



Teachers' Perceptions of Bullying with a Consideration of the  
Bystanders' Role: a study in the Finnish context

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This study analyses teachers' perceptions of bullying with a consideration of the bystanders' role. Ten Finnish teachers from all school levels were inquired about their perceptions on school bullying. Additionally, the teachers were asked to evaluate what is the bystanders' contribution. Thematic analysis revealed ten themes: 1) Not bully-free schools 2) Teachers: general strategies 3) Teachers' feelings 4) Specific teacher practices 5) Innovative practices 6) Shifting bystander roles 7) Teachers' perceptions of outsiders 8) Parental involvement 9) Gender and age 10) Skilful and loner- bully and victim. Some main findings of this study are: Finnish schools are described as facing many bullying problems. Teachers disclose they resort to their colleagues for help. Students are described as changing roles during or even after the incident or in another incident. In one occasion they stay uninvolved, for example, and in another they ally themselves with the bully. According to the teachers, parents are mainly responsible for educating their children about bullying. Parents should instruct their children not to bully and how to defend themselves and others when bullying occurs. Finally, according to one fundamental course of action used as an anti-bullying intervention, uninvolved students (outsiders) should be turned to defenders. The findings of this study though show that this aim has not been met with success so far. Some ideas for future intervention and prevention plans are being presented.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1. Introduction

This thesis investigates teachers' perceptions of bullying and probes into the bystander contribution. Whereas the prevalence of bullying varies in different countries, there is hardly any school around the globe that is immune to its occurrence. It is clearly a multifaceted problem involving human groups like students, parents, teachers as well as emotional, psychological and societal processes like ability to form friendships, school adaptation and socialization. In many countries scientists have been trying to understand better bullying and its dynamics by applying scientific methods. The aim has been to understand it and then control it or even stop it, by putting research into practice, by designing or recommending bullying prevention and intervention strategies and programs.

Since the present study has been conducted in Finland, a Scandinavian country, reference should be made to Dan Olweus (e.g. Olweus 2010), Robert Thornberg (e.g. Thornberg 2011) and Christina Salmivalli (e.g. Salmivalli 2014). They are all professors in Universities of Norway, Sweden and Finland specializing in school bullying. Moreover, Dan Olweus and Christina Salmivalli have created anti-bullying programs, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and KiVa respectively. They are both recognized as pioneers of research on bullying and as world leading experts in this area. Olweus, Salmivalli and Thornberg have been prolific writers and have been regularly cited in research articles and books on the topic of bullying. But these three scientists are not the only ones who deserve the title of the expert. Researchers from around the civilized world (e.g. Craig et al. 2000, Crothers et al. 2006, Gini et al. 2008a, Hong & Espelage 2012b, Houndoumadi & Pateraki 2001, Juvonen & Galván 2009, Marshall et al. 2009, Mishna et al. 2005, O'Brennan et al. 2014, Pronk et al. 2016, Von Marées & Petermann 2010, Waasdorp & Bradshaw 2018) have realized that as long as there is bullying happening in schools, despite the use of anti-bullying programs which usually reduce but not eradicate it, there is still room for more reflections, additional research and improvements in order to fortify the measures which are taken to tackle it. As the teacher perspective in particular on bullying is incomplete, the present study aims to add to the existing research meaningful insights by gathering and analysing qualitative data. The front line, school teachers share their experiences and thoughts and indicate important aspects of the bullying phenomenon.

#### 1.1. Definition of bullying

For the purpose of this study it is worth defining what bullying is and who the bystanders are. Understandably, bullying is a form of aggression. Nevertheless, not every aggressive behavior that can take place in a school yard or class is conceptualized as bullying. Somewhat different operational definitions have been used throughout the research conducted about school bullying but still, researchers seem to agree that a stronger party is involved who intentionally and repeatedly harm a less powerful victim (Olweus, 2010). So, a casual push of a classmate fits the definition of peer aggression but not of bullying. Besides, bullying is more than physical harm upon another classmate. There are more forms of bullying. It can be verbal, for example, when one student calls another names, teases or threatens them. Physical and verbal forms of bullying are easier to notice.

What is more difficult to notice though is relational bullying and bullying assisted by information technology (cyberbullying). Students inflicted damage upon in these other ways are equally victims of bullying. Relational bullying refers to the manipulation or damage to

another student's peer relationships. "Relational bullying includes social exclusion ("You can't play with us"), spreading rumors ("Did you hear . . .?"), or withholding friendship ("I won't be your friend if you . . .")", (Bauman and Del Rio 2006 p.220). These examples of relational aggression become forms of bullying when they are repeated and directed towards a less powerful person (Bauman and Del Rio, 2006).

## 1.2. Definition of bystanders

As far as the bystanders are concerned, although there is not consensus of who they are and in what ways they contribute to bullying, still a mainstream definition of them will be offered in this paper, a definition which finds many scientists nodding their approval. The same definition will be provided to the participants of this study. Salmivalli, since the start of her research career (Salmivalli, 1992), has stressed the idea that school bullying is a group process in which most children of a school class have a definable participant role, bystanders included. For her and her colleagues, within the bystander category there are typically four sets of behaviors identified: 1) students assisting the bully by joining them, 2) students reinforcing the bully by laughing or cheering, for example, 3) students defending the victimized peer by comforting and supporting them and 4) the ones remaining uninvolved or passive (Salmivalli et al. 1996). Other researchers from various countries have subsequently utilized the same conceptual framework (e.g. Goossens et al. 2006; Sutton & Smith, 1999) of looking at bullying as a group process where all and not just the bully and the victim play a vital role.

## 1.3. Triadic definition of bullying

How we envision school bullying can change when the bystander contribution is taken more seriously into account. Although for the present research the bystander roles as they have been delineated by Salmivalli (1996) will be utilized, the reader should keep an open mind as to how other researchers have conceptualized the bystander groups. As a start of seeing the bystanders in a pivotal psychosocial position framing the bullying act, Twemlow and Sacco have slightly but semantically added to the definition of bullying. "Triadic Definition of bullying (as opposed to bully-victim, that is dyadic definition): the repeated harmful exposure of an individual or group (the victims) to multiple episodes of harm by many different individuals and groups (the bullies), perceived as stronger than the victim, and facilitated mainly by the active or passive role of the bystanders linked with the bully and victim in complex social interactions and group dynamics. Often the bully will only do what the bystander social group allows" (p. 291, Twemlow & Sacco, 2013). In such a definition of bullying bystanders participate more actively than they traditionally do according to general definitions of the term. Process is more emphasized than actual deed. Bystanders do not just exist there, they spawn bullying. From alienated groups of bystanders in schools can easily become recruits for bully and victim roles (Twemlow & Sacco, 2013).

The researchers also noted that the term bystanders appeared first in the 80s in criminal justice and sociology for an incident of stabbing with audience, but later in the 90s, it was adopted by school bullying scientists who heavily relied on it for describing bullying phenomena. Importantly, bystanders in the familial environment of school are qualitatively different than random crowds who may happen to watch a crime. Twemlow and Sacco (2013) see four categories of bystanders: Those who watch but feel thrill for the bully's act, those who watch but feel the terror of the victim, the confused-ambivalent who want to act but do not feel safe enough to do so and the abdicating group who rather act the wrong way.

In their way of thinking Twemlow and Sacco see bullying as a result of social processes in the whole community which went wrong. For example, parents represent the abdicating group when they only blame the teachers and don't see their contribution to the bullying incidents. Or, the public can be the abdicating group in cases when severe incidents of bullying have gained press publicity. According to Twelow and Sacco "...bullies and victims are the results, not the cause of the problem. The solution to school violence lies in the mobilization of all abdicating bystanders to hear and act on the cry for help that the bully and victim have provided to us. Listening to their behavior as a consultation, or message, to the group about an experience of systemic violence, often disowned, is essential in order to solve its root cause. This approach will lead to a radical shift in how school violence is managed and on which effective interventions are based" (Twemlow and Sacco, 2013, p. 290).

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1. Bystanders

##### 2.1.1. Paradox involving bystanders and its underlying reasons

The bystanders have very often been targeted for the creation of prevention and intervention programs. As researchers envisioned to restore the power imbalance among bullies and victims they naturally also turned to bystanders. Although some anti-bullying programs have focused on the relationship between bullies and their victims, some others are based on the rationale that with the provision of proper actions the students who typically stay uninvolved can be turned to defenders of the victims. An unexpected finding of research, involving bystanders, has attracted considerable scientific attention. Whereas students, when asked by researchers, have been replying that they would help the victim, when bullying occurs, in real life, they stay uninvolved. Salmivalli and her colleagues have thus noted that “a critical question in intervention work may be how to convert the anti-bullying attitudes into actual behavior in bullying situations” (Salmivalli et al. 2005 p.467).

Actually, researchers have tried to address and understand better the above paradox, believing one thing and doing another on the part of the students. Some possible explanations have been offered. It has been shown, for example, that bullies, especially during adolescence are perceived as popular by their classmates (e.g. Peeters et al. 2010). Based on the finding of heterogeneity among male bullies from previous research, that is the finding that distinct subgroups exist within the male bully category, Peeters et al. decided to replicate that there are these different bully groups, and also examine how they differ in terms of behaviour, status and social skills. They made some interesting discoveries concerning relational bullying. They found that some bullies, both male and female were prestigious, socially intelligent and able to manipulate their peers. They also found for males that there was a relationship between status, intelligence, manipulative skills and relational aggression; these bullies would rather use relational aggression to gain dominance over the peer group. The researchers suggested that the use of relational aggression might be preceded by high popularity and social intelligence.

In the Peeters and al. (2010) study unpopular and lacking social intelligence male bullies though were also relationally aggressive, so perhaps there needs to be made a distinction among different types of relational aggression in order to account for this result. That is, social intelligence may not be a prerequisite of relational aggression (Peeters et al. 2010). Other scientists have made a distinction between two types of relational aggression, social aggression referring to covert aggressive behaviour like gossiping, and direct relational aggression referring to more visible aggressive behaviour like ignoring or excluding others (Xie et al. 2002). Crick and Dodge have claimed that the popular and unpopular groups of male bullies may be using different types of relational aggression with popular, socially intelligent ones using, for example, gossiping and unpopular, less socially intelligent bullies using social exclusion, for example (Crick and Dodge, 1999).

For female bullies in the Peeters et al. study, different patterns were true: the most rejected female bullies were those who were the most popular and socially skilled, findings which raise some concerns what it means having high status and being socially accepted or socially rejected for that matter. Peeters et al. contended that both situations are possible to



occur concurrently. High status girls act selectively and avoid being friends with lower status peers, an attitude which keeps them popular true, but makes them unsympathetic at the same time. The Important thing to keep in mind is that, with their popularity being at stake, bystanders may be worried about their own status in the group. Bystanders may be considering carefully taking sides with the victim and opposing the bully.

Another mechanism that inhibits the manifestation of defending behaviors can be found within the realm of group norms: each individual member reinforces the inaction of other members by not challenging the behavior of bullies. When no bystander condemns the witnessed bullying, students come to falsely perceive the others' lack of intervention as approval of the bully's behavior (Juvonen & Galvan 2009). This is called pluralistic ignorance and indicates that all the bystanders together as a group behave in ways that none of them individually would. That is, their group behavior is not necessarily representative of their private attitudes. Such norms are embraced even more, as both bystanders and victims might decide to hide their actual distress. For example, some witnesses of bullying might smile or even nervously laugh at the event, which is interpreted as a positive reaction by others. Victims as well, might decide to hide their pain out of embarrassment, signalling falsely that everything is alright, preventing in this way bystanders from intervening to help. Even ridicule might look like playful teasing when targets of bullying hide their true feelings. Thus, bullying in general is reinforced as a behaviour within the group, it becomes normative due to false assumptions (Juvonen & Galvan 2009).

Another school-level explanation which is related to normative beliefs of students and explains leaving victims undefended in reality, is the amount of bullying which is happening in school. Students who witness bullying habitually would most probably support aggressive retaliation on the part of the victim and would be unlikely to intervene to help (Frey et al., 2015). Moreover, the reactions of the victims can be radically influenced by friends and allies. Sometimes it is not about the bystanders staying uninvolved but what they do when they get involved. Bystander-friends, for feelings of pride, for sense of personal identity and sometimes even for personal gain as they might despise the bully after all themselves, can mediate or retaliate on behalf of the victim. Whereas bystander-friends cause amplification of the victims' emotions, it is also possible that they advise victims and help them regulate (moderate) their emotions.

It could be a target of relationship education to exemplify the prosocial characteristics of high quality friendships and try to make the identity of a good friend appealing. As people naturally compare their behaviors with the behaviors of others who are socially significant, it would be beneficial for programs which target to forge well adaptive behaviors especially in adolescents, to identify social leaders who are generous and friendly to others in positive ways. As Frey et al. have put it "changing the norms and behaviors of even a few people may unleash a cascade of sustained improvements in young people's lives" (Frey et al. 2015, p.33).

Still, other explanations why students presumably espouse defending the victims but in reality abstain from doing so, might be found in some of the characteristics that the victims possess. Since bullies selectively choose targets who are submissive and insecure (Schwartz et al. 1998) or in a low-power position in the group (e.g. Hodges & Perry, 1999), opposition is harder to arise than if the prospective victims were highly liked by their classmates or had many friends (Salmivalli, 2014). Actually, Thornberg has illustrated very well the victims and prospective victims in one review which he has published. Targets

chosen for victimization are the students who are different in some way, such as being dressed or speaking in another way than their classmates (Thornberg, 2011). Victims of bullying are found in the margins of the social groups in schools. What is interesting is the fact that separate groups have different definitions of what is considered to be weird; one group's misfit might be accepted in another group or in another school. Students who stand out somehow break the rule of conformity, a negative reputation can very easily be built about them and spread so that victims cannot count on other students for friendship or support. Moreover, as Thornberg describes it, there is nothing inherently deviant; high status students manage and impose these definitions. Finally, victims are stigmatized to the degree that it is almost impossible to change their situation (Thornberg, 2011). One secondary aim of this study is to explore more the bystander role, through the teachers' lens. It is of interest to know why victims are left undefended in schools. It is of interest to know what can be done to change this, how the system can impact on the sub-system which students create for themselves in schools.

### 2.1.2. Age of bystanders and gender

But how do bullying and bystander responses change through the school years and according to gender? In a study conducted in 2010 in Canadian schools it was found that the behavior of bystanders changes in relation to both age and gender. Younger students were more eager to intervene in the bullying episode and utilized techniques which are generally recommended by adults such as informing an adult or telling the bully to stop (Trach et al. 2010). Students who were older on the other hand, gravitated more towards passive or even aggressive responses to bullying. From the various possible responses that were depicted in the survey they would choose *Walked away* or *Did nothing* and as an aggressive response they chose *Got friends to get back at the bully* (Trach et al. 2010). It should be noted though that in the responses depicted in the survey the possible behaviors of assisting and reinforcing the bully were missing and these behaviors might have been masked in the response *(I) did nothing*.

As far as boys and girls are concerned, girls across different grades were more likely to stand up for the victim although, similarly like in boys, their prosocial attitudes decreased as they grew older. Also, girls were more likely to choose the item *Got friends to help solve the problem* than boys. Generally, girls as they grew older were adopting more indirect ways of helping the victim like trying to distract the bully. On the other hand, it could not be determined by this study whether changes in behavior occur as the same student gets older, that is, whether as a younger student he or she is prosocial and then he or she stops being so (Trach et al. 2010). Similar results have been obtained by more studies (e.g. Gini et al. 2008a, Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2018).

In the Waasdorp and Bradshaw study (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2018) it was additionally found that high school girls kept their defending stance in the bullying episode irrespectively of contextual cues like who is the person who is being bullied, for example. The researchers argued that this might be explained because of their tendency to be empathetic. Bystander boys' responses on the other hand, were more likely to be classified in the inconsistent category. The inconsistent category encompassed a variety of behaviors, and the boys' responses depended on the various aspects of the bullying situation in hand, like, for example, on how many students participated in the particular bullying situation and on what type of bullying was going on. Thus, depending on the contextual cues the boys in the inconsistent category could end up endorsing, assisting, reinforcing, defending and

assuming passive roles. For example, on the one hand they could defend a friend who was bullied but on the other, they could assist a friend who was the bully. Or, if the victim was not a friend they could remain passive. The findings of the Waasdorp and Bradshaw study are significant, as they suggest that taking a bystander role is a dynamic process where roles cannot a priori be assigned to students or boys for that matter.

### 2.1.3. Defending in the context of bullying

#### Process of defending

What does it take to be a defender? In a study conducted by Pronk et al. in 2013, the specific thoughts outsiders and defenders have about intervention in victimization were probed. It was found that outsiders too (not only defenders) are willing to help the victims but they don't feel as competent and sure as defenders do, to do so. And then, the outsiders' attempts are indirect (e.g. consoling the victim) compared to the defenders' attempts which are more direct (e.g. confronting the bully). In another qualitative study with Taiwanese participants, the researchers first administered a short version of the Participant Role Questionnaire to students of different schools and then they interviewed 24 students who scored high on the defender or outsider subscale (peer nominations). They found that the defending process seems to occur in certain stages during which the student assesses whether to intervene or not. Defenders are not such automatically (Chen et al. 2016). First, a student generally examines the situation, whether for example they think the episode is serious, whether they feel an increased sense of responsibility or empathy for the victim or friendship with him or her. Then, there are the stages of selecting defending strategies, and facing the bullies' probably confronting them and lastly, reassessing whether to continue with the defending or not. The researchers of the study noticed that the defender participants in their study go through all these stages and continue trying to help the victim through the reassessment phase and irrespectively of whether they are attacked themselves by the bully. In contrast, outsiders would not make it through the reassessment stage even if they would be to a certain degree willing to help the victim in the first place (Chen et al. 2016).

Twemlow and Sacco, in their turn, saw defending as a process which needs to be initiated in the whole community-level where disruptive bullying occurs. First, of all problematic communities should abandon the motto of curing bullying, they should target empowering the "body" instead. And the way to do this is through "mentalization". Mentalization in schools entails training to acquire the following functions: "reflectiveness (think before acting), double empathy (empathy for self at the same time as for others), emotional regulation (preventing anger from becoming a storm which disrupts logical thinking) and finally self-agency, the capacity to regulate yourself for your own good. As a result of self-agency, one can set boundaries..." p.297. These researchers theorized that mentalization skills can be taught and modelled, actually the researchers believe that these are innate qualities which school children should simply be "reminded of". They also see a 70 percent of students as able to go through their school life without creating or being recipients of behavioural problems in school, and the researchers contend that these are the students to be targeted for bullying intervention. In Twemlow and Sacco's terminology these are the confused-ambivalent students who have some advantages over another group, the abdicating members (students or other community members) who prefer to rather blame the others when bullying occurs. The confused-ambivalents other than being more in numbers, are easier to train, as their thinking processes are more receptive than the thinking processes of the abdicating group. The confused-ambivalents might think that violent behavior is normal and might gain a

questionable sense of safety standing there in the side-lines, but most probably, if given the chance, they would defend the victim. Finally, when the collective consciousness of mentalization is built in schools, starting from the confused-ambivalents, everybody's behaviour will come out ameliorated, students and personnel will experience an enhanced version of themselves. The Twemlow and Sacco system resulted in the Peaceful Schools and Communities program, which has gained considerable success in the U.S.A. and elsewhere.

## Results of defending

The defender's role cannot be stressed enough. It has been shown that defending has positive effects on both the victim and the overall victimization rate. The victims who have been defended, experience less depression and anxiety because of bullying and are less rejected by their peers compared to victims without defenders (Sainio et al. 2011). Moreover, the overall amount of bullying taking place in a particular classroom is affected by how bystanders respond when they witness bullying. When, for example, supporting the victim happens at a greater extent than reinforcing the bully, then in this classroom less bullying occurs (e.g. Salmivalli et al 2011). And even the children who are at bigger risk for victimization because of certain characteristics they possess that have been associated with higher victimization rate, they do not end up as much victimized in classrooms where bullying is less reinforced (Kärnä et al. 2010). Moreover, adults who had been victimized as school children reveal in interviews that the most traumatic experience was not the act of bullying but the fact that nobody stood up for them (Teräsahjo, 1997 as cited in Salmivalli, 2014).

Moreover, there is a positive relation between victimization and defending behavior, showing that these two are sometimes associated. Perhaps students who have been victimized tend to assume later a defending role in the bullying situation possibly because they have experienced the victim's perspective or because they empathize with the victim. It is also possible though that defenders are later, after defending, victimized themselves by the bully (Pozzoli et al. 2012; Salmivalli et al. 1996). Further research is needed to determine the reason of this correlation which is significantly positive for now. Victimization and defending rise together.

## 2.2. Bullies, victims, bully/victims

Irrespectively of why the bystanders behave as they do, other studies have looked at bullies, victims and those who are both bullies and victims (bully/victims) in relation to their gender and age. In a study in Germany, consistently with international results on the topic of bullying, they found that 8-12 year old boys and girls bullied equally but boys bullied and were victims of physical and verbal bullying more than girls (Von Marées & Petermann, 2010). Interestingly, in the same study they also found that the gender of the victim played a role, with girls bullying male victims in verbal and physical ways (direct bullying) as well, despite indirect bullying being otherwise their preferred method of bullying. Relational bullying (indirect bullying) on the other hand, like excluding someone from play and threatening to end a friendship, was used primarily by girls towards girls but also by boys towards other boys. The researchers hypothesized that since relational bullying intends to harm the peer socially, and since boys this age usually relate socially with boys and girls with girls, it is natural that relational bullying happens among same sex peers and within their existing social networks.

Moreover, in the Von Marées and Petermann, study almost 35 percent of students identified themselves as bully/victims. This term is reserved for students who in some cases are victims of peers, but in other cases they bully their peers. Bakker in her Master's thesis found evidence that indeed there are three types of victims, a. passive victims are the submissive students, b. provocative victims are those students who react to bullying with aggression and c. bully-victims, those students who are victims but also bully in other occasions. She hypothesized, based on existing literature, that bully/victims, when compared to pure bullies (i.e. children who bully, but don't get victimized) on the dependent variables of her study, would share some of the characteristics of bullies, but that they would be more reactively aggressive, have lower social dominance and more social maladjustment (Bakker, 2011).

There were eight dependent variables in her study: proactive and reactive aggression, prosocial resource control and coercive resource control strategies, resource control nominated by peers, resource control self-nomination, resource control nominated by teacher, and perceived popularity. Bakker found that bully/victims were both proactively and reactively aggressive, and used coercive resource control strategies (example item: "Which children in your class try to get what they want by forcing others?") more than any other group. She also found that bully/victims were more proactively aggressive than the passive victims and the control group. Reactively though, they were less aggressive than the provocative victims' group. Also they controlled the resources more than any other group and were perceived as more popular than passive and provocative victims. In their comparison with pure bullies, bully/victims were equally reactively aggressive. But bully/victims were more proactively aggressive than bullies. Bakker concluded that according to her results, bully/victims had it their way aggressively but not as effectively as bullies did, which rather rendered them less prestigious (social status) and less liked (social preference) (Bakker, 2011).

### 2.3. Preferred anti-bullying strategy

As the main population of schools is students, it is always important to know how they stand in terms of opinions and expectations of bullying prevention. In a study conducted in the USA in 2006, researchers asked middle school students to identify the intervention strategies they found more suitable for implementing when a child is bullied by peers (Crothers et al. 2006). The researchers claimed that knowledge of such preferences would result in better knowledge of what students find acceptable in bullying incidents, increasing thus the "social validity" (Crothers et al. 2006, p.478) of the intervention strategies in question. They asked 285 students in Pennsylvania to fill in a survey depicting three types of strategies commonly used in anti-bullying interventions, those that students might use, those that teachers might use, and those that non-teaching staff might use.

It came out that middle school students wished most for their teachers to intervene in bullying situations. Specifically, the top three items were: a. make the classroom so that bullying can't happen by having the teachers know what is going on at all times b. teach kids how to make bullies leave them alone and c. tell your parents and the parents of other bullies and victims. The first two top-rated items are strategies that can be employed by teachers, and the third top-rated item: tell your parents and the parents of bullies and victims, is a strategy that can be employed either by teachers or non-teaching staff. The item that was rated last (out of 15) by students was: make bullies and victims become study buddies or peer helpers. In short, students prefer their teachers' active involvement which implies that teachers should have the skills to know when to intervene and what to do.

## 2.4. Why to investigate teachers' perceptions? Six reasons

Acknowledging the role of bystanders and the opinions of the students in general, only partly assists us comprehend school bullying. Another important factor, the perceptions of teachers of bullying and teachers' attitudes need to be investigated to get a better picture of what is happening in schools. But why would such attitudes be beneficial to know? First of all, in schools it is typically teachers who estimate and classify which behaviors are bullying and which are not, at least till their students acquire themselves some knowledge on this issue. So, teachers decide on what is bullying and what is not. Teachers don't just evaluate what behaviors are reprehensible, they also implement the anti-bullying policies in their schools. In the school environment when we are talking about the implementation of an anti-bullying program, we are mainly referring to actions as they are implemented by the school personnel, teachers being the biggest part of such personnel. In "school culture approaches" teachers also attend to the school atmosphere. In these approaches there is a focus on creating positive school and classroom climates, with teachers as protagonists, in order to establish a sense of community among students. Since the present study will be applied in Finnish schools and since KiVa is the main anti-bullying program implemented in the country, it becomes relevant to point out that the KiVa program is a "school culture" anti-bullying intervention approach with teachers themselves both addressing and trying to prevent bullying by employing a variety of techniques.

Second, commitment of teachers to the universal anti-bullying principles as they stem from scientific research literature, is of uppermost importance. For example, it has been shown that knowledge of which are the early risk factors for bullying (i.e. which characteristics of students make them prone for becoming bullies) has helped inform better bullying prevention and intervention programs (Pepler et al. 2004). It is expected that assisting teachers to identify bullies can help them achieve the valuable lead. Teachers need exposure to opportunities to learn about the complexities of school children's peer relations and the advantages which arise in an emotional, social and educational level when relation problems are being addressed. More importantly, teachers' understanding of how bullying is perpetrated needs to be thoughtfully informed and needs to be transferable into concrete anti-bullying practices as bullying is a problem with a profound practical aspect. The pre-service time is deemed to be the best period for educating teachers (Pepler et al. 2004). Teachers need to have reflected on bullying issues and be ready to take action before they personally witness such problems or before their students point out such problems to them. Teachers need to be on guard irrespectively of how a principal or a school in which they will find themselves employed, sees fit to address bullying ((Pepler et al. 2004). Nevertheless, within any given school a proper definition of what constitutes bullying should be provided as a first step towards tackling bullying. It has been proven that in this way the teachers' confidence level is boosted (Gorsek & Cunningham, 2014).

Third, teachers can influence both victims' and bullies' life experiences with their responses to bullying. Unpunished behaviors of bullying are likely to be repeated in the future. As bullies enjoy controlling their victims, if there are no consequences for their actions they will continue attempting to do so especially when they are having repeated success. Success occurs as bullies' behaviors are reinforced every time that they are not punished. Moreover, teachers need to be aware of the effects of bullying on students and victims in particular as such awareness determines their course of action. For example, incidents which are perceived as non-serious will rather raise passivity on the part of the teachers, teachers will be less likely to intervene. Students are affected as well deeply by bullying which is deemed

as being non-serious. Specifically, students are reported to not approach teachers for help with relational bullying (Birkinshaw & Eslea, 1998) apparently because they feel they cannot count on adults or that this particular form of bullying is acceptable or tolerated (MacNeil & Newell, 2004).

Fourth, teachers are often deeply perplexed by bullying and they can also get in trouble because of it. Some forms of bullying are expected to be referred to the administration but a teacher who repeatedly refers incidents of relational bullying might be seen as an ineffective classroom manager (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). At least that might be what teachers think. Moreover, teachers who feel ambivalent about what happened cannot be determined action takers. When a teacher observes physical or verbal bullying, they might feel obligated to act. Unfortunately with relational bullying the situation is fuzzy. Some schools may not even have policies which bluntly condemn it. Whereas a teacher can stop a bully from kicking or swearing against another student, often they cannot help ostracized students feel more accepted even if they ask that they be included in their presence in groups which perform group work, for example. Even more so, ostracized students cannot be helped by teachers in friendships among schoolchildren. In the Bauman and Del Rio study preservice teachers responded that their action is often determined by how upset a victim is. But what happens when the victims' feelings are inner and not visible? Are they less devastating?

Whereas these are important questions to ponder on, other times teachers are hindered from action, being humans, by their own beliefs. That is, the tools for dealing with bullying cases might be in the system infrastructure but teachers do not use them. A teacher might believe, for example, that boys' fights help them build their testosterone levels and manhood or that relational bullying is part of the developmental process of students who learn how to cope with others. Teachers might also find bullies appealing or victims inept or the whole incident as understandable, certainly the researcher of the present study cannot say justified. And then, as Bauman and Del Rio put it: "...relational bullying is pervasive, and teachers may believe that if they intervene in every instance of social exclusion, rumor spreading, or social manipulation, they would be unable to do anything else" (p. 227). Teachers sometimes simply choose to do what they are mainly accountable for, namely, subject instruction.

Fifth, in the evaluation of school anti-bullying programs researchers have typically turned to students for answers and not teachers. The teacher perspective is lacking in research. The Beran & Shapiro study conducted in 2005 is an example of a study where schoolchildren were inquired in pretest posttest questionnaires about their knowledge and skill to deal with bullying. Later in time, in 2012, when Ahtola et al. published their article, *For children only? Effects of the KiVa antibullying program on teachers*, they claimed that "this is the first time the effects of an anti-bullying program on teachers are investigated" p.856. Still, although the Finnish researchers in the Ahtola (2012) study recognized that addressing the teachers' perceptions of bullying is useful and even predictive of the success of an anti-bullying program (i.e. KiVa) the method they used didn't really shed light to what opinions the school teachers held on bullying. In the paradigm of the evaluation of KiVa quantitatively, they drew data from previous studies evaluating KiVa in general. Then, specifically they asked teachers to provide answers for three variables which were a. teacher competence to tackle bullying b. teacher confidence in program effectiveness and c. teacher understanding of bullying as a malleable phenomenon and then ran multilevel regression modelling in order to explore their topic, which was mainly whether teachers' application of the KiVa program

had any effects on what they called teachers' perceptions on bullying (Ahtola et al. 2012). While in the end of their study they seemed to be happy with their results by stating that: "implementing the KiVa anti-bullying program can be seen, in fact, as teacher training in the field of bullying p.857" the reader is rather left wondering whether they had really addressed the topic of perceptions of teachers of bullying. Still, that is, the teacher perspective is lacking.

Sixth, as it has emerged from research that teachers underestimate the most how much bullying happens in schools, it would be beneficial to try to find out why this is so. Demaray et al. decided in 2013 to use an innovative way to establish the extent of this discrepancy with the belief that outlining the phenomenon better can help inform also better the development, implementation and evaluation of anti-bullying programs. Their unique contribution was that they considered the status of each student as it was rated by all, students, teachers and parents to examine convergence or divergence of opinions. That is each teacher was asked about possible victimization of each and every one of their students, and in the same way parents completed ratings of each one of their children. The ratings from teachers and parents were compared with how the student (and child) rated themselves. Thus they all referred to the same student-person as opposed to methodologies of previous pieces of research where global ratings were obtained. Besides, the Demaray et al. study considered item-level data and analyses to explore the agreement of the different groups on specific victimization experiences.

The result of the Demaray et al. study corroborated the finding from previous research that students report they have been victimized the most compared to their parents' and teachers' estimates. The study also found that between the adult groups, teachers are the least knowledgeable that victimization took place. Other findings: there was no gender difference, boys and girls reported similar extent of victimization. Third and fourth grade students reported more victimization than older students (level of students ranged from 3-8 grade). For parents victimization did not differ according to gender or grade level and for teachers victimization was similar for boys and girls except for fifth and sixth grade level girls who were rated as being victimized more than fifth and sixth grade level boys (Demaray et al. 2013). Additionally, as the study examined types of bullying and possible agreement in occurrence of victimization, there were no trends found in this respect, students and teachers simply did not agree. But parents were found to be aware of their children's victimization experiences when it was about boys, with the researchers theorizing that boyish bullying may be happening more in the playground where monitor teachers discover it and notify the parents of the boy in question. In the classrooms, on the other hand, teachers may opt to handle bullying episodes themselves alone. There was also a moderate relation between ratings of victimization between parents and teachers, specifically for girls of fifth and sixth grade level. Perhaps, adults tend to agree on a general level how much a student could or would be victimized after all. Parents and students though seem to have a better agreement on a detailed level than teachers and students (Demaray et al. 2013).

The results of the Demaray et al. research are important. As many anti-bullying programs are based on the idea of social ecology, which is about the interaction of individual, family, peer group, school, community and society variables and how they influence each other to manifest bullying and victimization, a multi-systemic approach is needed to tackle bullying (Demaray et al. 2013). But collaboration among different agents requires similar perceptions and attitudes towards the phenomenon. It is also imperative to study at some point why teachers think that in some cases and with certain students, bullying did not take place. But



this can happen only if discrepancies i.e. disagreements among students, teachers and parents are first established and documented properly. The present study will attempt to explore the possible reasons why teachers are impeded from acknowledging that bullying took place.

## 2.5. Quantitative paradigm

What is more, teachers' perceptions have predominantly been investigated quantitatively. In quantitative research researchers distributed questionnaires to teachers and used mostly the method of vignettes (e.g., Bell & Willis, 2016; Yoon & Kerber, 2003; Bauman & Del Rio, 2006), that is descriptions of hypothetical scenarios which depict student interactions varying in the different variables they intended to measure. Then, the teachers were being asked to answer a handful of questions, designed to bring out their reactions to these situations which may have been depicting bullying or not; intensity of reactions was also measured as typically teachers had to report the degree of their belief in a certain statement (e.g. not at all, a little, moderately, very, extremely) and the percentage of their certainty (how sure % the teachers were that a certain behavior would arise). Here is an example of a vignette:

“At the writing centre you hear a student chant to another child, ‘Teacher’s pet, browner, suck-up, kiss-ass.’ The child tries to ignore the remarks but sulks at his desk. You saw the same thing happen the other day” (depicts verbal bullying in the Yoon and Kerber study, 2003)

### 2.5.1. Vignettes

Supposedly vignettes have been used as an alternative to conducting interviews and surveys and as a solution against the problems which arise in these other methods of research (Poulou, 2001). By keeping the main body of the vignette stable and manipulating the details of the different vignette texts, scientists have been able to stimulate the imagination and interest of the persons who read the vignettes and elicit their answers for the studied variables. In interviews the questions can be too vague, answers of the participants can be too subjective and collected data may not be possible to standardize across all the interviewees who participated in any given study. Besides, surveys somewhat direct and force the study participant to choose fixed answers which may not represent them. Vignettes on the other hand set the stage for comparability of answers by providing each participant with the same context of reference. Variation is obtained through the questions that accompany the vignettes.

The main advantage of vignettes though might be the fact that they inquire about sensitive matters like values and beliefs in an unobtrusive way (Poulou, 2001). The participants do not worry about giving socially approved answers so they go ahead and respond with sincerity. Participants express their perceptions within the safe environment of the specific research design; they are asked about their opinions but questions are being posed hypothetically, realistically enough though so that participants still comment on familiar topics.

In an early example of the vignette-type of research, Yoon and Kerber set about exploring whether teachers respond the same to 3 kinds of bullying: verbal, physical and social exclusion. Or, whether they change their strategies when they encounter different bullying

behaviors and which strategies do they specifically use. Of interest were also how serious the teachers perceived the incidents, how likely the teachers were to intervene and whether they empathized with the victims. Ninety-four primary school teachers were presented with 6 vignettes which depicted the above 3(3X2, 2 standing for the variation within kinds) kinds of bullying behaviors and were then asked to complete scales which measured the variables of interest. For empathy, for example, towards the victim, they had to rate numerically from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) a statement such as "I would sympathize with the victim" (Yoon and Kerber, 2003).

It came out that social exclusion was perceived by teachers as a less serious form of bullying as it had been hypothesized due to results from other studies previously conducted. Moreover, teachers were less sympathetic to the victims in the social exclusion cases, intervened less often and used more lenient intervention strategies, even ignored the bullying behaviour totally. Yoon and Kerber (2003) warned teachers to take social exclusion more seriously, as it has similar negative consequences for victims and perpetrators as other types of bullying. Being a type of bullying itself, if it evokes no punishment or proper action by teachers, it sets the stage for more bullying in the classes and the schoolyards. Students who witness, experience or cause social exclusion receive the wrong message that bullying is allowed after all.

In the Bauman and Del Rio study a similar methodology was used. Six vignettes, the same six which Yoon and Kerber used, were utilized again for convenience of comparison. In short, Bauman and Del Rio replicated the results of the Yoon and Kerber study. They found that preservice teachers considered relational bullying as being a less serious form of bullying compared to physical and verbal bullying, a result which had also arisen in the Yoon and Kerber study. One addition of the Bauman and Del Rio study was the comparison of the answers of the sample of the preservice teachers with the answers of an enlisted sample of expert authors. Their expert authors were thirty six people who had published work on bullying in the past five years. Only the second group, this of expert authors rated the vignettes of relational bullying as equally disturbing and serious as those of physical and verbal bullying. Bauman and Del Rio concluded that training on anti-bullying principles and practices is desperately needed at the teacher preservice level and that relational bullying should be considered in the anti-bullying package when the anti-bullying policies and programs are evaluated and developed (Bauman and Del Rio, 2006).

Additionally, preservice teachers reported at a significant higher level that the bullying in the vignettes presented to them was more serious, that they empathized with the victims more and that they were more likely to intervene. Nevertheless, preservice teachers did not have any better ideas qualitatively as to how to deal with bullying. These ideas were explored by the researchers, as participants were required to respond after each vignette to two open ended questions, one inquiring about their possible actions towards the perpetrators and the other towards the victims (i.e. "If you would respond to this situation, what would you do with the perpetrator?" and "What would you do with the victim?" p. 223). The researchers theorized that the differences among preservice teachers and primary school teachers in the Yoon and Kerber study, might be explained as preservice teachers idealized more their role in the bullying situation and as primary school teachers were desensitized to bullying because of their lack of skills to cope with it. The researchers also thought that the public is gaining awareness as bullying is being discussed more, in the media for example, with the possible result that the participants in their study, which was conducted later in time, were influenced and more knowledgeable. The answers to the open ended questions lacking

depth on the other hand rather showed that teachers need training how to respond to bullying; common sense does not suffice.

In the most recent example of these pieces of research with the use of vignettes namely the Bell & Willis's study which was published in 2016 in U.S.A. there were the following findings. First of all the purpose of that research was to "explore the severity of different kinds of bullying situations(physical, verbal, and relational) based on teachers' perceptions in relation to gender of the bully and the victim, as well as the response of the victim (aggressive or passive)" p. 161. One hundred and ninety-three teachers were randomly assigned to 3 possible groups. All three groups of teachers read the same 16 vignettes of bullying scenarios but for each one of the groups there was a different variation for students' responses. One set of vignettes was followed by no reactions from the victims. Another set of vignettes was followed by an aggressive reaction on the part of the victims, like shoving the bully and the last set of vignettes was followed by a passive reaction on the part of the victims, like ignoring the bully. Moreover, they conceptualized their study as a 3x(2x2x4) factorial design, so they also considered gender of the bully, gender of the victim and kind of aggression(4 types: physical, verbal, relational, nonaggressive).

Interesting results came out in their study: teachers' ratings of seriousness of the vignettes varied depending on the reaction of the victim, kind of aggression depicted in the vignettes, gender of the bully and gender of the victim. For example, teachers perceived bullying incidences in the category of physical kind of aggression as more serious when they (teachers) were not presented by victim reactions(1<sup>st</sup> group of teachers) than when they were presented with victim' reactions being passive(3<sup>rd</sup> group of teachers). The researchers interpreted this finding as indicating that if teachers' judgement was affected when the victims did not react when bullied, teachers (in real school bullying incidences) perhaps do not intervene promptly in these cases, perpetrating unintentionally victimization of passive victims. Another finding was that when females were the perpetrators and males were the victims teachers perceived all kinds of bullying examined (physical, verbal, relational, nonaggressive) as the least serious types of bullying.

The vignette method has provided psychological and educational research with some valuable insights but it is not problem free. The moment vignettes need to be clear, stimulating and easily understood by the participants of the study, this moment they get descriptively limited and finite in length. Vignettes cannot possibly account for all the contextual and personal factors which may influence decisions in the most critical way in real life. Thus, we do not necessarily get information about how participants would actually respond in real life, how responses are evoked. There can also be bias in the responses when participants decide to present themselves in ego-enhancing ways or when they go for what seems to be the socially acceptable answer (Poulou 2001).

## 2.6. Identifying a gap in research

Whereas teachers' perceptions have not been altogether ignored in research, they have rather been inadequately addressed within the quantitative paradigm. There are few research articles published that examine qualitatively teachers' perceptions of school bullying. One of them was published in 2005 in the Canadian Journal of Education. It is broadly related to the present study as they examined teachers' understanding of bullying in general. Nevertheless, they too used semi-structured interviews and some of their findings were useful tools for developing the content of the interview questions of the present study. For example, it came out in this piece of research that sometimes victims were deemed(by

teachers) “responsible” for their victimization, so those bullying incidences were overlooked even when the classmates of the victims(of bullying) reached out to their teachers for help(Mishna et al. 2005). The researchers also stated that after conducting some of the interviews with teachers-these teachers were chosen for interviews because they had students who were victims- and after the information came out that teachers had themselves been bullied as school children, the researchers started asking directly the rest of the teachers if they had been bullied in school. Overall, the present project draws a lot from the findings and methods of the Mishna et al. study.

More closely, in the Mishna et al. (2005) study, they interviewed the teachers of the students who had first self-identified as victims in order to find out how these teachers understood bullying and how they intervened. The teachers’ reactions to the information that a certain student of theirs had been bullied were also considered. In many occasions the teachers were not even aware that a student had been bullied. Moreover, sometimes they overlooked non-physical victimization and supposed that certain attributes of students rendered them vulnerable or immune to victimization. For example, these teachers were surprised to find out that assertive and well-adjusted students had self-identified as victims. Naturally also teachers’ responses were influenced by their compassion for certain students. Perhaps similar things happening to different students raised different reactions depending on whether they empathized with the student or not. Teachers also felt tired and lacking time and resources to address bullying. Finally, many teachers struggled with concepts of objective and subjective experiences of bullying as well as with how indirect bullying should be addressed.

## 2.7. Mixed methods’ paradigm

In the research literature there has also been some discussion about the advantages of mixed methods research designs with some scientists claiming that they are the best option towards yielding optimal results in social sciences. Several scientists are cited in the Hong and Espelage review study, stating that multiple data collection approaches can scoop the advantages of the different, individual methods they are using (Hong & Espelage, 2012a). They can obtain more reliable information since this comes from various sources, reducing at the same time non-sampling error. Besides, they can help eliminate bias as the researcher can make sure that in the alternative data collection methods used, potential biases are not replicated (Hong & Espelage, 2012a). Even the fact that the results from the different methods used may diverge or even contradict is not necessarily disastrous; researchers are called to contemplate more and put their research questions and hypotheses into perspective again (Hong & Espelage, 2012a).

## 2.8. Qualitative paradigm

Whether it comes as a surprise or not, research on bullying is being commonly conducted quantitatively still, as it did back in 2000. For Torrance it came as a surprise (Torrance, 2000) since, she observed that, several scientists as early as in the 90s had been advocating that the social background of bullying should better be explored in order to understand thoroughly its occurrence and this cannot be obtained by completing surveys (quantitative research). Torrance also observed that research even back in the 2000s had already shifted from simply documenting the existence of bullying to how to cope with it, that is, its prevention and intervention. Such a shift welcomed qualitative methods. It seems though that her stance: “if researchers and practitioners are to develop an in-depth understanding

of bullying within a social setting, supported by findings which lead to a better understanding of intervention strategies, greater emphasis needs to be placed on qualitative research” p. 16, is relevant still now, 20 years later; the quantitative paradigm still dominates the field.

In a review published in 2012 Hong and Espelage concentrated the research findings which support the idea that bullying happens in a context, in a social ecology (Hong & Espelage, 2012b). From an ecological point of view, bullies victims and bullying itself are placed in the middle and then there are the other interrelated systems on “the micro- (parent–youth relationships, inter-parental violence, relations with peers, school connectedness, and school environment), meso- (teacher involvement), exo- (exposure to media violence, neighborhood environment), macro- (cultural norms and beliefs, religious affiliation), and chronosystem (changes in family structure) levels” p.311, all of which need to be considered for successful bullying intervention. In the microsystem there can be found the most direct influences on bullying behaviour. In the meso-system there are the student-teacher interactions which in their turn can influence to a big extent both youth-peer interactions and students’ perceptions of the school environment. In the exo-system there are studied the aspects of a system where the individual does not need to be present. For example, things that happen in the neighbourhood, like gun carrying, can influence the interactions of youth with each other in school. As far as the macro-system is concerned, we need to understand that behaviors do not occur in an empty space but they are culturally embedded. Finally, the youth in the middle of these ecology circles can be influenced by life changes, or historical events. For example, death of a parent or divorce in the family may adversely affect the behaviors of children in schools (Hong & Espelage, 2012b). All in all, Hong and Espelage believe that bullying interventions are incomplete because they have targeted only some parts of the above ecological systems. Unless bullying is placed where it belongs surrounded by its wider ecology and studied within it, results of the anti-bullying programs will continue being limited (Hong & Espelage, 2012b).

Back to qualitative methodology, another study commenting on teachers’ interventions was published in 2009 (Marshall et al. 2009). Semi structured interviews with 30 teachers were analyzed. The researchers in their findings’ section separated the responses of teachers to bullying to four types: Constructive-Direct, Constructive-Indirect, Punitive-Direct, and Punitive-Indirect. An example of constructive-direct response would be the teacher to make the bully apologize, an example of constructive-indirect response would be the teacher to consult other educators, an example of punitive-direct response would be the teacher to physically get in the middle of students, and an example of punitive-indirect response would be the teacher to call the bully’s parents. The researchers’ model concurrently examined the teacher intent and teacher involvement. That is, whether the teacher wanted to instruct or punish and whether they used direct or indirect means doing so.

In the Marshall et al. study there were some findings that contradicted in some ways the findings of previous bullying research. In the Marshall study teachers did not occasionally ignore bullying situations. Whether teachers felt uncomfortable or not to declare so in the interviews, in previous research it had come out from students that teachers ignore certain incidents of bullying (e.g. Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Another finding was that teachers had quite wide definitions of what constitutes bullying with the result that students were getting surprised at times when reprimanded for bullying. According to the students’ opinion they were only joking with their schoolmates. For this reason, the authors of the Marshall study cautioned that convergence among students and teachers is needed about what is bullying and what is not, so that everyone agrees which behaviors are permissible and which

are punishable. On the other hand there were some responses to bullying on the part of the teachers like pulling aside and talking to a student or referring a student to a counsellor which arose as practical techniques that were employed by teachers both in the Marshall et al. study and in other studies in the past (e.g. Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

## CHAPTER 3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Aims

School bullying persists as a problem despite the existence of many initiatives intended to address it. It seems that it has not been successful so far to address real life school complexities with intervention programs although such programs have been built upon empirically based research. Qualitative research can help bridge this gap by providing thorough accounts of the experiences of those who are involved being students, teachers or others. The present study aims at voicing school teachers in particular, by employing individual interviews with them. As it has already been stated teachers' perceptions of bullying have seldom been investigated qualitatively, therefore this study can mostly be seen as explorative in nature. The present study is neither meant to pick up from where any particular other study has left nor to replicate any results. Results from previous studies have been considered though for the creation of the interview questions. An additional aim is to probe the bystander contribution and whether bystanders can be targeted in school bullying intervention in ways which have, perhaps, not been considered till now. More specifically these are the three aims of the study:

1. How do Finnish teachers perceive bullying in their schools, and how do they tackle it?
2. How do the bystanders participate in school bullying according to the school teachers?
3. What other factors emerged from the interview data which need to be considered when examining school bullying?

### 3.2. Methodology

#### 3.2.1. Participants

The research sample consisted of ten school teachers working in seven different schools in Southern Finland among whom three were males and seven females. Two were high school teachers, three were primary school teachers and five were secondary school teachers. With the belief that teachers working in the same school share ideas and practices, a maximum amount of two teachers was recruited from any given school. It is the researcher's belief that by limiting the number of participants from each school, more diverse opinions could be obtained. Some of the teachers were concurrently employed at primary and secondary schools, or at secondary and high schools. The subjects of the teachers of secondary and high schools ranged from foreign languages, arts and humanities to sciences. Primary school teachers usually taught all subjects as class teachers. It should be noted that one of the teachers was a special education teacher, working primarily with students who have behavioural problems. Additionally, one teacher has had international experience; before joining her school in Finland she had been working on two more continents. Overall, the teachers' work experience ranged from three to twenty-seven years. Interviews were conducted in English which was a foreign language for all except for two of the teachers who were bilingual. In the beginning of the study an additional teacher volunteered to participate in the interviews but he expressed the opinion that there is no school bullying and refused to acknowledge the phenomenon altogether. Therefore, given the nature of the study, his views were excluded from analysis. Five of the teachers were the researcher's acquaintances, three were recommended to the researcher by her participants and two of the teachers were recruited by a principal who was contacted first by the researcher.

Table 1. Participants of the study

teacher	gender	School	Years of experience
T1	male	primary	27
T2	female	secondary, primary	7
T3	male	secondary	12
T4	female	high school, secondary	20
T5	female	high school	19
T6	female	secondary	3
T7	female	secondary	8
T8	female	primary	4
T9	female	primary	9
T10	male	secondary	25

### 3.2.2. Instrument and data collection

A semi-structured interview method has been applied in face to face interviews with one participant at a time. Principles for the interview method were taken mainly by Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann. In their book *Interviews Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* they call their method “a semi-structured life world interview, in part inspired by phenomenology” p.14. In the Glossary of their book they give a definition of the method: a planned and flexible (set of) interview(s) with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee(s) with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena p. 327.

Content from previous studies, both quantitative and qualitative, concerning school bullying in general and the role of bystanders has been considered by the researcher and questions addressing this content were asked during the interviews. For example, the teachers of this study were inquired about their opinions on a previous quantitative research result which predicted that students would choose to help the victims of bullying when presented with hypothetical scenarios of it; in reality though they rather don't do so. Other questions were created by the researcher in order to address the aims of the study. Fourteen questions in total were generated. In the end teachers were asked to express freely their own comments about school bullying.

A pilot interview was conducted first, with the purpose of refining these questions and solving issues that might have arisen but then no refinement was deemed necessary; in the end the pilot data were also taken into consideration in the analysis like the data of the subsequent 9 interviews. During the interviews, clarifications were asked when needed with follow up questions to the participants' responses, but the researcher's purpose was to stay neutral and not express personal views. Also, preliminary questions were sent to the participants meant for possible contemplation and as a stress management technique (participants would know roughly what to expect). A privacy notice was sent to the participants by e-mail



that explained the general purpose of the interviews and their consent was asked again before the interview took place.

Interviews were recorded at all cases again with the participants' consent and lasted up to one hour. The shortest interview was roughly 30 minutes. After each interview, the researcher was available to answer any more questions that the participants may have had about the study (debriefing). Finally, participants were later in time offered a copy of the transcription to obtain their consent once more to use the specific content and the themes that arose were also provided to them to seek their opinions about the accuracy of meaning. Five participants replied to thank the researcher. Non-replies were deemed as showing agreement.

### 3.2.3. Data analysis

Two options have been considered for analysing the data of this study: 1. content and 2. thematic analysis. According to Vaismoradi et al. the main difference between the two methods lies in the opportunity for quantification of data. Measuring the frequency of different categories and themes is possible in content analysis with caution as a proxy for significance. After contemplating on the practices and implications involved in each method and after deciding that there is no intention that the results of this study be quantified, the researcher chose thematic analysis. The arising themes from the interviews have been represented as such in the written form of the study, naturally expressing that a certain theme was discussed more-if that was the case-but reference was made to all the findings of the study. The researcher contacted the participants again (they all agreed when asked during the data collection phase) after the initial analysis had taken place and themes emerged, to check whether the participants felt that these themes were accurate (to enhance validity of the analysis, see next section for more information).

Interviews have been transcribed including the pilot one. Questions and answers have been expressed in a written form without special emphasis on depicting characteristics of the oral speech such as fillers. Moreover, the researcher kept a personal diary composed right after individual interviews, with the purpose of collecting information about the overall impression of the interaction between her and the participant and anything else that might have been deemed as influencing the content or the subsequent analysis or interpretation of the interviews. The researcher familiarized herself with the data by going through the answers several times. Then she produced summaries for all the transcribed texts to be able to discern the actual meanings. It was estimated that the interview questions did not necessarily dictate the meanings because the participants were opting individually what points to emphasize. From summaries of summaries were created codes and then these codes were again applied to the whole of the transcriptions to reveal the themes of the transcribed texts. After the researcher had compiled a functional draft of the themes and their content, a colleague was presented with both some themes as they had emerged from the analysis and also choice pieces of the interview transcriptions. The goal was to eventually agree with the researcher that those pieces of text addressed a certain theme. In cases of disagreement, the researcher and the colleague discussed their views with each other. Some small adjustments were made but overall there was agreement between the researcher and the colleague that themes and content corresponded well to each other. The report was elaborated one more time as the researcher revisited the transcriptions to make sure that secondary comments made by the teachers would also be included in the final report. Some final comments and teacher quotations were added.

#### 3.2.4. Validity and reliability of the research methods

There are some specific techniques that have been applied to enhance the validity and reliability of this piece of research: First, the participants were asked if they agree with the emerging themes as they were presented to them (member checking). Second, an effort was made to give information about the participants and the setting or different perspectives or even counter information about the themes, in order to improve the understandability of the report and add to the credibility of the account. Third, the researcher has strived for self-reflectivity (explain aspects of herself that potentially affect her understanding of the phenomena). Fourth, a colleague has been asked to review themes and pieces of transcribed text with the intention that the two reach an agreement with each other (p.201-204 Creswell, 2014).

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

In this section the first aim is addressed, what constitutes bullying is being described, where it takes place and what teachers do when they encounter it. Teachers also describe the conditions under which a bullying incident can be successfully deterred and how they obtain support from their schools.

### 4.1. Not bully-free schools

Although all the participants refer to the existence of anti-bullying policies, plans and structures in their schools, it is clear that bullying does exist in schools. Perhaps for this reason, the schools invest in anti-bullying programs and training for both teachers and also for students in some cases. There are some differences in the ways how bullying is carried out depending on the space being it physical i.e. inside or outside the classroom, or cyber. Bullying in the playground or in other places of common use, where adults are not normally present, is more overt and physical whereas in the classroom it is more concealed, like name calling, whispering, making the faces or dropping a classmate's things on purpose on the floor. A primary school teacher (T9) explains how sometimes during group work, one student might disallow their classmates from contributing to the completion of the task, because they think they have better ideas and more skills themselves; according to the teacher this also is bullying. Moreover, nowadays bullying also expands into the social media terrain for older students. Teachers also wonder about and fear that many students are probably also victims of bullying in the cyberspace. The teachers' attention though focuses on what happens in school.

Of course the fact that there is not one and only one definition of what constitutes bullying creates some problems as well. For example, one primary school teacher (T8) and a secondary school teacher (T2) admit that it is difficult both for teachers and students to differentiate between teasing and bullying. Pupils often seem to move quickly from teasing to bullying and leave the teachers wondering whether they are too strict. Additionally, the secondary school teacher (T2) points to a similar issue: when students were in another class before her lesson and will go to another class after her lesson, she only knows what has happened in her class but it's not the whole picture of the students' school experience.

“yeah, yes I think like small instances you might even see every day but it is sometimes very difficult to us as teachers, sometimes even recognize is it bullying or is it just maybe friends having a laugh at each other or teasing each other or something like that. So sometimes it's because we are not with the pupils like the whole day we don't know what happened before our lesson or after our lesson, so it's sometimes very difficult to understand was it bullying or what isn't” T2

There is also an effect of professional and teaching experience on the teachers' perceptions of bullying and their readiness to act. It can be confusing to make sense out of the many different stories that arise when students are being asked to explain their involvement in the bullying incident, it is not just about he is the bully and he is the victim and punishing the bully. Teachers with less working experience can get easily overwhelmed; in these instances turning to school policies about bullying can be a relief as

a primary school teacher admits (T8). A secondary school teacher (T2) agrees with this point, when she contrasts herself currently with how she was in the beginning of her teaching career. Over the years she has gained valuable expertise and she feels she can respond to bullying more readily and more effectively.

“I did find it very difficult at first when I was a starting teacher I had my own class there as well, there was actually I think straight away there was this bullying situation and it was really really difficult ... but I think what was the most difficult thing was that the mother of the boy who was bullied always called me and was really kind of sad and really sometimes really angry so I found that really difficult because I didn’t really have the tools to kind of talk to the parent and tell her what we are doing and what are they supposed to do but I think nowadays it’s been easier” T2

Among the teachers who participated in this research there are two who had been bullied when they were students themselves. Currently, they have been teachers for many years, so both their personal and work experiences make it easier for them to discern bullying and understand the complex dynamics involved.

Nevertheless, for some teachers, exposure to bullying has been so common that they can promptly offer examples of it. A secondary school teacher (T3), when asked to give a recent example of bullying, differentiates between a conflict which seems to be among equally strong parties and bullying. He says that sometimes conflicts escalate to bullying but also that bullying can happen on its own and it simply happens anytime, inside or outside of school involving schoolkids.

Moreover, schools sometimes are being caught in the transition between implementing a particular anti-bullying program and then stopping it due to limited resources. The schools facing every year increases of commissions for these programs are forced to decide to stop buying the program to lower their expenses. During such a transition the school enters a state of numbness as the personnel is left to their own resources. The teachers’ motivation and confidence is struck as well. Other times, after such transitions the school personnel is more equipped with techniques as they complement the knowledge they already have from the previous anti-bullying program with the knowledge they acquire from the new one. It is like they are applying what is best-or perhaps what works best for them-from the two programs.

Table 2. Summary of the content of the first theme

<i>Not bully-free schools</i>
Bullying exists in schools despite anti-bullying policies
In the playground bullying is overt and physical
In the classroom bullying is concealed
Excluding from group work
Cyberbullying
Teasing
Teacher’s years of working experience and confidence to address bullying
Conflict VS bullying

Effects of changing the anti-bullying program
Numbness and combining techniques to tackle bullying

#### 4.2. Teachers: general strategies

There should be more education for teachers how to get involved in the bullying situations in the playground, for example. Teachers should know which the right questions to ask are and what hints to pay attention to. Besides, parents should play a more active role when it comes to educating children about bullying. The special education teacher (T6), would like to see parents and teachers cooperating more when their children and students participate in the bullying situations. She thinks that all adults together can tackle this pervasive problem better. She also thinks that victims need to be taught skills how to “defend themselves” since help cannot come always from the outside. If victims and the students who stay uninvolved learnt how to stand up for themselves first, then perhaps the bullying incidence would drop.

Teachers often turn to their colleagues for support. They discuss with each other the incidents as commonly bullies engage in the troubling behaviours in more than one environments. One teacher may, for example, alert the teacher who is responsible for the class where the bully is and then they may together handle the case. They can also be each other’s supporter if a common decision is made to alert the parents. But not all feel that the communication channel is open. A secondary school teacher (T2), for example disclosed that the teachers’ attitudes in her school diverge more that converge when it comes to tackling the problem; she craves for more discussions with her colleagues about bullying which would align more their practices. Additionally, a secondary school teacher (T3) made a distinction between younger and older teachers with the former being more accessible and open to deep conversations with colleagues and students alike, whereas the latter just say to their students not to be bullies which is not effective with bullying at all. As, he himself finds it difficult to express something to older colleagues, he suspects that for students it must be even more so.

“yeah with some but with some I haven’t even started to converse about it because I think it would just end badly. It’s about I think it’s about a question of personality and age. Because some usually younger teachers are more open and more easily converse, talk with the students and like meet the students as a human being but there is also always exceptions and then the older teachers usually there is also exceptions exist, but usually those older teachers are more like they think they are on the higher level they have the moral standard and they give to the student and talking about the way I want to handle those bullying situations they wouldn’t understand” T3

Some teachers have been very trusting of the anti-bullying programs their schools utilize. They cited some examples of cases being handled successfully with the implementation of techniques available in such programs. For instance, a secondary school teacher (T10), informs me with pride that his school ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> nation-wide as showing decrease of the incidence of bullying after implementing such a program. Others express relief when more specialized teams within the school can handle the bullying cases; when ordinary teachers

have to be or go to class one teacher of the anti-bullying team, so to say, can spare the time to talk with the victim, for example. Teams of teachers that handle together bullying incidents can also interview groups of students. The same teacher (T10) says that a colleague from such a team shared that in individual interviews the understanding of students of their contribution in bullying changes. Whereas in the group interviews students say one thing, subsequently in the individual interviews they say other things. The teacher understands it as showing that the students have in the meantime processed the situation. Teachers operating alone cannot accomplish the results that these anti-bullying team teachers can.

Nevertheless, not all teachers think highly of the anti-bullying programs. One of the teachers (T7) seems to believe that they would be better off in her school without the anti-bullying program they are using because she feels victims would discuss the bullying incidents more promptly with their teacher. She offers two reasons for the students' reluctance to approach their teacher. First, according to the protocol of the specific anti-bullying program the victims have to face their bully, which they might not be willing to do. Second, the students currently know that their parents will be notified, so some victims try to avoid feeling humiliated in their parents' eyes and avoid altogether approaching their teacher to discuss that they have been bullied. Despite seeing flaws in the procedures of the anti-bullying program the same secondary school teacher (T7) concludes that having an anti-bullying program is more preferable than not having one, especially for teachers who want to know what to do. A high school teacher (T5) is also critical of the anti-bullying programs. According to her the teachers can proceed without an anti-bullying plan, only with common sense and the support from colleagues. She thinks that the programs in the market are more useful with younger students and that there are details in real life bullying episodes which are not addressed in these plans. But her too understands how such plans can be of more help to colleagues who don't know at all what to do.

The teachers in the study often make a connection between their workload and handling bullying. They would love to have more time to deal with bullying problems as they arise. One high school teacher (T4), for example, says that she can't afford to discuss with all the students involved in bullying i.e. the bystanders, because she is rushing to cover the material of the curriculum. Of course she has to deal with the victims and the bullies-or anyone who happens to be loud for that matter-but the bystanders are usually left alone.

“oh I can't say really, it's more like I told them (those who cheer and laugh) to stop or to concentrate, so they haven't really sort of explained why they are doing it, because most of the time we are also, we are in a hurry to catch through all teaching stuff also and then I don't know, I guess the real reason would be that they want to be accepted by the ones bullying but I don't think they would say that...” T4

The teachers in the study all think that the bystanders play an important role in the bullying situation but sparing the time to raise the awareness of the class of the importance of their participation in bullying seems to be a luxury they simply do not always have. Curriculum first then.

Table 3. Summary of the content of the second theme

<i>Teachers: general strategies</i>
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Need for more training for teachers
Teachers and parents should cooperate more
Need to teach victims skills how to defend themselves
Need to teach all students how to stand up for themselves
Teachers turn to colleagues for support
Why anti-bullying programs are deemed successful
Why anti-bullying programs are deemed as failing
Teachers' overload and bullying

#### 4.3. Teachers' feelings

Although teachers attempting to solve the bullying situation, try to be objective, they experience many feelings especially anger, towards those who cheer and laugh or those who repeatedly engage in bullying. One teacher (T2) describes herself as frustrated. It is almost unintelligible to the teachers why a meaningful discussion cannot be effective and why the students continue their bullying behaviour. A primary school teacher (T1) differentiates among younger and older students and admits that he experiences more negative feelings towards those who are older. According to his opinion, older students should have the maturity to comprehend the impact of their actions.

“And sometimes I am very angry to those that, who are laughing or cheering or just watching and leaving the situation I usually tell them that ok you did basically you did not anything wrong but you are the ones who give this opportunity because you are accepting this, I usually try to tell them that they started to understand it oh is that really so, we are the crowd and usually I am angry to them, that depends also the situation and the age of children, the more yeah of course, one who is 12 or 13 should understand more than one who is 7, that's natural...” T1

A high school teacher (T4), also admits that she is irritated when her 16 to 19 year old students bully; on the one hand they want to be treated as adults but on the other, they behave like 5-year-olds. Another teacher (T7) mentions that sometimes huge workload renders teachers “blind”; they simply cannot notice everything and they have to accept this. Teachers also feel helpless to interfere in some cases, when for example they do not know the students involved; true mostly for the secondary and high school teachers who only teach the groups for few hours. In this case these teachers turn to their colleagues for help.

Outstandingly, the teachers in my study feel that their fellow teachers have similar points of view about the topic. They can pinpoint minor differences like the fact that for example, one teacher might go more easily to ask the principal's help than another teacher, or that one teacher might have a stricter definition of what constitutes bullying but bigger differences were not expressed. That is promising because it means that on the one hand bullying instances are handled similarly and that on the other hand teachers discuss openly with each other about bullying. Such discussions can increase their expertise and offer them support. Besides, students experience less confusion and a sense of fairness when for similar actions there are similar repercussions.

A primary school teacher (T8) is committed to do everything she can to influence the behaviours of her students and get also other people involved in this direction but she knows that she cannot control the unwanted behaviours. At the end of the day she believes she should detach herself from the bullying incident and face the fact that bullying will perhaps continue. Some teachers think that students possibly have problems in their personal lives as well, so conducts they might have at school might reflect these problems. As one secondary school teacher (T10) states, it is not the teacher's job to interfere in students' private lives. A high school teacher (T4) has the same inhibition, when the student replies that everything is fine, even when she suspects strongly that there is a problem, she doesn't inquire further.

Despite problems and frustrations teachers express their admiration for their students as well. Of all six possible roles in bullying, victims and bullies included, teachers admire the students who offer support to the victim- even if they only decide to help when their friend is in trouble-for their integrity and strong personalities. Defenders are characterized as being the "heroes" but "rare" in numbers. So rare indeed that one high school teacher (T5) goes as far as to say that having worked for ten years in the specific school she has never seen any student helping the victims; she has only heard about one in discussions with her colleagues.

"...but the students that help the victim is unfortunately not happening, no. It's so sad. I have heard about a case about one of our former students that stood up for someone who got bullied but that's many years ago and I didn't see it, I just heard about it and I think that's so sad that I have heard in the last 10 years I've seen that, I've heard about it one time, I haven't seen it, so that's very sad..." T5

One secondary school teacher (T3) mentions that defenders usually know the victim, which is why they come to their rescue. As far as the defenders' strength is concerned it can be either mental (says T1) or physical (says T10). Other than his admiration for defenders a primary school teacher (T1) also feels that modern schoolkids, in general, are wiser than how he was when he was in their age and more open-minded as they accept ethnic differences, for example, more easily. He shared that during his school years there were more fights concerning issues which currently do not seem to attract negative attention.

Table 4. Summary of the contents of the third theme

<i>Teachers' feelings</i>
Anger and frustration for those students who cheer and laugh/those who repeat bullying/those students who are older and bully
Blind from workload
Helplessness if the students are unfamiliar
Teachers feel their colleagues agree with their opinions
Students' personal problems might cause bullying
Teachers don't want to interfere with the personal lives of their students
Admiration of defenders
Belief that modern kids are wiser and more open-minded

#### 4.4. Specific teacher practices



The participants of the study feel they can help more in the cases that the students are familiar to them. Then, even when bullying does not take place even when the students simply seem not to be acting like themselves in a certain day, teachers can go and ask if everything is alright. At all cases they strive to be good role models, “living” or “leading” examples for their pupils. Politeness towards the class was also mentioned by a secondary school teacher (T7). She said it sounds tedious but a teacher who is not polite with their students, how can they give the example of good manners?

“...and what else, that you are polite to your students yourself, I think that’s one of the things that it sounds really, it sounds like it’s not so related to the situation but you need to be really, you have to treat everyone equal so that if the teacher is picking on somebody, it’s easier for children also to be impolite. If you are not nice to somebody they think that it’s ok to be, so I think the teacher has to be a good model for how to behave with the other people” T7

One secondary school teacher (T2) tries to be friendly and accessible so that students approach her more easily when they have problems themselves or when they want to report bullying. Another secondary school teacher (T3) tries to “spark” the seed of empathy, modelling how a caring adult behaves.

Besides, some teachers are implementing whole class discussions. During such discussions when bullying has happened, a primary school teacher (T1) focuses on what pupils can do instead of participating-more or less actively- in the bullying situation. Class discussions apart from addressing a particular instance of bullying, can also facilitate the avoidance of similar instances in the future. This is so because students often don’t know that a certain behaviour constitutes bullying or poor bystander role. The teachers are not just required to punish the bully and confront the victim, the bullying incident can be cherished for its educational value to the whole group. In an example provided by a secondary school teacher (T7), a boy spontaneously exclaimed, after a discussion where what behaviours are considered bullying were explained in a whole class discussion, that he doesn’t want to be a bully (or bully helper). In other words, the boy realized during the whole group discussion that he was engaging in bullying by laughing with the nasty comments his classmate was making against another classmate who was very short.

Some teachers think that the timing of their intervention is crucial. They choose to intervene just before or the minute after bullying occurs. According to them late teacher intervention is problematic as the bullying incident has already escalated. It may also exhibit permissiveness on their part. The two high school teachers (T4, T5) are committed to take action immediately when bullying takes place and not postpone it for later. In this way they believe they can model to students how defending can be realized.

“I think the main thing that I, or the thing that I can do and that I have to do and that I try to do, is to be very observant and every time I see something to put an end to it right away. Not to think that, well I will follow the situation and maybe I say tomorrow,

maybe next week. I think it's very important to act right away to put an end to it right away" T5

A secondary school teacher (T7) reveals that when she notices conflicts in the playground during recess which are bound to intensify, she approaches the students and asks them to stop "dancing". She hopes with a funny comment the tension will steam out. And it works.

None of the teachers think they could stop bullying from occurring, one teacher (T2) says they can only "talk it out in school". But such talks should not be underestimated; on the one hand they clarify the situation for teachers and on the other hand and most importantly, students realize the role they have played. It is not uncommon for students to find out for example that they have been provoking their perpetrator. Bullies can also realize which the real reasons are, hiding behind their aggression. A primary school teacher (T8) mentions an example where the bully, after a talk with the teacher, the victim and the parents of the two schoolchildren realized that he did not have many friends and that was perhaps related with his harassing behaviour. He apparently strived for attention and human contact in the wrong way.

Teachers sometimes change their methods to include practices that enhance bully-free lessons. One secondary school teacher (T2) for example, refers to "small things" that she has incorporated in her lessons like deciding herself where the students will sit (to encourage tolerance). More teachers deliberately incorporate techniques of a practical nature. A visual arts' teacher started keeping her supplies close to her in class at all times after she noticed that her students were getting restless and potentially started to bully every time she was going out of the class to fetch supplies. But it is not just teachers who can implement practices to prevent bullying from happening, there are some things that students can do as well in order to stay away from harm.

One primary school teacher responsible for very young students (T8) offers a technique which could help prospective victims obstruct the bullies. Offended students should abstain from "feeding the drama" the bully is looking for. They can just ignore what the bully said or did, or even compliment them. When for example the bully says: "you are stupid", they can reply: "sorry to hear that cos I think you are so smart". She believes these techniques work actually better than reporting the incident to the teacher, because bullies who have been reported to the teacher often retaliate and engage in more bullying. She acknowledges though that her pupils lack the maturity to process in this way issues of such perplexity. They usually instinctively retreat to behaviours like crying or asking for help.

Table 5. Summary of the contents of the fourth theme

<i>Specific teacher practices</i>
Ways with which the teacher can be a leading/living example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity with the students</li> <li>• Politeness</li> <li>• Friendly teacher</li> <li>• Empathetic model for students</li> </ul>
Whole group discussions
Timing of teacher intervention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good timing prevents escalation of bullying and shows intolerance of the bullying act</li> </ul>

Teachers can talk bullying out but cannot stop it
Implementing techniques to prevent bullying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ex seating arrangements /keeping supplies close</li> </ul>
Techniques for students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop feeding the drama</li> <li>• Ignore or disarm the bully with unexpected compliment</li> </ul>

#### 4.5. Innovative practices

Some teachers refer to some ways how bullying was or could be addressed. For example, in one school they have monthly well-being lessons delivered in all classrooms. The content of the lessons is age-appropriate. During such lessons proper conduct, and improper conduct like bullying, can emerge easily. As a matter of fact wellbeing is a topic in the finnish school curriculum but then it depends on the school whether the relevant ideas are incorporated into concrete and separate lessons or not. For some schools well-being is cared for in an abstract manner like for example other student or human rights are. Most schools though make concrete additions to this directive which is distributed in schools so that teachers can find more support how to attain different goals.

In another school they hold clubs for lonely, victimized peers or peers with problems in any other way. One teacher (T10) cites with pride how successful these clubs have been; it has also happened that two students, a former bully and a victim ended up being friends in one of these clubs. Moreover, he says that for those students who are not particularly interested or good at school, spending time with their mates while engaging in the specific activity of the club, e.g. cooking in the cooking club, makes their school reality more positive.

“...and one good thing with those clubs is that, some of those boys are, don’t get any other positive experience of feelings here in school. They may be very weak in studies and then they may be very lonely so that gives them at least some positive” T10

The special education teacher is a proponent of teaching social and emotional skills. Students take part into class discussions about the events as they occurred, what everybody did and what they should have rather done. Actually the special education teacher (T6) thinks that similar discussions should occur regularly at home between parents and their children. According to her opinion children even at the age of two, should start becoming aware of what are the consequences of their actions, how the other parties are feeling and what is the right thing to do.

“I think it’s really important to have emotional skills, the parents just teach and teach and teach different kinds of emotional skills for their children and they always talk all the situations through even when they are 1 year old, or 2 year old or always, always when something happens you have to go it case by case and part by part and talk what should you have done what could he or she have done, what is the result of this situation how can we prevent this before happening and self-confidence teaching the

children or students to trust themselves and just be put in their place like having enough social skills and emotional skills to understand the other part's role in these kinds of situations" T6

One primary school teacher (T1) initiates as well such discussions in his classroom. The teachers see not only themselves but also the parents as required to revisit discussing the same events till it's clear to the children what the proper line of action is. Two teachers of primary school (T8, T9) mention that either after a discussion with the bullies, victims, parents and teaching personnel, or even after a presentation in class of bullying as a problem, students had to sign contracts that they will not bully.

Some schools have really been very resourceful. For example, a primary school teacher (T1) mentions that in his school there are some older pupils who have received training as part of the vertaissovittelu, a skills' school program for conflict mediation and they are given the title of "peacemakers". Then they handle mild cases of bullying. The bully and the victim always decide who will handle their case, the peacemakers or the teachers. The teacher participant comments that victims and bullies often feel more comfortable to have discussions with senior classmates (the peacemakers) and not teachers. Besides, it's a relief to the teacher that others (the pupils) also assume roles of responsibility. When the cases are handled by pupils alone, the bully receives no further punishment and the victim declares that they feel comfortable with the end result. These of course are milder cases of bullying to start with.

Some of the innovations in schools do not work well with bullying though. A secondary school teacher (T7) referred to the actual constructional renovations in some schools where there are open concept (not in the classroom) workplaces for students. Some students may opt to go to work for their assignments in places where the teacher is unable to keep an eye on what is happening. The same teacher (T7) comments that her students can choose their preferred place to work only if they behave well, otherwise she does not offer them this choice. But some of these spots are so concealed that the teacher cannot hear or see what is happening there. New opportunities for bullying may arise and the misbehaviour of bullies may go unnoticed.

Table 6. Summary of the content of the fifth theme

<i>Innovative practices</i>
What schools can do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly well-being lessons</li> <li>• Activity clubs</li> <li>• Teaching social and emotional skills</li> <li>• Vertaissovittelu-peacemakers(training for students)</li> <li>• Should avoid designing open concept work spots for students</li> </ul>

Next, the second aim is addressed, real life bystander roles are presented along with explanations why many students choose to stay uninvolved in the bullying situations.

#### 4.6. Shifting bystander roles

The school teachers (the study sample) were provided by the researcher with a list of 4 possible roles for bystanders as they are documented in current research. The majority of the participants confirm familiarity with the following roles in the bullying situations: 1) students that participate in bullying actively, 2) students that laugh or cheer, 3) students that help the victim and 4) those who watch or withdraw from the scene. In real life situations though the boundaries among these roles often fuse and overlap. Or students may switch from a role they assumed in the beginning of the bullying incident to another role as the incident progresses. Thus, the school teachers have noticed the following sub roles that broadly fit in all the above 4 categories.

The students who go home and ask their parents to inform the teacher that bullying took place in school (help the victim). Usually these students want to keep their anonymity and specifically ask-through their parents-that their names are not revealed. A primary school teacher (T1) attributes this shift to a change of mind as they move from a dangerous to a safe environment i.e. their home. A high school teacher (T4) mentions that her high school students although they don't react immediately when bullying takes place in the class, they might go to the bully during the break after a bullying episode in the class has taken place, and tell him or her that their behaviour in class was unacceptable.

“But in many cases it is also when the situation where you are, for example in a classroom and someone says something and then the others start laughing, it might be that they (defenders) don't help the victim at that moment, it might be that it could be in the break, then after, they go and tell the bully hey you can't really do that. And it might not even be so that the victim can hear it, but you can just, sometimes you (the teacher) just pass and you notice this...” T4

Moreover, there are those who experience agony and think about an adult who would stop the bullying they are witnessing (without going to fetch one though). It is like they want to but they do not have the courage to help the victim. The high school teachers (T4, T5) and the special education teacher (T6) might have been observing carefully the bullying scene because they have seen in the eyes of some students that they would prefer to have been absent from the bullying episode.

Then, there are those who cheer and laugh in the beginning and then become active bullies. A secondary school teacher (T3) thought that very often there is a key leader who initiates bullying but then more students join both from role 1 and role 2. He estimates that typically there is a group of students to start with and when the bully's (key leader's) insults drain away, then his mates who were cheering before now take the active role. So the key bully now turns to cheering. The teacher (T3) considers these shifts very common. A high school teacher (T5) has also noticed that students from category 4, the uninvolved ones, may switch to cheering and laughing and then to active bullying. Perhaps, that is one good reason for which bullying episodes should be dealt with immediately, they escalate fast.

Additionally, two primary school teachers (T8, T9) and a secondary school teacher (T2) say that certain pupils often leave out one classmate when for example they don't allow that classmate to sit with them and then the next student doesn't allow the same student

neither. They consider this behaviour as bullying since students when they do that, deliberately decide to exclude one of their classmates.

“I thought of one more thing, another bystander role would be leaving somebody out. Like not including somebody in a game or not letting them sit with them so that could probably go with, you know, leaving the scene (bystander role 4) or witnessing silently (bystander role 4) or even helping the bully (bystander role 1). So, one person says they can’t sit with them and then the other people say that they can’t” T8

As students that help the victim and those who watch or withdraw from the scene are not inquired about their contribution, what do the teachers of the study say about the students that participate in bullying actively and those students who laugh or cheer? A secondary school teacher (T2) mentions that it’s difficult to tell the difference between a bully and other students who help the bully actively (bystander role 1). Besides, this group of bystanders do not take responsibility of their actions when confronted by the teacher. They quickly deny their involvement as active bullies. Like the actual bullies they also reason –when they have to- that the victim was annoying. Students that laugh or cheer say that they only did too what everybody else was doing or that the situation was funny or that they were not thinking straight. Many teachers are annoyed by the attitude of this group. A secondary school teacher (T3) for example, ponders that this attitude has an “immense effect” on bullying and practically “cheering keeps bullying going”. These students who laugh and cheer are also seen as “going along with the herd”, not having a mind of their own.

Table 7. Summary of the content of the sixth theme

<i>Shifting bystander roles</i>
Two defender types (after bullying has occurred)
Outsiders who want to help but do not
Students adopting the roles 1 and 2 change into bullies
Leaving out from participation
Explanations of students that take role 1,2

#### 4.7. Teachers’ perceptions of outsiders

There is this group of students in the bullying situation who might silently watch or leave the scene, their quietness makes them almost invisible. One teacher of the study (T7) admits with shame that focusing on the verbal or physical violence aspect of the bullying incidents she hasn’t even noticed that such a silent group exists.

“...so I think I can’t relate to the bully, I am more on the side of the victim. And I am really glad that those students that help the victim exist, I am proud for them so, and I feel quite ashamed that I haven’t noticed the group 4 so much, paid attention to that, because they are helping the bully by not telling no...” T7

A primary school teacher (T8) pertains that the outsiders might simply not think it is their place to step in the bullying situation, they might think that it’s the teacher’ role to do so or

that their voice has no power in the situation. It's true that teachers do not know much about the outsiders. The adults are busy controlling the bullies and those students who laugh and cheer, so almost never have they asked the outsiders to explain their attitude. A high school teacher (T5) believes that there is a lot in the minds of the outsiders and that teachers should devote more time asking the outsiders to express their feelings. By guessing the teachers of this study respond that it must be fear of victimization that makes them freeze. But is it a legitimate fear? A primary school teacher (T1) speculates that outsiders know that if they intervene, their classmate who bullies will swap victims, abandon the previous victim and lash out at them. The same teacher (T1) believes himself that this is what bullies do and the outsiders simply know it.

To a large extent, the teachers in the study understand and empathize with the outsiders. Although the outsiders, same like the other groups of bystanders, might offer when asked the justification that they didn't do anything or that they didn't see anything, they appear to know what is wrong and what is right. All participants in this study confirm that their students in general are aware of what is morally the right thing to do in the bullying situation i.e. help the victim, which is the reason why when having been asked in research to point it out (what they should do) they promptly articulate it. Usually teachers don't ask though the outsiders why they stay uninvolved.

Nevertheless, not all teachers see the outsiders favourably, two of the teachers speculate that some outsiders simply don't care. A secondary school teacher (T3) for example, speculates that the students who "live in their own" bubble, cannot get affected by episodes of verbal or physical violence. He can also see how staying uninvolved has a "degenerating effect"; you start by not responding one time and then you keep doing it in the future.

"if they are aware of the bullying then definitely if they choose to look the other way it has, I think this degenerating effect on you, because if you look away this time it's easier to look away next time and next time next time...even if something really really really bad happens, I just look away because it's my habit now. There are those exceptions who have no idea what is happening in the school, they just live in their own bubble and don't see anything, I think they have no effect if they look the other way because they just don't care, they live in their own sphere" T3

A high school teacher (T4), also suspects that they stay uninvolved because they don't care enough to take either direction, join the bully or help the victim. Despite what the reasons are why the outsiders keep to themselves, the majority of teachers think that it is traumatic to watch violent behaviour or knowing that bullying exists in your school. Outsiders might as well be students who try to keep away from the centre of attention. As there are students who avoid "raising their hand in class", it's plausible that some are unwilling to take action to oppose a scary bully. Or, as they are relatively young in age, they might want to but do not know how to intervene and what steps to take, as one of the teachers (T6) hypothesizes.

The discrepancy between what they know they should do and what they actually do, is one between "reality and fantasy". In reality they try to stay away from possible harm like being picked out by the bully as the next victim. Or, since defending behaviours are uncommon,

the outsiders might want to be accepted by the group and do what everybody else is doing. It is also possible that they are not aware of the gravity of their behaviour. Outsiders specifically are thought of in research as being influential in the bullying situation because they come in big numbers. Researchers, teachers and adults in general, consider outsiders for utilitarian reasons and wish that this big body of students would switch to defenders.

Table 8. Summary of the content of the seventh theme

<i>Teachers' perceptions of outsiders</i>
Reasons for being an outsider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of victimization</li> <li>• Not care</li> <li>• They think the teacher needs to solve the problem</li> <li>• Want to keep away from the centre of attention</li> <li>• Might not know what steps to take</li> <li>• Want to be accepted by the group (defending is rare in the group)</li> <li>• Students are not aware of the gravity of their behaviour</li> </ul>
Generally, teachers sympathize with the outsiders

Next, the third aim is addressed, teachers explain how parents can play a supportive role added to what they do themselves to tackle bullying in schools. Also, differences among boys and girls and younger and older students are presented. Finally, teachers discuss their perceptions of bullies and victims.

#### 4.8. Parental involvement

The important role of parents was acknowledged by all ten participants. One secondary school teacher (T3) thinks that the students shape their attitudes at home and that some students have so serious psychosocial problems that their sense of right or wrong is totally impaired. Therefore, they cannot understand the negative effects of bullying on their classmates. A high school teacher (T5), ponders that proper behaviour cannot be taught later in life; parents need to be careful what they say and do around their kids because their kids will assume that this is the right way to behave and they will copy the behaviours. Parents can always model how it is to “coexist with other human beings” by keeping a harmonious, loving and respectful relationship with the mother or father of their child.

Besides, although it might not be an action against bullying, parents should stop expecting that teachers can “wave their magic wand” and solve the problems with bullying or any other problems for that matter which exist in the society and are reflected in schools.

“One thing that is quite frustrating as the teacher’s role is when these incidences happen the parents tend to have this expectation that you can just wave the magic wand and everything goes away...yeah, and I find that very difficult because it’s not black and white, it’s not always bully -victim there is usually some kind of back and forth going on and it takes time to solve, it really does, so a lot of time teachers, parents think that teachers have all the power to fix everything and stuff and you know



the reality is that we are just human beings with two hands like everybody else so yeah” T8

Parents should also cease opposing teachers, when teachers inform them, for example that their children have engaged in bullying. Excuses of the kind “my child doesn’t do that” cannot help the child who is a bully. For one secondary school teacher (T2) it’s understandable that parents want to defend their child (bully) because they don’t know the other student (victim) so it’s difficult to grasp that there are many points of view. Building a relationship of trust inside their family though, can help parents discuss with their children problems the school informed them about.

Furthermore, parents should stop blaming teachers when the latter inform the former that their children are being victims of bullying. The topic of parents second-guessing or blaming the teachers arises more during the interview with the primary school teacher (T9) with the international career, who thought that in the Finnish society parents cooperate with teachers more than in other countries where she has taught.

“I feel like, in terms of bullying, I feel like in Finland maybe they are more supportive, the administration and the teachers in handling incidents of bullying, and maybe the parents have in some ways more respect for you and maybe more trust in you in Finland that they do in let’s say when I was teaching in Canada. They kind of accuse you (in Canada), you’re kind of afraid to say things about the child or provide criticism because the parents don’t really believe you or they just assume that their child is some, is the best and that he is perfect and he can do no wrong” T9

Still, more teachers refer to it when asked about how confident they feel to deal with bullying. They say that when parents pose issues of misbelief then the teachers turn to their colleagues, counsellor or principal for support. One secondary school teacher (T10) mentions that in one home the answer for bullying cases might be “fight back”. He says that the school cannot give advice to parents and tell them what is wrong and what is right in the way they choose to raise their children. The same teacher (T10) also says that sometimes parents of the bully (ies) might end up fighting with the parents of the victim instead of notifying the school. He ponders that such familial disputes add to the existing problem. Schools should at all cases be informed so that they take proper actions to handle the bullying situations.

Despite that, schools and teachers have their own role to play, in order to ensure that bullying will not be repeated. Needless to say that if parents urge their children to fight back, for example, then this attitude finds the school in complete opposition. Of course teachers can understand that there is a difficult balance there for the parents who obviously don’t want their child to be neither a bully nor a “hopeless victim”. A primary school teacher (T8) ponders that when parents give specific directions to their child this issue might be resolved. Thus, instead of saying, you need to defend yourself they can say how exactly their children can defend themselves. Specific directions work best. It is also advisable, as there are sanctions in school for improper behaviour, to be sanctions at home. A primary school teacher (T9) says that parents should not just discuss at home about bullying, they

should proceed and give consequences to a bully child. She does not see harsh punishments as merely punitive, really, according to her opinion all humans need good social skills; it is of paramount importance then that pupils learn in early age how to treat fellow classmates and be around people in general. Finally, a primary school teacher (T7) proposes that parents be creative and include in their fairy tales stories like the one with Antti Fantti Elefantti who is bullied for his extra wrinkles, or Cinderella who faces abuse at home by her siblings. Using age appropriate literature the topic of bullying can safely be introduced for further exploration.

Table 9. Summary of the content of the eighth theme

<i>Parental involvement</i>
Parents are responsible for their children’s behaviors
Parents need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be careful what they say and do</li> <li>• Teach them how to coexist with others by keeping a loving relationship with their partner</li> <li>• Be specific when they tell their children how to behave</li> <li>• Discuss with their children</li> <li>• Sanctions caused by misbehaviour</li> <li>• Read to their children age appropriate literature which addresses bullying</li> </ul>
Cooperate with the school about problems with bullying
Accept and respect what the teacher says is happening in school
Know that the teacher cannot magically solve problems

#### 4.9. Gender and age

Upon being inquired, all teachers reply that girls are just as capable of bullying as boys are. The difference stands on the ways they opt to do it. Female students are deemed as being even “nastier”, “meaner” when they bully or their bullying is “psychological”, “elaborate”, “devious” and “sophisticated”. It can also be secretive and impossible to notice since usually it is hardly physical. For example, they “leave out” their victim, they exclude them from social interaction during the school activities (group work), from games during recess or from events in social life, like parties. Moreover, they might spread rumours about another student around the whole school. Some teachers think that girls resort to bullying more easily than boys because they tend to build more complex social relations and they exhibit less tolerance towards students who do not belong in their social groups.

On the other hand, boys engage more physically in bullying they push or kick their classmate, especially when they are young in age. Of course girls too can engage in physical violence. One of the teachers (T10) refers to two such incidents which are atypical but real. In the first one, an angry secondary school girl tossed a scissors in the classroom without luckily injuring anybody. In the second one, the oldest sister of a secondary school girl came to school with the purpose to confront in the playground the girls that were bullying apparently her younger sister. The teacher saw the oldest sister pushing the bullies. Such instances are not common though. Interestingly, the participants in the study generally think that female bullying incidents are more difficult to address and resolve.

As far as the bystander roles for boys and girls are concerned, there is a variation in what the teachers think, perhaps as a result of their specific experience in primary or secondary

school (student age differs). The vast majority of teachers think that girls do not engage in cheering or laughing during bullying. Cheering and laughing is acknowledged as being a male bystander role. One teacher (T3) speculates that this is happening because boys tend to gather in bigger groups and the members of the group tend to impose their preferred behaviours, cheering in our case. But there are other deviant behaviors that may be also imposed by male groups. If, for example, a student informs the teacher about a violent incident in general, either involving him or another classmate being the victim, his mates will ask him why he did that. Moreover, some teachers think that it is easier for girls to help the victim, as females are perceived in human societies as those who protect and are “motherly”.

“I think it’s easier for the girls to take like the mother kind of mummy character or something, like this, like come there and say hey you are not allowed to do this. It’s easier for the girls go there and defend someone because they don’t have to be scared of losing their face or something...so it’s maybe more approval (approved) for the girls to defend than for the boys” T6

Or they, the girls, approach the teacher more easily to say that they have been victimized themselves.

Table 10a. Summary of the content of the ninth theme

<i>Gender (table continues)</i>
Girls bully as much as boys do but do not cheer and laugh
Boys’ behaviour is influenced by the groups they belong to
Girl bullying is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborate, sophisticated, nastier, psychological, non-physical</li> <li>• Examples are offered</li> <li>• Difficult to address</li> <li>• As they grow older they bully more</li> </ul>
Girls belong in complex groups and exhibit no tolerance towards those who do not belong in the group
Boy bullying is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• As they grow older they become defenders more</li> </ul>
Bystander roles and gender:
Girls do not cheer and laugh/they approach the T more easily to report they have been victimized
Girls can assume more easily the motherly role due to societal stereotypes
Boys cheer and laugh/group norms

To the different tendencies among boys and girls, we need to add the age factor. A secondary school teacher (T2) comments that younger pupils’ bullying is “childish” whereas older pupils can come up with really hurtful ways to do it, using for example social media. As a high school teacher (T5) notes, bullying of older students is more sophisticated and harder for teachers to notice. Besides, as students grow older they value more their friendships than their teacher’s opinions. A primary school teacher (T1) is often telling his

students that they have the “wrong kind of loyalty” when they are supporting their friend who is harming another student.

“There is a difference because the younger ones tell, they usually tell to teacher. This or this happened, they they are open and they want to tell (it), they want to mmm they act right. When they are getting older, I think, I don’t know but I think that there comes some kind of loyalty to friends, friends are more and more important and adults are not so important and sometimes I think and I have told also to students that now you have wrong kind of loyalty, it’s not fair to be loyal if it’s very harmful to someone else, you you that, so there are lots of changes I think” T1

Being influenced by peers is especially true in adolescence when for example, students will stop a behaviour when their friends ask them to, but not when the teacher says so, notes a high school teacher (T4). From adolescent students, a secondary school teacher (T6) often hears that they don’t fetch a teacher to help when bullying occurs because they are not “snitches”. Another thing, as they grow older, students are more aware of the fact that there will be consequences for many, so they prefer to keep silent. Younger student on the contrary don’t have such inhibitions, they go and tell their teacher easily when there is a problem with them or their classmates. Besides, playground games can be particularly overwhelming for very young students. A primary school teacher (T8) has noticed that whereas teachers are able to see only students playing, young students feel bullied. One such game is tag, where classmates chase another classmate. Often the young who is being chased feels bullied.

The same teacher (T8) also notes that age makes younger students less aware of the consequences of their action; they participate in bullying by ignorance. Older students are more conscious and their bullying is intentional. Moreover, another primary school teacher (T1) has observed that very young students are more likely to ask their teacher to help them; as students grow older they feel shame and avoid attracting attention. Mostly they decide to “manage” themselves alone. A secondary school teacher (T3), who sees students entering and leaving secondary school (13-15 years of age), has to say that by the time they graduate they become more defenders when they are boys. He attributes this to a change from “going with the flow” to making responsible decisions about their lives and behaviour. He sees the opposite happening for girls; as they grow older they bully more.

Table 10b. Summary of the content of the ninth theme

<i>Age (continued)</i>
Younger students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Childish</li><li>• Tell more easily the teacher what happened</li><li>• Playground games are scary</li><li>• Participate in bullying by ignorance</li></ul>

Older students:

- More elaborate/social media
- Listening less to the teacher
- Peer pressure for adolescents/don't want to be a snitch
- Prefer to keep silent/know there will be consequences
- Intentional bullying
- Students feel shame and decide to cope alone

#### 4.10. Skilful and loner- bully and victim

Being a bully (skilful) or a victim (loner) is something that rather stigmatizes you. The two high school teachers (T4, T5) who teach students at ages 16 to 19 have seen that repeated incidents of bullying that persist through the years are extremely difficult to break. By the time victims and bullies reach high-school their behaviours are full blown. It might be so because usually students get promoted to the next class with the same group of classmates. The teachers feel that it is like victims and bullies are taking an addictive substance which they cannot stop using. Schools try to tackle such problems by removing the victim or the bully from the class and placing them in another class.

“...they had been together in one school from grade one to grade six. And if there, has been problems they can't continue here (secondary school) because it's the same group of people and those situations sometimes can be severe. We have to make decisions if we took someone away from them. I know the problem of, I have no experience on that, but who is coming away the bully or the victim? It is a difficult decision if someone has to make it, I think usually the victim goes (to) (an)other (class)” T10

Besides, some victims might even change schools themselves to avoid tormenting bullying. One teacher also presents the information that in the beginning of the school year his school tries to incorporate activities for the newcomers which enhance a positive classroom atmosphere. They organize activities where students hopefully engage enthusiastically and mingle. Allegedly, whenever there is us, and not just me on the one side and you on the other side, bullying diminishes.

But how are bullies and victims perceived as being? Bullies are described as “cool”, “leaders” and sometimes as students with high grades. Many participants in the study refer to the bullies' special skills to manipulate others. The bullies and the defenders seem to both have strong types of personalities which rather operate in opposite ways. While bullies intrude to intimidate, defenders intrude to help. Very often bullies when asked about the cause of their actions reply that those whom they bully are annoying, that they deserve it, that the victims started it, or they say they are irritated by what the victims said or did and they cite this as a reason for bullying. Bullies might also say that they are joking with the victim, that they were just making fun and it is nothing serious. Besides, they are quite capable of intelligently choosing the suitable words to say so that their victim “breaks down”, “flips out”, “explodes” or cries. For all they can accomplish they are both feared and admired. Some students avoid to be their next target but still others follow the bullies and

repeat their actions in order to please them and gain their acceptance. A high school teacher (T5) feels that mostly primary or early secondary school students follow the bully and try to impress them.

Teachers sometimes feel sorry for the bullies. The special education teacher (T6) is sure that they are not “bad”, they need to solve some issues for themselves, which is why they are misbehaving. Another teacher from a primary school (T8) puts it: “hurt people hurt people”; it all starts with the bullies feeling terrible about themselves, they hurt another student just to feel better or entertain themselves. But it’s a vicious circle because then they create more hurt students who might go out there and attack another student. For a secondary school teacher (T7) nothing really can justify their actions. She thinks that their arguments are not valid and there are always other ways to solve personal or interpersonal problems.

Victims on the other hand are mostly described as “innocent”. Their painful adventures in school raise teachers’ sympathy. Nevertheless, some teachers think that victims are not always innocent. A primary school teacher (T8) cites an example where, after discussing with the teacher, the victim realized he was a perpetrator as well, exchanging roles with his bully. Careful examination of what happened revealed that the victim was rather “banging heads” with the student who was considered to be the bully before the discussion. Another primary school teacher (T9) also notices that some students “play the martyr” for sympathy. Very often these victims have provoked their classmates, they have put them on the role of the bully and then they cry or get upset. The teacher claims that now she is aware that events can occur in this way and tries to keep her objectivity while she is resolving the bullying situation. She has learnt that the students who cry are not always the innocent victims.

“I do realize that some students do play, as I said the victim, they may play the victim or the martyr and go like, they say I haven’t done anything, he said this this, then I access the situation and say you said this to him, you are also a participant...yeah, like it makes me upset because I don’t like children to cry and I am quite sensitive to that and I maybe, but also, I think maybe lying is what really bothers me about it. It’s just like if, you know this has happened please be honest and say how you participated in it, don’t lie, this is what you did and please own up to your own actions”

T9

The problem seems complex; while the teacher notes that she is repelled by liars, it can be asked whether some of these crying students truly believe that they are being bullied or whether they just try to convince themselves about being true victims.

Table 11. Summary of the content of the tenth theme

<i>Skilful and loner</i>
Problems with bullying stigmatize both bullies and victims, difficult to handle if they persist for years

**Bullies:**

- Cool, leaders, strong personality, feared and admired
- Skills to manipulate
- They claim the victim is annoying
- Capable of finding the right sentences to say to hurt

**Teachers often feel sorry of the bullies**

- “Hurt people hurt people”
- Bullies need to solve personal issues
- No excuse for what they do

**Victims:**

- Innocent
- Not always innocent/banging heads with the bully
- Play the martyr for sympathy/they provoke the bully

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to see bullying from the teachers' angle; if it is happening and what exactly is happening. Moreover, this study aimed to surface teachers' opinions about the students who are being involved, about bullying in general and more specifically about the bystanders. Also, other factors related to bullying have been explored, for example, parents' contribution and the change of the bullying incidents as students grow older. In the findings section different points of view were presented without an attempt to make interpretations. Findings were also presented irrespectively of whether it was one or more teachers who expressed a certain thought. On the other hand, when some thoughts were expressed by more than one teachers this was stated in the findings' text. Here, in this section, the findings of the present study are linked with results from previous research conducted in the field.

#### **Frequent bullying in Finnish schools**

It appears that the teachers in the present study were fairly knowledgeable of the dynamics of bullying. Most of the time they know how to discern it and they know how to tackle it despite some insecurities they might have. Even in the cases where they find it difficult to solve a bullying incident, they promptly turn to another structure in their school for additional assistance. And luckily the structures which exist in their schools are quite sophisticated and helpful. There are their fellow colleagues, the principals, counsellors, social workers and anti-bullying programs and plans. With such an elaborate infrastructure it is a point to be argued whether bullying should be rare in Finnish schools. Although bullying happens regularly in Finnish schools, the researcher of this study is content to see that there is a set of systems within schools which addresses bullying and that bullying episodes are adequately handled. But the researcher cannot keep from wondering how much more bullying there would be if the infrastructure was not available.

#### **Cyberbullying**

The participants in this study were not inquired about their opinions of cyberbullying but still they referred to it consistently. Some teachers of the present study provided illustrations of cyberbullying cases and others discussed it as a major concern. The literature on cyberbullying is not as abundant as on school bullying in general is, given the fact that technology has been thriving more only in recent years. It is true though that through the use of information and communication technology nowadays youngsters harass and bully their schoolmates. In a study conducted in 2008 in Canada the researchers claimed that school bullying and cyberbullying differ in the anonymity that cyberbullying can provide the perpetrator with, but resemble in that both types have witnesses either in the cyberspace or in the schoolyard i.e. bystanders (Beran & Li, 2008). Beran and Li also cautioned on the importance of cyberbullying, as it came out in their research that more than a third of school children who are bullied in school are bullied in the cyberspace as well.

Equally alarming is the statistic that those bullied at school and in cyberspace are likely to bully others in the cyberspace (Beran & Li 2008). Other researchers have found that students who are involved in school bullying and in cyberbullying belong to different groups, in other words they are not the same students (Kubiszewski et al. 2015). For the relevant students (cyberbullies) the cyber space is a place where they can engage in behaviors they would not have, were it a physical space. Whether cyberbullying is the cyber counterpart of



school bullying or not, based on the present study it seems that both problems need to be addressed concurrently; teachers cannot restrict themselves to taking action about what happens only in school premises as a physical space. Perhaps they should enlarge their definitions and take into account what happens involving school children.

### **Teasing**

Another issue that needs to be addressed is teasing. Teasing is often examined in research side by side with bullying. For instance, both phenomena have been shown to affect the school climate and to have detrimental effects on academic performance indicators (e.g. Lacey et al. 2017, Lacey & Cornell 2013). Perhaps the difference between teasing and bullying is that the former does not get physical and there is not a power imbalance between perpetrator and victim. Whereas it can only be playful, teasing can also be hostile when, for example, one is criticizing another's physical appearance or clothing. Teasing as a form of peer aggression perplexed the minds of some of the teachers interviewed in this study. They would like to have more information about the sequence of events they are witnessing or the events that are being brought to their attention by students, to decide about the nature of the incident. But this is not always possible as students transition (secondary and high school students more so) from teacher to another teacher or from classrooms to the playgrounds. Only few times teachers know how incidents arose and developed. Many times they do not know if a mild episode is hostile or playful teasing. Luckily, with the experience that comes from increased years of teaching they know what clues they should pay attention to and when the right moment to intervene is. Indeed the teachers in this study who had more working experience seemed more confident differentiating between the two types of behavior, namely, playful teasing and bullying.

### **Connectedness with students**

The teachers in this study often referred to their attempts to establish connectedness with their students as a measure against bullying. For example they try to be the living or leading example of a caring adult. The concept of caring is recognized in pedagogical literature. It is a well-established value promoted in schools and preschools, a value which may not guarantee bully-free classrooms but it gets there. It has been shown, for example, in research that in schools with positive climates students do better academically, emotionally, and health-wise (e.g. Brand et al. 2003; Wang et al. 2010). Students need to feel cared in order to learn how to care for others. Angela Lumpkin, a professor at the University of Kansas has said that "when students know that their teachers genuinely care, they respond by exerting greater effort to reach their potential" (Lumpkin, p.158). It is a quotation that is not directly related to bullying but it does relate, as students trying for their best are not bullies and are not fearful of stepping up. And if one classmate misbehaves, if bullying occurs, the rest of the class can readily act prosocially and stand for the victim.

### **Connectedness with school, colleagues, administrators**

But connectedness is not only something that teachers cultivate in their relationships with their students. Teachers themselves look for it in the form of support in their relationships with the other teachers or principals. The teachers in the present study regularly consult with their colleagues about bullying episodes and proper course of action. Actually, it came out as a surprise finding that, when they were inquired whether they think that their colleagues agree with their opinions about bullying, teachers genuinely believed that their colleagues do so. It was a surprise for the researcher because at some point further back in time all those teachers did not even know each other and have not chosen each other as a workmate. We can say that they were almost randomly assigned as coworkers so how

probable can it be for their approaches to converge? Important finding indeed and practical; bullying can be addressed more effectively if those who set the rules share consensus. Only one teacher expressed that there is divergence of opinions. Even in this case, she was referring rather to techniques how to deal with bullying and not to core principles. Above the anti-bullying programs the teachers of the present study trust their colleagues. This sense of solidarity, a finding emerging from different schools, is greeted with optimism since colleagues are readily within reach.

Based on the idea that problematic behaviors in schools may be associated with other variables existing within the schools, Roland and Galloway researched whether the amount of bullying happening in schools varies as three different aspects of professional culture vary (Roland and Galloway 2004). The three variables the researchers examined were: 1) how the teachers perceived the principal's leadership 2) how well the teachers cooperate with each other and 3) how well teachers agree with each other on certain important aspects of the school life. According to the results of their study, schools ranking high on bullying suffer in all three variables tested (Roland and Galloway 2004). They concluded that if their results can be corroborated by more studies, programs for school improvement instead of targeting bullying alone perhaps they should also address staff-level interactions as a major contributing factor.

In the same line of examining and improving the whole school climate where bullying occurs, with the hope that such an understanding will decrease bullying occurrence, O'Brennan and colleagues (2014) decided to research some factors that may make teachers intervene more easily in bullying situations. They separated connectedness on the part of the teachers and school personnel to four interrelated dimensions: (a) personal sense of connectedness to school, (b) student-staff relationships, (c) staff relationships to fellow employees, and (d) staff connectedness to administrators. Then they drew their sample from the population of the National Education Association (NEA), USA's largest teachers' union, which includes 3.2 million members nationwide. From their sample a little over half were education support professionals (ESPs,  $n=2,901$ ) and the remaining participants were teachers ( $n= 2,163$ ). They found that personal, student, and peer connectedness were pivotal factors in school staff members' comfort intervening in bullying happening in the general population and then higher levels of staff connectedness were consistently related to reports of being more comfortable intervening in bullying situations with special populations, like obese and gay students. But these results emerged, only when there were specific anti-bullying policies in their schools and when the staff members were involved in the programming efforts of such bullying prevention policies (O'Brennan et al. 2014). Indubitably the sense of connectedness with different human groups in school and with the school norms and atmosphere affect how the school functions as a whole, as connectedness determines both students' and teachers' behaviors and attitudes towards bullying. Finally, of the four above types of connectedness, perhaps the second one, student staff relationships, reminds us of the need of the teachers of the present study to be familiar with the students in order to feel confident to intervene to solve a bullying episode. The issue of the confidence of teachers to intervene is explored more, in the next paragraph.

### **Familiarity with students**

When the teachers of the present study were asked about their confidence to solve bullying incidents they replied that they feel confident only when they are familiar with the students involved. Familiarity with the students is something that has not emerged or has not been researched in connection with intervening in bullying episodes. On the other hand

“confidence to intervene” seems to fit the definition of self-efficacy i.e. belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1977). What has the research revealed about teachers’ self-efficacy to intervene in bullying incidents? Scientists are unfortunately theorizing about the conflicting results that emerge in between studies. Whereas there is needed more research combining self-efficacy and school bullying variables, some important and useful results, have already been arising.

### **Self-efficacy of teachers**

There is some evidence that the level of teacher self-efficacy affects bullying occurrence and outcomes. In a study conducted in 2017 (Gregus et al. 2017) the researchers studied how two variables, teachers’ self-efficacy and teachers’ intentions to use actions to reduce bullying affected the level of peer victimization among their students. They collected data both from elementary school teachers and their fourth grade students. In classrooms where the teachers had very low or very high self-efficacy to deal with bullying, the students reported higher levels of peer victimization. Trying to explain why students reported a high level of peer victimization in classrooms where the teachers felt highly efficacious, the researchers offered two reasons a. teachers’ overconfidence prevented them from realizing how much bullying there is in their classroom and b. these teachers, being very competent, were placed by the principal in classrooms where there was increased rate of bullying. In classrooms where the teachers had strong intentions to use anti-bullying practices, the levels of peer victimization were low. Moreover, the researchers found that the lowest levels of peer victimization were reported in classrooms where the teachers had moderate levels of self-efficacy and strong intentions to use anti-bullying practices (Gregus et al. 2017). Perhaps for the teachers of the present study the path of strong intentions passes through familiarity with the students involved in bullying. Lack of familiarity might be weakening their intentions to act. As familiarity with the involved students is a novel finding in bullying research, how it relates to teacher responses to the bullying episodes, should be researched more in order to get a clearer picture.

### **Teacher empathy**

As it was mentioned in the preceding paragraphs teachers who know the students who take part in any given bullying episode, promptly intervene to resolve the dispute. True, familiarity with the students has not emerged as a decisive factor in the bullying research but there is a cognate of the familiarity concept, empathy, which has. Perhaps the teachers of this study can relate more to (empathize more with) the students they know, even when these students misbehave. That could explain their reluctance to intervene when the students involved are unfamiliar. In the qualitative study of Mishna et al. (2005), it came out in their interviews with teachers of victimized students that when teachers felt empathy for a victim, they tried to understand the victim’s experiences and behaviors even when they thought the specific victims were either responsible for their victimization or that the victims misperceived the situation. The same teachers or other teachers when they did not feel empathy, easily dismissed similar incidents that were brought to their attention as being not serious. In other words, empathy determines how teachers respond and intervene in bullying situations.

A handful of more scientists have addressed teachers’ empathy. In a quantitative study of preservice teachers they examined how some individual characteristics of teachers (empathy included) interact with some contextual characteristics of the bullying incidents (Craig et al. 2000). They used vignettes of bullying varying in different aspects, for example whether the teacher witnessed the bullying behaviour or not, and 3 more scales to access some individual characteristics of the teachers. One of these scales was the Questionnaire

Measure of Emotional Empathy (QMEE). The researchers found that aspiring teachers with greater empathy levels were more likely to identify bullying, consider it serious and be willing to intervene. Along with common intuition, individuals who score high on empathy can comprehend better the bullying encounter. The researchers concluded, as far as empathy is concerned that cultivating empathy in teachers should be a focal part of both teacher training and anti-bullying programs.

### **Teachers advise victims**

The teachers in the present study mostly felt that the best strategy against bullying is, either the victim or another student to inform a teacher (or an adult) about the victimization. Ignoring the bully and avoiding emotional reactions was also mentioned. Besides, the teachers disclosed that they take some practical measures themselves in order to discourage bullying from happening in the first place. For example, they try not to leave the students unattended. In one piece of qualitative research where teachers were inquired about school bullying, what characterizes victims and bullies and what victims should do and what they should avoid, somewhat different recommendations emerged. Whereas seeking adult intervention and support was cited as an effective technique as well, it was also cited as an ineffective technique (Rosen et al. 2017). The reason was that according to some teachers the bullies who receive punishment from teachers often retaliate. The teachers in that study agreed with their colleagues that bullying should not be ignored (not be a passive victim) and that victims need to regulate their emotions and avoid strong sentimental reactions as those attract like a magnet the bully to continue his attack either in the present or in the future. Responding with humor or wit was also suggested (Rosen et al. 2017).

### **How teachers intervene**

On the other hand, in both the present study and the Rosen et al. one (Rosen et al. 2017), teachers felt that pressure to focus on academics, testing and curricula obstructs them from devoting more time to helping their students develop socially and emotionally. In the present study teachers agreed that their students should learn how to respond to bullying by learning how to stand up for themselves, defend themselves. The special education teacher was over and over advocating social and emotional skills which should be addressed by both parents and teachers. The rest of the participants would agree if only they were sure that a certain recipe is effective. It is true, the teachers of the present study were sometimes unsure what to propose to the victims of bullying even unsure how to deal with perpetrators. Similarly, Rosen et al. direct the reader's attention to the need for discovering whether intervention programs that target increasing the teachers' understanding of peer victimization, would be effective in reducing bullying. In the present study the teachers turn repeatedly to their fellow teachers and seek guidance and advice. It appears that this is a technique that helps them appease their mind amidst the complexities entailed in the role that modern teachers need to play, having to be knowledgeable and efficient in so many ways.

### **Tolerance**

Several teachers in this study pointed out that students need to recognize individual differences and develop their acceptance for all. Specifically, the fact that there are students who bully others because they find them "annoying" demonstrates that those who get annoyed are not doing well in terms of peer acceptance or peer tolerance. In an ethnographic study of a primary school in South Africa, MacDonald and Swart (2004) found that students need to be helped in order to identify with the democratic values of their

schools and not just be asked to engage in or abstain from certain behaviors. Students feel the values and underlying conflicting realities apart from appearances; values cannot be imposed to them. Moreover, values such as tolerance for individual differences and mutual respect need to be reflected in the procedures and policies of the schools if bullying is to be diminished. In schools which are harmonious and caring, the needs for security and belonging can be fulfilled and all, students and educators can work together to actualize their potentials (MacDonald and Swart 2004).

In another ethnographic study conducted in a secondary school in a Chicago suburb, Merten, an anthropologist, cautioned that the aggression commonly exhibited by certain students towards some of their classmates in puberty should not be regarded neither as “transitory” nor as “part of growing” (Merten, p.40). It constitutes bullying and needs special attention. He also posed as one reason for the occurring aggression in the particular school he studied, the dichotomous evaluation of the classmates and self; students react in this way to the need to re-establish their position in the group after leaving the primary school where the positions of students had already been set through the years. Classmates do not rank as having “more” or “less” of a certain quality (i.e. degree) but rather they rank as having the positive or negative aspect of the quality in question. Then they are, for example, either “babies” or “cool” and being classified in the negative part of the dichotomy, a “baby” in this example, gives reason for bullying (Merten, 1994). Such perceptions of others as “good” or “bad” may apply more widely than in the specific suburban school and may generalize to more institutions during the transition from primary to secondary education, when the bullying rate is at its peak. These perceptions can be seen indeed as causing poor tolerance of others.

### **Emotional impact of bullying on teachers and parents**

The teachers in the present study have implied that parents rather hold teachers responsible for preventing and responding to bullying, especially when their children are being victimized. Clearly the teachers believe that the behaviors students assume during bullying are learnt at home, directly or indirectly from parents. Whereas who is responsible for school bullying is a question which does not have a definite answer, some research conducted on the parents’ perspectives shows that the situations among parents and teachers often overlap in certain areas, especially emotionally (Harcourt et al. 2014). Both groups, for example, struggle how to define and identify bullying. Unfortunately, this confusion affects parents’ and teachers’ responses to bullying and in turn it affects the victims. The teachers of the present study also felt angry and frustrated with the bullies who repeat their actions, those who cheer and laugh and the older students who get involved in bullying although they know it is wrong. Both parents and teachers at some point feel helpless and unprepared to deal with the news that their child or student is being bullied (Harcourt et al. 2014).

Moreover, both groups crave for increased information how to tackle bullying and for supplementary support from their environment. This is so especially for parents who unexpectedly learn that their child has been a victim of bullying (Harcourt et al. 2014). The teachers in the present study have also expressed that they crave for more cooperation with parents and wish to offer them some pieces of advice, like that they should teach their children how to coexist with others peacefully, with acceptance of differences. Besides, teachers wish to encourage parents to model harmonious relationships at home. On the other hand, we can only hope that teachers will stop being skeptical about the role of parents and will stop being anxious about how the parents will react when they find out that their child is a victim or a bully. Unequivocally, teachers need to keep the channels of

communication with parents open, since shared collaboration and shared responsibility between these adult stakeholders can accomplish the best possible results and ensure positive outcomes for all.

### **Amplified bystander roles**

For the present study bystanders have been categorized according to the way provided by Salmivalli and her colleagues (Salmivalli et al. 1996). A piece of paper was offered to the teachers with four possible roles for the bystanders (participating actively, laughing or cheering, defending the victim and staying uninvolved) and teachers were asked to answer whether these roles match with the roles students assume in their schools during the bullying incidents. Although in general terms they agreed that this list met their observations, further inquiring with the sub-question whether they have observed other roles, surfaced somewhat different answers for the bystanders. Students were described as switching roles both from day to day and during the same bullying episode. For example, uninvolved students might go to their home and undertake actions to help a peer who has been victimized in school or they can be so deeply affected that they wish that a teacher comes to the rescue of a victimized peer or they might even go up the ladder, progressively turning to bullies themselves. Moreover, there are groups of bullies, assistants and reinforcers who take turns to bully another student and additionally there are those students who bully with the precision of a surgeon, by excluding their classmates from class activities turning them down from group work, for example, without even saying a word.

### **Changing from active reinforcement of bullying into an uninvolved approach**

As thirty years ago it was innovative to begin looking at what the bystanders are doing in the bullying incident, in addition to the victims and the bullies, perhaps now the time has come to examine how and why the bystanders shift in different roles. Definitions of the four bystander categories presented above as distinct and separate should at best be utilized as merely operational; we should not forget that the actual behaviors in schools vary widely. Besides, looking at the school bullying phenomenon in another way, the one that encompasses shifts in roles, might require taking a different course of action. For instance, what if we aimed at transforming those students who actively help or reinforce the bully into uninvolved bystanders by cultivating prosocial attitudes more consistently? It would be one way of deterring bullying or at least preventing bullying from escalating. With the awareness that this proposition sounds now as being a radical or even desperate thought, the researcher would like to add that perhaps not everyone has the potential to be a defender of the victim. Essentially, as it was expressed by the participants of the current study, it seems impossible to turn outsiders to defenders. The teachers of this study have only rarely seen defenders emerging, although their schools have been utilizing anti-bullying programs for many years. Also, if the outsiders are afraid of being victimized themselves, it would probably be more effective to take coordinated action so that schools are perceived by schoolchildren as safer places where bullying behaviors of all-the bullies, their helpers and reinforcers-are discouraged.

### **Bystander behaviors from the school field**

Whereas bystanders in the present study have been classified according to Salmivalli and her colleagues' classification (Salmivalli et al. 1996), it should be mentioned that there have been other scientists and not just the researcher of the present study, who have found evidence of the boundaries of the Salmivalli et al. bystander categories being somewhat untrue and even misleading. Waasdorp and Bradshaw published an article in 2018 taking a stance which aligns more with the findings of the present study. Waasdorp and Bradshaw's

work can account better for the shifts in the bystander roles which seem to be common in schools. For example, conventional classifications of bystanders cannot explain the fact that many bystanders are capable of switching roles between and even within bullying episodes, as teachers of the present study have observed. By adding two categories to the possible bystander roles (see below) Waasdorp and Bradshaw managed to substantiate better bystander variation. True, for Waasdorp and Bradshaw the starting point of the research they conducted in 2018 was the suspicion that the four or three categories of bystanders -if we combine those who assist and those who reinforce the bully, we have a common category, those who side by the bully, who are called contributors by Waasdorp and Bradshaw- are more heterogeneous groups than it has traditionally been estimated. Another sub-goal of theirs was to see if the bystander categories, as they have been arising in Europe, were also applicable in the United States. The researchers used nine possible bystander responses to bullying to see how their sample of high school students would unite in different categories by endorsing or not these nine responses. It was also of relevance which responses they would endorse so that they would be assigned to a category and the category would be given a name depending on which response-items it contained. Moreover, based on prior research the researchers expected that at least three categories would arise, namely the passive-type category, the defending category and an assistor/reinforcer-type category (contributors), but even more categories were expected to arise.

First of all, their results corroborated the existence of the three main types of bystander responses about which researchers had been writing before them. Second, they discovered two additional categories of bystanders, belonging to the limited and the inconsistent response classes. These last two categories of bystanders are being characterized as such for the first time. In fact the majority of their high school subjects fell in the limited response category, comprising almost 65% of students. These were the students who would rather endorse none of the offered nine bystander responses. Despite them too being a passive category of bystanders as outsiders, it was found in the Waasdorp and Bradshaw study that these students were a distinct category from classic outsiders as they had witnessed less incidents of bullying in the last thirty days and as they admitted less boldly than outsiders that when they witnessed bullying they did nothing about it. In sum, as the researchers put it: “a large proportion of youth is uncertain and/or unwilling to identify as someone who “would not do anything,” yet they did not identify as someone who would actively help” (p.29). For comparison reasons the percentage of outsiders in that study was almost 10% of students. It seems that in conventional interpretations of empirical data on bystanders these two rather distinct categories of limited response students and outsiders would have been deemed as comprising one category i.e. the outsiders.

The inconsistent response class comprised almost 2% of the high schoolers and were those who, as the name of the category implies, did not confine themselves in one behavior but rather displayed a high probability of endorsing any bystander behavior. They were the ones who were getting triggered the most by what the authors called contextual cues, the specific characteristics of any given bullying episode, and acted accordingly. They were also the ones who replied they witnessed bullying the last thirty days more than the others and the ones who replied they were victimized the most. Needless to say they were also bullying others and perhaps they were choosing, as the authors theorize, to be defenders of some students but in aggressive ways with the result that the bully in the incident of question would redirect their aggression in the end towards them, that is towards the students who comprised the inconsistent response class and were defenders in this case.

Finally, the contributors (i.e. assistors and reinforcers combined) resembled little with the students belonging in the inconsistent response class but the former were more likely to be bullies and less likely to be victims. Despite their differences, students belonging in the contributor and in the inconsistent groups recounted bullying others highly. For comparison reasons the percentage of contributors in the study was almost 3.5% of students.

Further reference should be made here to Twemlow and Sacco who suggested that we should categorize bystanders in four groups: those who watch but feel thrill for the bully's act, those who watch but feel the terror of the victim, the confused-ambivalent who want to act but do not feel safe enough to do so and the abdicating group who rather act the wrong way (see introduction) (Twemlow & Sacco, 2013). Apart from what names we coin for the different bystander groups, we need to see a main similarity between the present research and Twemlow and Sacco's work. Same as Twemlow and Sacco advocated that the whole community needs to get empowered (see literature review), the teachers of the present study were aware that random interventions from the school personnel cannot make the bullying incidence go away. The teachers of this study often expressed that they want to see the parents getting more involved. As far as the bystander groups are concerned further research can reveal more precisely where the boundaries among these groups can be drawn. Nevertheless, perhaps we first need to decide whether school bullying is solely a school problem or it needs to be examined in a whole community context. Then for extra clarity we can assign the names which represent the relevant participant groups.

### **Comparing defenders and outsiders**

Another way of examining bullying with the purpose to limit it-perhaps the one that has been adopted the most next to the examination of bullies and victims-is to see what personality traits or what psychological processes drive the outsiders in comparison with the defenders. There have been some studies which targeted finding out how outsiders differ from defenders. Actually, it has been shown that these two groups of students have a lot in common like similar empathy rates (Gini et al. 2008b) similar popularity (Goossens et al. 2006) and the ability to keep themselves away from possible victimization (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). But perhaps their biggest difference is that defenders in a victimization situation react to solve problems whereas outsiders react to avoid problems (Pozzoli & Gini 2010). Occasionally though, outsiders do intervene in rescue of the victim (Goossens et al. 2006) but they do not do it consistently enough to be nominated as defenders by peer nominations in the bullying research.

Although the teachers in the present study speculated that outsiders do not intervene mostly out of fear of victimization, bullying research conducted in order to unravel the outsiders' cognitions, shows that the picture is much more complicated. When the teachers of the present study offered recounts of students who go home and inform their parents or those who show with their attitude (e.g. their facial expressions) that they do not want to be witnessing victimization, they referred to students who are rather outsiders and not defenders, at least as they are defined in research; students who have pro-victim attitudes but are ambivalent about bullying, indecisive whether to act or not. If we persist in seeing outsiders transforming to defenders in the future, we need to identify them better and research them more. We need to learn more about their inhibitions to intervene, why they intervene sometimes and not always and what kind of support they need to keep the desirable behavior coming out steadily. Besides, apart from the methods which the teachers put into practice, there are some considerations of the anti-bullying programs which are used in schools. Kiva, for example, which is a widely used anti-bullying program in Finland, has



been found by Kärnä et al. in 2011 to have a small effect on pro-victim attitudes of students. Careful selection of an anti-bullying program is of uppermost importance since it steers perceptions of what needs to be done and how.

### **Teachers and responsibility**

Interestingly, teachers in the present study did not feel responsible for the reasons which sprout bullying problems in their schools. They felt they have the responsibility to act when bullying occurs but they saw the problem as stemming from family upbringing. They felt they can adjudicate on school disputes but parents were deemed as the real actors who give their children conscious or unconscious directions how to act when problems arise, how to behave in the presence of others. Moreover, prior research shows that the three categories of the people who have a stake in bullying, namely the students, their parents and their teachers, do not agree to the extent of victimization by bullying that takes place in schools. In principle, students when asked report the highest degree of bullying behavior, but then parents and teachers underestimate how much bullying takes place in schools, with teachers doing more so (Demaray et al. 2013). If students report higher bullying rates, it means that at least in some cases teachers simply don't think bullying took place.

Furthermore, Houndoumadi and Pateraki report that students tend to go more to their parents when they are victimized whereas the bullies are dealt with by teachers mostly (Houndoumadi & Pateraki 2001). School victims' tendency to approach their parents more to inform them about victimization might mask the above result that has teachers underestimating the most of all (i.e. students, parents, teachers) the occurrence of bullying in schools. By going to their parents, victims probably make them more aware of the problem of bullying whereas their teachers might stay in ignorance, at least temporarily. As far as the issue of responsibility is concerned, perhaps to a certain degree there is denial, with parents and teachers not acknowledging the problem properly or acknowledging it but not owning it. According to them it seems to be somebody else's problem.

### **The aspect of gender and bullying**

The teachers in the present study often mentioned that girls bully covertly and that bullying incidents involving girls as bullies are somewhat harder to solve. When bullying is defined as physical e.g. hitting, kicking, pushing, or relational e.g. teasing, spreading rumors, excluding, female students are described as engaging more in the latter form (Elinoff et al. 2004). Logically then, females' bullying is easier to escape the attention of the school personnel and teachers might be oblivious to it, unless a student decides to bring the issue up. There have been many studies which investigated the different forms of bullying in general and more specifically as different trends among boys and girls. In 2018, a study conducted in the USA was published in order to delineate some alarming nationwide trends which showed female high school bullying to be on the increase. Acknowledging that bullying victimization has detrimental effects (e.g. suicidality; Van Geel et al. 2014) on the wellbeing of students which persist in adulthood, American authorities launched an initiative to obtain a 10% reduction in the prevalence of school bullying victimization from 2009 to 2019 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services {USDHHS}, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion {ODPHP}, 2016). The researchers of the article (Pontes et al. 2018) used the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) as their data source for measurement of high school bullying victimization to see among other things whether the goal of the reduction of 10% was accomplished and if it was so for both males and females. They found that although male high school bullying victimization decreased over the years i.e. nationwide efforts in this direction were successful for males, it was not so for females.

There was already an increase of 17% from 2010 to 2015 in school bullying victimization as it was surfaced in this self-administered survey (YRBS).

The researchers offered some reasons why female bullying was on the increase but cautioned at the same time the readers that these were only speculations. First, it is possible that anti-bullying programs used widely were able to reduce the physical and overt verbal forms of bullying which males usually use. Second, as there are currently more discussions about what constitutes bullying including its relational forms, perhaps self-reported bullying victimization has increased especially among females as part of an increased awareness. Third, this increased awareness might have driven both males and females, in particular, to turn to subtler forms of bullying (relational bullying). If these trends are true concurrently i.e. there is a decrease in male physical bullying, and an increase in both perpetration and self-report of relational forms of bullying (female type of bullying, concurrently assumed by males as well), then the uneasy phenomenon can be explained (Pontes et al. 2018). Clearly, more research is needed on the experiences of bullying victimization to determine the increase in school bullying victimization for female students. Perhaps female bullying is a rising phenomenon in other continents as well, not just in the USA. Such a claim is worth being investigated in more countries. Finally, differences in the nature of bullying and victimization among boys and girls require rather different, gender-specific interventions.

### **Peer status of victims, bullies and bully/victims**

But how do fellow students look at those who bully, at victims and at the ones who are victims in certain occasions and bullies in others (bully/victims)? Perspectives on peer status of these three categories of students can help us understand better the bystander involvement. The teachers of the present study were not directly inquired about victims, bullies and bully/victims. Inevitably though, some discussion was held about these participants in the bullying episode and how they differ from bystanders. Mostly the teachers of the study claimed that bullies possess above average skills to manipulate others and classmates see them as cool or leaders. Victims were mostly perceived by teachers as innocent as long as they did not provoke the bully and they did not use their victimization to gain sympathy. Since there was not made a distinction of bully/victims as a separate group from bullies and victims, it is possible that some of the comments the teachers made addressed this type i.e. the bully/victim. When, for example, they said that students who are hurt, hurt others they might have been referring to bully/victims.

In a study conducted in the United Kingdom among adolescents they explored the peer status of the above 3 categories of students as opposed to the bystanders. Specifically, they examined the variables social impact, that is how known the student is within the social group, social preference, that is how liked the person is and perceived popularity, that is the person's social prestige and dominance in the peer group (Guy et al. 2019). All the above 3 categories of students (i.e. bullies, victims and bully/victims) were more recognizable students in the social group (high social impact) than bystanders. Bullies were the most dominant personalities in their classrooms and schools (high perceived popularity), and bully/victims were liked the least by their fellow students (low social preference). Victims were less popular than bullies and bystanders, which can be seen both as a result and a risk factor for victimization (Guy et al. 2019). Victims were also liked less than bystanders. Bully/victims were pretty recognizable in the group same as bullies, but less liked and prestigious than bullies. Guy et al. theorized that high social impact (how well known one is) is not indicative of overall peer status; adolescent bullies and bully/victims match with each other in the impact they have on their social world but their social experiences are different.

The authors concluded that it is a challenging task to change the behavior of popular bullies. The whole peer group must be addressed so that the social status of those mostly affected by bullying i.e. victims and bully/victims, is ameliorated. Additionally, the aspects of the social environment that offer opportunity for bullies to thrive should clearly be impeded.

## 5.2. Conclusions

All forms of bullying are detrimental if only we asked the victims. Perpetrators on the other hand might not realize the consequences of their actions, unless their teachers point those out to them. Based on this study it can be concluded that teachers aim and need to notice carefully how students behave and need to be quick, as timing is concerned, explicating that certain behaviors will not be tolerated. Additionally, even if they punish all the conducts which unequivocally constitute bullying i.e. the disruptive cases of bullying, if they let go of subtler cases i.e. indirect bullying, cyberbullying, they still create a precedent of permissiveness of bullying behaviors in their classrooms and schools. What is more, if they punish conducts of the same nature, randomly and not consistently, they succumb to unfairness and chaos. Teachers, can influence with their example hundreds of pupils in a career time and they need to set the standard carefully. It is never redundant to say that they forge the characters of those they teach.

Students have many excuses why not to intervene. Fear of victimization, lack of care, belief that someone else should do it, unwillingness to be on the center of attention, ambivalence as to what steps to take, doubting whether defending is accepted by the group, lack of awareness of the seriousness of the situation, just to cite some of the possible reasons for inaction of the uninvolved students which have been offered by the teachers of this study. It is sure that the teachers of this or any other study would not like to see added in the list an additional reason: but the teacher did nothing.

It is totally understandable that teachers said they are overwhelmed by their workload. It is a finding that has emerged especially in qualitative research. In this study as well it was mentioned by several teachers that simply there is no time for discussing with students about ways to be “upstander”, as one primary school teacher of the present study put it. For her, upstander was the person who takes action as opposed to the one who stands by. But, if we think for a moment, what is more important, factual knowledge, a good mark in a test or good citizenship?

It is also understandable that teachers held families responsible for the moral upbringing of their students. But students do not behave the same way at all places. This may account why, for example, a confident, sports enthusiast at home may get bullied in school. Homes and schools have different norms, so school children adapt accordingly, or cannot adapt for that matter. Parents and teachers should not join their forces only when something unpleasant happens, they should rather collaborate proactively so that nothing goes wrong in the first place. Parents should realize that their children will most probably get involved in bullying either directly (victims, bullies) or indirectly (bystanders), so they need to address this issue at home without delay. Parents would better inquire what the anti-bullying policies of the school their child attends are. They need to get acquainted with the anti-bullying policies of the school their child goes to and with the measures the school takes so that bullying does not occur. Parents need to make sure they have the same understanding of what the nature of bullying is as the teachers do. After privately discussing with the teacher, they can reflect on what the teacher told them about bullying and decide about where they

stand themselves and what they wish to convey to their child and how they will do it. Then they can firmly explain the facts to their child in the safety of their home. Such discussions can be revisited as often as needed.

In the present study, depending on whether a teacher was employed in a primary, secondary or high school, their engagement with bullying problems varied. Primary school teachers seemed to be the most confident of all. They said that they knew their students and that they could discern even minor changes in their behaviors as indicating problems with bullying or problems with something else for that matter. None of the primary school teachers said that students might have personal problems the teachers did not want to hear about. Clearly, primary school teachers were all ears and thought of any reason that could make their students participate in bullying in roles other than the one of defending the victim, as pertinent to bullying and deserving to be heard. As a matter of fact they were fostering opportunities for the relevant issues to come out, by discussing, for example, with their students. These teachers exhibited no fear of personal revelations on the part of the student; these teachers did not think that listening to personal problems renders them disgraceful or meddlesome. Secondary school teachers on the other hand were already feeling overwhelmed with their workload even before bullying entered the picture. Moreover, they felt they could not affect their adolescent students in meaningful ways unless they knew them well. The two high school teachers who participated in this study, were the most dismayed of all. They hardly felt there was something they could do to deter bullies from bullying or alleviate victims' pain. According to them students have shaped their personalities long before and there was little they could do to change that. Luckily, they still condemned bullying behaviors in their classes by asserting in the presence of students that these behaviors must cease immediately. They were doing so, without heart and soul though.

Finally it has been hinted in this study that since our attempts to make defenders out of outsiders have not been particularly successful, perhaps we should strive to change course of action. Since it is important for bullies to dominate the peer group, if those who actively help the bullies and those who cheer and laugh with the bully's tricks did not participate as such anymore, perhaps bullying would decrease more. Research has taught us till now that outsiders have prosocial skills, what if there was a way to teach these skills those who join trouble or sustain conflicts? In other words, what if we increased the numbers of outsiders by emptying the categories of helpers and reinforcers? Sometimes, we can get more by aiming at less. We would still teach something positive, that is prosocial skills. We just need to find the way that these skills become appealing to helpers and reinforcers. It is all about where the focus of researching and implementing anti-bullying concepts is.

### 5.3. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

The findings of this study emerged using a specific instrument, the interview questions (see in the Appendix). Although this instrument was designed carefully to address the aims of the study and to obtain responses which would clarify important aspects of the bullying episodes, it is possible that there were other discussions that deserved more to be elicited, discussions that could have addressed better the aims of the study.

Besides, the researcher, being a novice, understands that same as her less experienced teacher participants who were still considering the bullying facts, the researcher might have

paid attention to certain angles, or thought that such angles were important, whereas a more experienced and knowledgeable researcher would have considered emerging material in another way, both during the interviews and while compiling the report (discussion).

Last but not least, researcher bias is also possible. Although I haven't experienced school bullying personally, for me it is a problem that can readily be assigned the rank of the most overwhelming school experience. We want to believe that our children are safe in school but they are not. One day they might be picked on by a bully or they might watch a bully pick on another student, really the difference between the two is not that big. What matters is what our children will do. We do not know whether they will choose the one socially desirable option, the only one, intolerance being it for bullying. The results of this thesis research imply that parents and teachers are all into this together; they need to be ready, they need to have addressed bullying before it happens. Students deserve to be told plainly how intolerance on the part of the victim or on the part of the bystander is exhibited. The present study was conducted with the hope of raising awareness to the issue of school bullying.

Irrefutably there has been done a lot worldwide in the field of school bullying. Even if the present project had not been limited in its resources, one researcher completing all the stages alone, the focus would still be on researching bystanders and specifically outsiders in conjunction with participant groups 1(assistors) and 2(reinforcers), that is outsiders and those who enable the bully the most. More argumentation on the need to expand research on these bystander roles has already been presented in the conclusions section. As far as the method is concerned, an attempt could be made to have interviews of pairs of teachers who work in different schools or three teachers at one time. Thus, there would be a mini conversation between teachers and one would expect that this method would stimulate teachers further to think and express their ideas, especially since teachers have already expressed in this study that they turn intentionally to colleagues for support. The researcher could keep being neutral, without expressing opinions or taking sides, could simply concentrate on asking questions which could clarify the ideas being expressed. Lastly, teachers would not have been provided with a readymade list of possible bystanders' roles and the opportunity to provide modifications. Teachers themselves could compile from scratch students' profiles as the latter adopt different roles when bullying occurs in schools.

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## **APPENDIX**

Appendix 1: bystander roles (paper shared with the participants after interview question 5)

There are 4 possible roles for bystanders:

1. students that help the bully actively.
2. students that reinforce the bully by laughing or cheering.
3. students that help the victim.
4. students that leave the scene or witness silently.

## Appendix 2: interview questions

1. Have you recently observed bullying in your school? What happened? Where?
2. What role do you think parents play in deterring school bullying? How can they deter their children from being bullies? Can they possibly do something so that their children defend the victims?
3. How do you feel confident yourself about dealing with bullying? If yes, what has helped you feel confident? If not, what kind of support would you need from the school, from parents or from the community?
4. What about your colleagues? Do you think they agree with your opinions?
5. Specifically, what do you think about the anti-bullying policies in your school? Have they been helping you to tackle bullying? How?
6. How do you think each of these roles is related to school bullying? In your work, have you observed that children have been adopting such roles? Could you give examples? Have you also observed other roles?
7. What about the classroom, does bullying happen in the classroom? What if we compare the bystanders 'role in the playground with the one in the classroom, is it the same and if not, how is it different? Do children with similar attitudes hang out together in the classroom or the playground?
8. When solving the bullying situation, what justifications have the bullies been offering about their actions? What justifications have the bystanders been offering about their actions? What are your opinions about these justifications?
9. Could you tell me more about your experience when solving the bullying situation? Is there any role which is bothering you the most? (Have you thought why is that?) Would you like to share with me why is that? Is there any role that raises your sympathy? Would you like to share with me why is that?
10. In your reference paper, the 4th category of students is called "the outsiders". Do you think that simply watching or knowing that bullying is happening in the school changes them? How?
11. In research they have asked students to respond to hypothetical bullying scenarios and state what they would do. Although most children are saying that they will help the victimized peers, in reality, few do so. Why do you think this is happening?
12. Is there something you do, or you think you can do as a teacher to increase the defending behavior of your students? What?
13. What if we consider for a while the age of students, have you observed whether younger and older students assume different bystander roles?

14. What if we consider for a while the gender of students, have you observed whether boys and girls assume different bystander roles? (2<sup>nd</sup> version: If we were to consider separately boys and girls, have you observed whether boys and girls assume different bystander roles?)

15. Is there something else you would like to share with me today before we finish?

### Appendix 3: example of the e-mail sent to one of the participants for member checking

Dear Heidi,

Our interview has been very helpful to me for the development of my themes. In the findings' section of my thesis there are 10 themes in total. You are mentioned in the text as Tx, a secondary school teacher. With this e-mail I am coming back to you to seek agreement that I didn't distort the meanings you wanted to convey. You can also see the theme under which your comment has been placed. Please have a look and in case you want to make any corrections reply back.

Theme: **not bully-free schools**

Difficult to differentiate between bullying and teasing. Additionally, teachers cannot know what happened in the previous class or during the break.

Theme: **teachers: general comments**

Variation in how colleagues deal with bullying, wish for more discussions with them about bullying.

Theme: **teachers' feelings**

Frustration comes when bullies repeat their actions after the teacher has discussed with them.

Theme: **specific teacher practices**

The teacher is friendly and accessible towards students. Cannot stop bullying, can only talk it out. Deciding seating arrangements to encourage tolerance.

Theme: **shifting bystander roles**

Certain students' leaving out a classmate is considered bullying (bullying or bystander role 4). Difficult to differentiate among bullies and students that actively help the bullies (bystander role 1).

Theme: **parental involvement**

The teacher understands when the parents of bullies defend their child because they don't know the other children and the different points of view.

Theme: **gender and age**

Younger students' bullying is childish. Older students can come up with hurtful ways to bully, using for example social media.

This is a summary of what I have included from our interview in the text. Points are more elaborated in the actual text and of course there are also comments that other teachers have made.

Best regards,

Katerina