

# UPHOLD CHILD DIGNITY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

**Eliza Mihaela SPĂTĂRELU, PhD**

*Adventus University, Cernica*

*elizaspatarelu@gmail.com*

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**Abstract:** The concern for respecting human dignity, in general, leads to a detailed analysis of concepts such as freedom, equality, fairness, fraternity or respect for life. Focusing on studying the subject of child dignity leads us to slightly different aspects. There are several main directions that can be considered. Respecting dignity in the family, at school, in the community, in the mass media, in the church are some of the variants that can be addressed. This work will be limited to respecting the dignity of the child in primary education. After analysing the specificity of the research in the wider field of child dignity, a list will be provided containing practical ideas that can be applied in teaching.

**Keywords:** child dignity, bullying prevention, primary school, value of respect, multi-level strategies

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Respecting human dignity should be one of humanity's most important concerns. Each human being is unique and deserves to be sustained, encouraged, assisted in his own development and evolution in order to reach his full potential. The focus on the needs and specific development of individuals at the age of schooling is part of this noble challenge, including their own accents and multiple challenges. Research in this area is quite limited, most of it heading towards bullying.

The school and the family should work together to respect the dignity of the child and to participate in joint projects specific to this area. The school can and must take the initiative and educate parents in order to have the most appropriate course of action. It holds the key to education for the future. Schools must ensure that students have equal access to the most appropriate education and extracurricular activities (Smith, 2001).

School principals need to be prepared to have an appropriate response to any type of challenge that may arise. To meet this purpose, the school must have a set of well-established rules that harmoniously combine education, prevention, intervention, discipline, security and procedures to be met in the event of a crisis. Even if the threats are different, there must be a right answer for each one (Surface, 2011).

When working with students with disabilities, one of the teachers' achievements is to be dedicated to all children, to show equal respect for all, to show dignity, regardless of the child's development. The main purpose of the teachers is to educate the child in such a way that he can reach the maximum level of potential (Harris, 2015).

The too-short duration of the meal period has a negative impact on the health and well-being of the students. Eating fast promotes habits that contribute to obesity. Proper nutrition positively influences academic performance. The way lunch takes place communicates basic notions of human dignity. Children need a dignified environment in which their physical and mental health is protected (Harrell, 2017).

It brings to mind the concept of the "circle of courage" which includes four important basic values for a normal child's development: belonging, empowerment, independence, generosity. This concept is associated with that of resilience and the four A's are discussed: attachment, achievement, autonomy and altruism (Brokenleg & van Brocken, 2003).

## **Child dignity and bullying prevention**

One of the biggest challenges that has begun to be increasingly encountered in schools around the world is the phenomenon of bullying. This phenomenon is an attack on the rights of the child and on human dignity, restricting freedom, security and the need for privacy. Its psychological and emotional effects cannot be minimized (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akepaide, 2008).

The male aggressors are popular, athletic, manipulative, sociable people, with an aggressive attitude, with the need to dominate, do not show empathy towards the victim, come from dysfunctional, hostile families. Female aggressors are more oriented towards social manipulation, which includes gossiping, ignoring the victim, excluding the victim from a group (Aluede et al., 2008). The victims of bullying are, on the other hand, more anxious, insecure, with a weak self-image, without friends,

vulnerable, predisposed to depression, unbelieving and very unpopular, lonely, sensitive, silent (Aluede et al., 2008).

Jenson, Brisson, Bender and Williford analyse the effects of a prevention program on a sample of 876 public schools for children aged 9-12. The examinations show positive results especially in the first year of application of the program. The transition from elementary to middle school entails multiple changes in the behaviour of some children. Aggressive behaviour and victimization by colleagues are the most common problems encountered during this period. Children who participate in special programs to prevent bullying have fewer behaviours specific to this phenomenon. Special positive results are signalled when applying the prevention program in the last year of the primary classes, making the transition much smoother (Jenson, Brisson, Bender, & Williford, 2013).

Letendre, Ostrander and Mickens implement a similar project, studying the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of the program and identifying the factors that need modifications to better fit the needs of the school, students and community. The results show that often the inappropriate attitude of teachers or parents encourages bullying. The three stages are presented: Stop, Walk and Talk. The model encourages students to stop acts of verbal or emotional violence, engages parents in this process by describing the program and behaviours that children need to learn. One of the most important weapons of action is the approach of parents. Parents send important messages to their children about how they need to interact with the world and some of them can materialize in inappropriate behaviours that their children can adopt. Analysing the perspective of parents can lead to a better understanding of how to best deal with the phenomenon of bullying (Letendre, Ostrander, & Mickens, 2016).

The concern for respecting the dignity of the child envisages the creation of a safe and positive environment and the development of healthy social skills that will foster strong interpersonal relationships. These are essential for the prevention of bullying problems in primary classes. This is where the first addictions of aggression and violence develop for the inappropriate resolution of personal problems and social disorders (Teasley & Nevarez, 2016).

The intersection between the subject of bullying and the school environment is also studied by Cornell and Bradshaw. Higher

concentration in this direction is expected to indicate the best mechanisms for modelling students, classrooms, and school. It is difficult to indicate exactly the level of impact the school environment has on student behaviour because the two are mutually conditioned. However, implementing programs that build inclusive and tolerant climates in which students feel respected and supported brings positive results (Cornell & Bradshaw, 2015).

### Practical ideas that can be applied in teaching

Some authors emphasize the role of professional consultations in collaborating with school communities in preventing behavioural bullying deviations and the chance of preventing them. They provide a multi-level prevention scheme, as can be seen in Figure 1. (Morrow, Hooker S. D., & Cate, 2015)

Figure 2 and 3 show Levine and Tamburino's view on how to address the problem of bullying, elaborated after summarising a work carried out in this field (Beane, 2005; Levine & Tamburino, 2014).

Area	Recommendation
Evaluation	Assess bullying and victimization in Grades K through 2 (student- and teacher-report measures)
Implementation	Increase teacher communication and collaboration regarding OBPP class meetings
	Videotape experienced teachers' OBPP meetings as a training tool
	Share additional materials (e.g., handouts or worksheets) developed for OBPP lessons
	Include school support staff and volunteers in OBPP class meetings
	Expand peer mediation program to the lunch period and the before and after school period
Programs	Provide schoolwide education on cyberbullying
	Offer students education in multicultural awareness and social justice
	Offer assertiveness training workshops to students at risk for peer victimization in middle school

Figure 1: Recommendations for Bullying Prevention (Morrow et al., 2015)

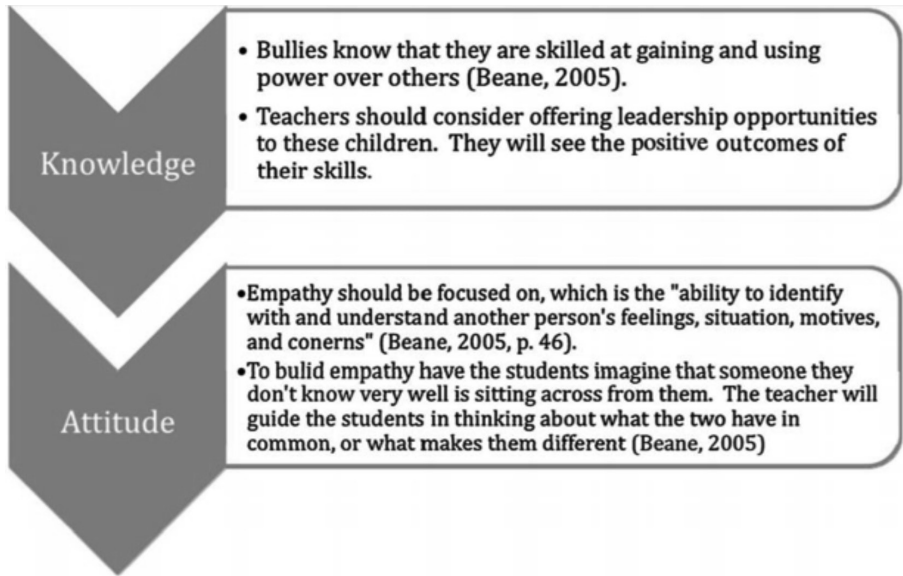


Figure 2: Educating young children about bullying (Levine & Tamburrino, 2014)

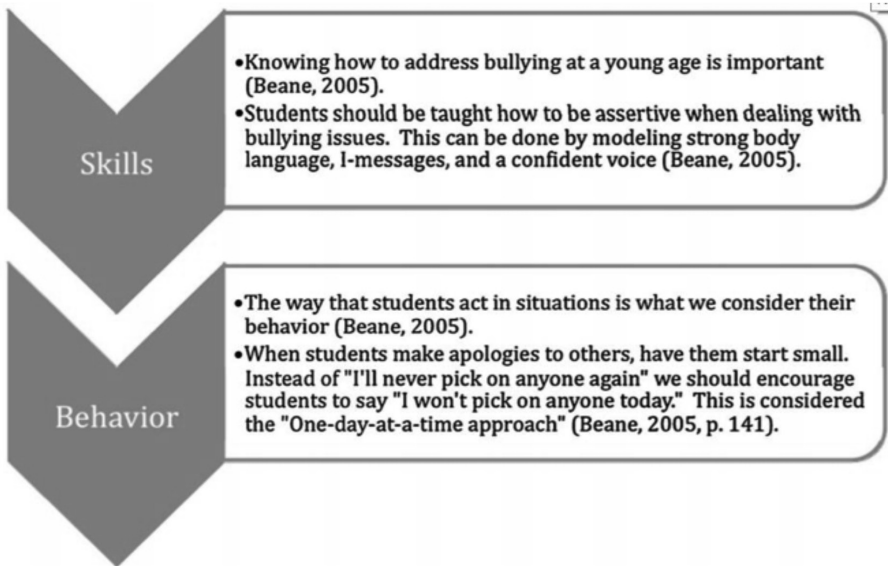


Figure 3: Educating young children about bullying (Levine & Tamburrino, 2014)

For a correct approach to respecting the dignity of the child, multiple actions are needed. Three main action levels have been delimited, as follows:

- ✦ Involvement of the main institutions concerned with stopping bullying.

A combined action needs to involve the three main institutions of a healthy society:

1. family
2. school
3. church

Each of the three institutions has its own sphere of action and can overwhelmingly influence the attitude that the child has towards himself and towards the others. For a natural evolution in this process, the school should have the initiative to attract both the family and the church in specific, meaningful projects.

- ✦ Identify the real causes for creating appropriate strategies to combat bullying.

The three main categories of causes can be:

1. Physical causes. Physical causes can refer to any physical trait that can lead to frustration, isolation, or non-acceptance. These traits can be innate, acquired or simple physical defects that do not in any way incapacitate daily life.
  2. Psycho-social causes. The psycho-social causes include both the sensitivities related to the partial or total inability to perceive, understand and express emotions, to maintain quality relationships or problems related to group integration.
  3. Cultural causes. Cultural causes are the most complex because they are based on different perspectives of interpreting reality. Different philosophies and lifestyles, adherence to minoritarian religions or belonging to a marginalized ethnic group may be involved.
- ✦ Adherence to the three stages of action.

A three-step action scheme is proposed:

1. The child must observe in the environment in which he lives creative ways of showing respect. These manifestations do not have to be sporadic, but to prove a correct integration of this value in both the norms of life and the most common behaviours. In the family, at school

and in the church, these behaviours should be naturally integrated into the daily routine.

2. The child must learn to respect himself. He must learn to gain his autonomy as soon as possible and be able to maintain their physical and intellectual mental integrity.

3. Only after these two steps have been successfully completed can he be able to respect others and recognize and uphold the dignity of his friends as his equals.

These three steps can also be considered as three main elements of a strategy that envisages a combined action that should involve the three main institutions of a healthy society: the family, the school and the church. Correct collaboration between the three institutions cannot be possible without a thorough knowledge of the causes underlying the analysed phenomenon. Considering the connections between the three levels of action, this plan was called the „3x3 Model for upholding child dignity in primary school” (Figure 4).

## Conclusions

The creation of “3x3 Model for upholding child dignity in primary school” was based on the need to implement multi-level strategies for greater efficiency. Each level of action has multiple connections with the others, requiring a stratified strategy and combined attention, so as not to lose the overall image.

Future work should focus on analysing this model for refinement through practical application. Only applying this model in practice will be able to prove its value. It is also necessary to return with practical ideas for applying this model, customized for each type of situation observed in practice.

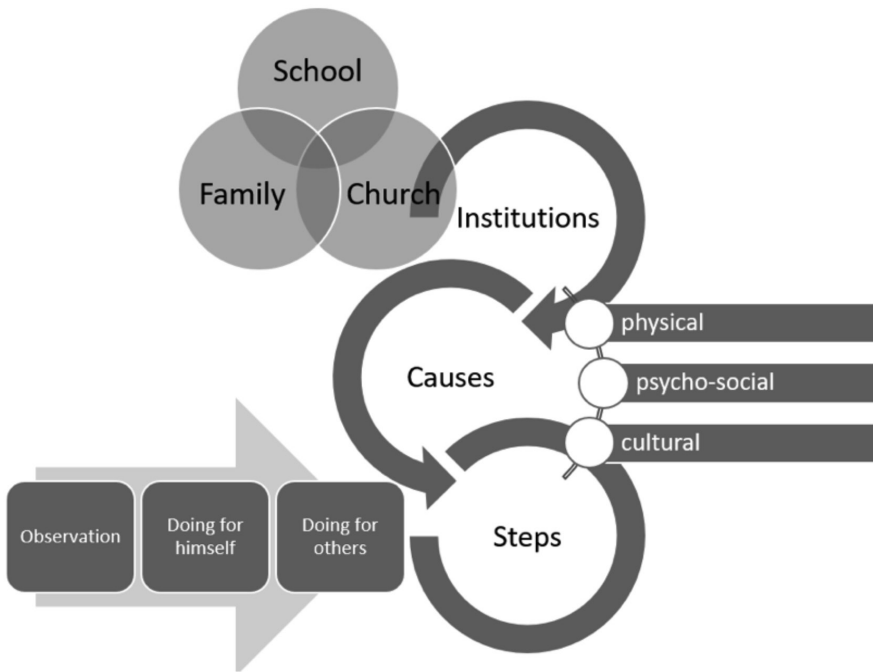


Figure 4. Spătăreanu's 3x3 Model for upholding child dignity in primary school

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