It grows deep and becomes a tradition
How Gambian teachers interpret and deal with the concept of bullying

Author: Elin Lind
Johanna Aminezghi
Supervisor: Kajsa Higgins
Examiner: Birgitta E. Gustafsson
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Abstract

Title: It grows deep and becomes a tradition - How Gambian teachers interpret and deal with the concept of bullying

Authors: Elin Lind and Johanna Aminezghi

The aim of this study is to create an increased intercultural understanding by studying how the Gambian teachers interpret and handle situations that from a Swedish perspective could be called bullying. A qualitative method have been used were the materials have been gathered through unstructured observations and interviewes with teachers in the Gambia as well as formalized conversations with other school staff. The data has been collected in different schools in the Gambia during the winter of 2013. Four different theories are used to analyse the result. These are the sociocultural perspective, cultural framework, the postcolonial perspective and the frame factor theory. The result shows that the Gambian teachers have a hard time to describe and define the term bullying. They interpret the concept bullying as corporal punishment and that it is a question about abusive behaviour from an adult towards a child. There is also one teacher that speaks about bullying as something that can occur between pupils as well, but this is a rare opinion. It is obvious that the overloaded classrooms are a big obstacle for the Gambian teachers when it comes to create a positive learning experience were the pupils show mutal respect for each other. There is a risk that teachers are missing a lot of things that are going on behind their backs. There are no written documents on how to work with or prevent bullying. There is one document about corporal punishment and it does only exist in governmental schools.

Keywords
bullying, corporal punishment, discipline, the Gambia, collectivistic, individualistic
Thanks

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1 Introduction / Background

1.1 Introduction

We are two Swedish students who study to become teachers in art, music and drama and we are both very interested in intercultural relations. For this reason we wanted to write this study in the Gambia in West Africa and got the opportunity to do a Minor Field Study in this country. In the end of October 2013 we made our field study and visited several schools in order to find answers to different questions corresponding to our aim.

The Swedish culture is different from the Gambian culture in many ways. The hierarchies within the societies look different as well as values and how we view the children. Sweden is a high income country whilst the Gambia is a low income country and this also affects the cultures in different ways. Even though the Swedish culture and the Gambian culture differ, we found it important to challenge ourselves and do a study in a different country to enhance our intercultural knowledge. Since a majority of newly arrived refugees having immigrated to Sweden in the past years with roots in various cultures we know that we, as teachers in the Swedish schools have to be open to meet children from families with different ideas, lifestyles and social values. The curriculum for the preschools states the following:

The internationalisation of Swedish society imposes high demands on the ability of people to live with and understand values inherent in cultural diversity. The preschool is a social and cultural meeting place, which can reinforce this and prepare children for life in an increasingly internationalised community. Awareness of their own cultural heritage and participating in the culture of others should contribute to children’s ability to understand and empathise with the circumstances and values of others. The preschool can help to ensure that children from national minorities and children with a foreign background recive support in developing a multicultural sense of identity (Skolverket 1998, revised 2010:5).

During the autumn semester 2011 we went on an educational trip to the Gambia to do our internship for five weeks. During this time we took notice of incidents that from our cultural understanding can be interpreted as a form of bullying. This expression can, from a Swedish perspective, be defined as follows:

Bullying is when one or more people repeatedly during a period of time causes harm or discomfort to another individual. Bullying is caused because of a certain imbalance in a relationship, the one who is getting bullied have difficulties to defend himself from the bully. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2014. Our own translation)

None of the Gambian teachers being present during the ongoing incidents showed any visible reaction during our observations. This made us think about how teachers in a different cultural context deal with bullying. Is it a cultural phenomenon that does not occure in the Gambian schools? Do the Gambian teachers interpret conflicts and incidents as bullying in the same way as we do in the Swedish schoolsystem? Do the teachers have methods for preventing bullying in the schools?
1.2 The Gambia

*In this chapter we will give a presentation of the Gambia, economy, statistics, government and schools. We find it important to have a background of the country when taking part of this study to fully understand its content.*

The Gambia is a republic in West Africa with strong presidential power that covers an area of 11,300 km². The capital is Banjul and the population of the country is 1.9 million. The current president, Yahya Jammeh, is the head of the state, got elected in 1996 and has been the president since then. The Gambia is a former English colony and achieved its independence in 1965 and because of this background English became the official language in The Gambia. However, the local languages, such as mandika, wolof, fulla and jola, are also strong. 90% of the population are muslims and the other 10% are divided between Christians and nature religions (Nationalencyklopedin, 2014).

The Gambia is classified as a low income country and the economy is mostly based on the agriculture. Peanuts and peanut products dominate the exports from the country. Tourism is an important source of income and creates a lot of job opportunities. Another important source of income is coming from Gambians working abroad sending money back to their families in the Gambia. The unemployment among the citizens is very high, approximately every fifth Gambian has a formal employment. The rest of the working Gambians are occupied within the so called "black sector" of the economy. This means that they are not paying taxes on the money they are gaining from their work (Landguiden, 2014). The foreign aid is a big part of the Gambias economic sector and the country is receiving foreign aid from several countries spread all over the world (AidData, 2014).

In the Gambia, Herlitz (2007) reminds that the focus is on the success and wellbeing of the group rather than on the success of the individual. Society will look at you based on who you are and who you know rather then your achievements and for this reason a lot of effort is put into social relations (Herliz, 2007). It is usual that extended family lives together since they need to take care of each other. Depending on what religion a man belongs to he can marry more than one wife. A man is aloud to marry up to four wifes, they all usually live under the same roof with their children and sometimes the mans siblings are also living in the compound (Informant, 2013). We will give more definition of different cultures in chapter 3.2

A big part of the schools in the Gambia are private. The private schools have higher school fees then the governmental schools and they depend on on school fees to survive. The private schools have to pay all of their teachers salaries whilst in the governmental schools the government helps with half of the salaries. Most of the private schools are also financed by rich people or foundations from different countries. The Gambian classrooms that we visited contained of 40 to 60 children in each class and about half of them being female. The class sizes are bigger in the governmental schools then in the
private schools. Each class is lead by one teacher only (Informant, 2013). According to a survey being done in 2008 each teacher had 34 pupils in each class, so in the past six years the class size has increased (Landguiden, 2014).

Even if The Gambia has compulsory basic education you still have to pay school fees in a lot of schools and therefor only seven out of ten children were attending the basic education in 2010 (Nationalencyklopedin, 2014). Out of those seven there is about three out of four pupils that completes their basic education (Landguiden, 2014). In 1998 the president of The Gambia ordered termination of school fees for the first six years in school but it is still not fully achieved. The school fees has been troublesome for Gambian girls in particular. Since many families can not afford to send all of their children to school and there is not any tradition of educating girls in the country the families were more likely to send their boys to school. Today however the gap is almost closed mostly because of the Girls-Friendly School Initiative. This initiative was to educate the population in why it is important to send the girls to school, make the school environment safer for girls by for example try to reduce the sexual harassment in schools but most of all to create a fund to finance the girls schooling. Today a lot of Gambian school girls get their school fees paid with money from this fund. The goal is now to redo this project and find ways to also get the out-of-school boys to go through the basic education (Chabbot, 2009).

1.3 The purpose of our study
The aim is to create an increased intercultural understanding by studying how the Gambian teachers interpret and handle situations that from a Swedish perspective could be called bullying. Furthermore how do teachers act and work in order to prevent situations like bullying and are there any documents or guidelines that can help teachers in their work?

1.4 Questions and issue
- How do the interviewed teachers interpret the concept bullying?
- How do the interviewed teachers express that they deal with the bullying situations?
- Do guidelines/documents concerning how to behave in a bullying situation exist and in what way are these documents known to the interviewed teachers?
2 Previous research

In this part we will present previous research on bullying. This research is international and the empirics is gathered in countries such as England, Japan, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands. We are aware that the research that we are referring to have been implemented in Europe or countries with a high standard of living. We have tried, but have not been able to find any research implemented in any African country or other parts of the world.

Bullying is a systematic, repetitious abuse of power that is based on a desire to hurt and takes the form of physical, verbal, or relational aggression. Bullying behaviour can occur in any human situation where power relationships exist and those with power have opportunities to abuse it (Nesdale and Naito, 2005:537).

Whether bullying occurs is determined by multiple factors. Nesdale and Naito (2005) mentions the following factors: characteristics of the ones who bullies, the nature of the institutional framework and peer influence. Of the last mentioned factor, peer influence is a growing area of interest and an increasing amount of research has begun to view at least some bullying as the result of group processes. There are six different participant roles taken by individual children in the bullying process. They are: victim, bully, reinforcer of the bully, assistant to the bully, defender of the victim and outsider. This study took place in Japan and Australia. There was 157 participants from Griffith University and 158 participants from Seiwa University, Soai University and Konan Women’s University in Japan who was asked to answer a questionnaire about collectivism and individualism and bullying. The answeres were measured on a scale ranging from one (strongly agree) to five (strongly disagree). The students participated in groups ranging from 5 to 60 people, they where not allowed to speak to one and other while they where answering the questionnaire. (Nesdale and Naito, 2005).

An English, quantitative, study about bullying show that while a majority of the children enjoy school, a minority find it stressful and frightening. This study shows that five to ten percent of nine to eleven year old pupils do not feel safe in school because they are being or have been bullied by their peers. It is well documented that bullying between peers have connections to several types of mental ill-health, for example, depression, anxiety, low self esteem and loneliness. There are also connections between bullying within peer groups and on how well the victims concentrate in the classrooms. Befing a victim of bullying moves the focus of the child from what is tought in the classroom to how to survive in the playground. Not being able to concentrate during class can be damaging for the child. It will effect how well they pay attention and what they actually learn academically. This means that it is not just the bullying it self that inflicts pain in the pupil, but the notion that he or she is not keeping up in school can increase the pressure that the child is already under (Boulton, Woodmansey, Williams, Spells, Nicholas, laxton, Holman, and Duke, (2011).
2.1 Teachers awareness

A quantitative research made in the United States show that children never having been involved in bullying are feeling a lot better than bullies and bully victims. Children not been involved in bullying situations have in most cases got a feeling that there is always an adult to talk to, something most of the bullies and bully victims do not experience (Birchmeier, 2009). Bullies and victims are more likely to experience mental ill-health such as depression later on in life. However an American research report shows that strong family support can decrease the chance of depression in these two groups. When there is no existing family support a good support from one teacher can have good influence which shows the importance of teachers awareness when it comes to bullying (Conners Burrow, Johnsson, Whireside-Mansell, Mc Kelvey and Gargus, 2009).

A quantitative research being made in the province of Ontario, Canada show that, even though teachers are very important in solving bullying situations, they feel insecure and that they do not have enough knowledge about how to address the problem (Blaine-Arcaro, Smith, Cunningham, Vaillancourt and Rimas, 2012). This research also show that the teachers are stepping in in certain situations and are staying out of it in others. The teachers tend to break in when it is obvious that the victim is feeling very bad and the harassments are happening frequently. They also tend to intervene when they know that the victim has not done anything to anger the bully. If the situations are not looking like mentioned the teachers try to stay out of the arguments. The teachers are also more likely to step in when physical abuse are being performed rather than verbal abuse. This is a problem since verbal abuse can cause more mental ill-health later on in life then physical abuse (Blaine-Arcaro, Smith, Cunningham, Vaillancourt and Rimas, 2012).

A Dutch, quantitative study shows that even if teachers are trying to put an end to bullying it does rarely work. In most cases where teachers have intervened nothing have changed or the situation have changed for the worse. The study also mentions that only half of the bullied children have talked to a teacher about what is happening or what they are going through. The teachers need more education on the field in order to address the situations successfully and to be able to create an environment where the pupils feel comfortable about talking with the teachers when it concerns emotional subjects. This does not only apply to teachers but to parents as well. Most of the parents having a bullying child did not talk to their child about his or her actions. They mostly are either unaware of the child's behaviour or (in many of the cases) ignorant on to how to succesfully address the situation. However it is important for children to know that the bullying behaviour is not accepted neither in school nor at home (Fekkes, Pijpers and Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005).

According to Birchmeier, who has written a report about the effects of parent and teacher support in bullying situations, most research show that teachers as well as parents are in need of more education in this field. In countries were anti-bullying campaigns have been tried out the bullying have decreased and this has created a more positive social climate at the schools (Birchmeier, 2009).
3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter we present this studies theoretical framework consisting of the sociocultural perspective, cultural framework and the Frame factor theory. We have chosen these theories as a framework for our study since they discuss what we are writing about. The theories describe similar ideas in different angles.

3.1 The sociocultural perspective

The human learning and cultural educational settings do not look the same in every part of the planet. It occurs on an individual level as well as a collective level and it is affected by the society in which the learning is taking place. The content of the learning and its value also varies with time, society and culture. This means that learning has nothing to do with the human biology but is placed outside of our bodies. For example, our human bodies and minds have not changed a lot over the years, our knowledge, however, have grown tremendously. “Our knowledges and abilities comes from the realisations and strategies that, through history, has been built in to a society and we become part of them through interaction with other people” (Säljö, 2010:21).

The sociocultural perspective is about this interaction. Learning is not what is written in a book or in a lesson plan. The learning is what happens when communication occurs, when a reader processes what is written in a book or when students discuss the content of a lesson. We do not only communicate with each other, communication can also occur in the own mind. To make the learning process easier the human being constantly creates tools that can be both linguistic or materialistic. The metric system is an example of such a tool. These tools helps when we communicate with each other and it helps us to avoid misunderstandings. However the tools are always created and affected by the societies in which they take place and therefore they vary between countries and cultures (Lundgren and Säljö, 2012).

Culture is to society what memory is to individuals. In other words, culture includes traditions that tell “what has worked” in the past. It also encompasses the way people have learned to look at their environment and themselves, and their unstated assumptions about the way the world is and the way people should act. (Triandis, 1994:1)

Our societies and cultures have been developed over time through social interaction. We pass on ideas, behaviors and actions that have worked over time and we forget about those who have not and through this cultural traditions have been created. Many ideas and traditions go further back than we can count and they are very hard to change since there must have been a reason to pass them on (Triandis, 1994).
3.2 Cultural framework
All societies nurture their children with the intention to make them grow in to their society and culture. The goal is to teach them different codes and rules of the society in order for the children to lead an easy life and be as successful as possible in the society in which they grow up (Herlitz, 2007).

The majority of the world’s population are born into cultures where you are first and foremost looked up on as a part of a group. The children in these cultures are normally born into a large extended family with many children and relatives with which they have a close relationship (Hofstede, 2011). This type of family offers safety and support and for the individual this means that family always comes first. Your place in the society is based on which family you are born in to and you are classified based on who you are and what your name is. Jobs go to relatives and in the classroom students that have personal bonds to the teacher will be preferred. For this reason people in these types of cultures put a lot of effort into social relations and it is important to preserve the harmony in the group (Herlitz, 2007). When it comes to education, the aim in a culture such as mentioned is to learn how to do different things to be able to take part of the social life. The point is to pass on traditions to the children and learning is looked upon as something you do once when you are young. These cultures are sometimes defined as collectivistic cultures were the collective is more important than the individual (Hofstede, 2011).

A minority of the world’s population is according to Hofstede (2011) born into cultures where you are looked up on as an individual. The families in these cultures are normally small with few children and extended family members are rarely very close. The aim for the children is to be independent and stand on their own feet. When this goal is reached you are expected to move out of the family and it might be looked up on as strange if a grown man or woman is still living with his or her parents (Hofstede, 2011). In a culture like this the aim with education is to learn how to learn. People in this culture learn through their whole lives and the purpose is to understand how to act in unexpected situations to be able to communicate and interact with other individuals (Hofstede, 2011). These types of cultures can sometimes be defined as individualistic where the individual is more important than the collective (Herlitz, 2007).

It is very rare to find a society that is purely collectivistic or individualistic since it is always a mix between the two. However, most societies tend to lean to either one or the other and some societies more than others. According to Herlitz (2007) America is a society that leans very far towards an individualistic society and most of the African countries leans more to the collectivistic.

3.3 The frame factor theory
In every school there are frames created by political, economical and administrative judgements. Consequences of these decisions can be a number of children in the
classroom, the estetics of the school, length of schooldays, number of teachers in the school to mention some (Linde, 1993).

It is within the frames the learning process takes place and they are not the cause for a certain result but they will either create or not create different options (Lundgren, 1999). For example, if the teacher has 20 pupils in the class and wants to do a drama exercise suited for five children it might be an idea to devide the children into smaller groups. This means that the teacher has changed the frames to make that kind of lesson possible.

There are two types of frame factors, internal and external. Internal factors are the social structures within the group or class while the curriculum is an example of an external factor. In short the frame factor theory means that the teacher in all situations have to consider the fact that there are frames that you have to relate to. The frames will not affect the result but they will affect the way the teacher choose to work and in order to be able to work in different ways the teacher or the society first have to change the frames (Lundgren, 1999).

4 Method

In order to choose between a quantitative and a qualitative method we had to look at the main differences between the two. Fejnes and Thornberg (2009) describes a quantitative method as a research were statistic data is collected and analysed. The main goal with the method is to explain a phenomenon. A qualitative method on the other hand is a research where the data is gathered through interviews and observations for example. This type of data has to be analysed in a different way then statistics and the main goal with this method is to understand a phenomenon. For this reason we have chosen to use a qualitative method during this study in order to be able to answer our questions of issue.

To use interviews instead of for example a questionnaire has its pros and cons. In an interview the knowledge is created in the interaction between the one who is doing the interview and the one who is being interviewed. In this situation the interviewer will not just simply get the answers from the interviewee but has also got a chance to listen to the tone of the voice, look at the body language, ask additional questions and be part of the conversation. Doing an interview is not easy. To be able to really get essential information it is crucial to consider some advices. The interviewer needs to be able to pick up on the answers and create new questions out of them and invite the interviewee to explain if something is unclear. The goal is not to just ask questions and get straight answers but to ask questions that are as open as possible in order to create a feeling of dialogue (Kvale, 2009).

We also chose to use observations in this study. We know that bullying is a sensitive subject to talk about and this means that an interview might not always be the best option because the interviewee might not feel comfortable to completely speak his or
her mind. We believed that we might find out more by combining interviews with observations. Observational studies are coloured by naturalism. This means that when doing observations you are studying something in its natural environment rather than making an experiment. While doing an observation you can choose different approaches. One approach is to be a part of the group that you are studying and take fieldnotes of what is going on. The other approach is more structured. Here you already know what you are looking for and you are using an observational scheme to take notes of what is happening. There is also an option between being a part of the group that is being observed or watching the group that is being observed. Watching the group means that the group members will be aware that they are being observed which might affect their behaviour (Tjora, 2012). With this in mind we have chosen to take part in the classrooms and take fieldnotes. We will also try to take part in the groups by acting as teachers at some lessons. During the observations it is helpful to take notes. This is necessary to be able to capture the experience you are going through. Taking notes can have a negative effect on the ones who are being observed because they might act in a way that they otherwise would not have. Therefore it is important to reflect on the way the notes are being taken, so that the participants are not feeling judged (Tjora, 2012).

4.1 Method criticism
Kvale (2009) writes about the importance of being attentive as an interviewer and pick up on the answers that are given. This however is a hard task as a “research beginner” and often this becomes easier as time goes since you get more comfortable with the situation and might find it easier to create a dialogue. Interviews can also be misleading if the interviewee are feeling judged in any way. That can mean that the person being interviewed is not feeling comfortable to speak his or her mind. Language insecurity and the fact that we are using English as a medium can also be an obstacle. The Gambians as well as Swedes have their own dialect just like any other English speaking country and differences in dialect can sometimes cause misunderstanding.

4.1.1 To encounter the unfamiliar
The discussion in this section of the chapter gives us a perspective to interpret our taken-for-grantedness and prejudices when it comes to our study of the Gambian school culture.

Through other peoples thoughts your own opinions about subjects deepens and changes, other peoples thoughts give you a different perspective on things you thought you already knew about. In almost every meeting with other people we learn something new and sometimes our ideas of our selves is put at risk (Gustafsson, 2008). The idea you have of yourself and your own world image is created and recreated when encountered with other peoples world image. It can be experienced as a challenge of your own world image. So what happens when two world images meet? Either the things you believe in is strengthened or the things you have thought been true is overthrown.
How a person acts depends on what that individual truly believes in, even if it is expressed verbally or non-verbally. New information that we need to process is according to Gustafsson (2008) either rejected, reduced or changed from a closed thought system or stowed and defined so it will fit your view on the world. If your thought system is closed you will look at the world as if it is threatening to you. But if you have a more open thought system you can stand up against what is threatening your world image. The human being is not only one or the other, but a mixture of both closed- and open minded.

According to the postcolonial perspective the language of the western society is built up by dichotomies such as white/black, male/female and so on. It is the differences that creates the meaning. This means that Europeans are still expressing themselves in a similar way that they did during the colonialism when it was belived that western ideas were superior to eastern ideas. This is based on two factors, eurocentrism and ethnocentrism. Eurocentrism means that it is the birthright of Europeans to be superior to other cultures. Ethnocentrism means that people are looking at and judging other cultures based on what they know from their own culture. This is something that happens unconsciously since it is inheritted from previous generations (Tepic and Wickström, 2009).

According to the post colonial perspective we as Europeans are also representing ideas about being more educated and having more hierarchical power then the persons that are going to be interviewed (Tepic and Wickström, 2009). This can also make the interviewing situation difficult since the interviewees might feel that he or she is in a inferior position. With this in mind there is a risk that the final study will be angled an presented from our point of view. This is always a risk in a qualitative study but it is an even greater risk in this study since we are interviewing teachers from a culture that differs a lot from our own. Therfore we find it important to reflect on the way we are writing but also on how we are presenting our questions to the interviewees. We do not want sound judgmental and do not want to put the interviewees in any situations were they can feel inferior in any way.

4.2 Credibility
During our study we have communicated with as open inquiries as possible, not asked leading questions and we have communicated around the chosen subject.

We are very much aware of the language barrier and for that reason the use of dictafon while conducting the interviews has been of great support. Because of the recordings we have been able to write down the exact answers word by word. To be able to listen to the interviewees many times has helped us a lot to avoid misunderstanding.

During our interviewees we have tried our best not to show our emotions about things that the interviewees have been talking about. “Being objective is impossible but you
can always try to avoid to force your own opinions on to the informant. It is the ideas of the informant you want show and try to understand” (Trost, 2010:134. Our own translation). We consider the study to be trustworthy.

4.3 Selection
Before starting with the study we found a mentor in The Gambia with whom we had regular contact through email. He is working as a lecturer at The Gambia College, educating teacher students and is also working with development of the Gambian school system with focus on how to successfully teach younger children. He has been to Sweden and Linneaus University several times and he has also been visited by many Swedish teachers and teacher trainees.

When making our selection we were using a convenience sample. This means that we were choosing informants as we went along (Trost, 2010). The reason for this was that it was impossible to find all the informants before arriving in the country. At first we decided on the number of schools we wanted to visit and decided on two private schools and two governmental schools. In every school we wanted to interview two teachers and we wanted them to vary in age and sex. We wanted to make a strategic selection that included variation between the informants but we did not want the variation to be extreme (Trost, 2010). Once we had made our decisions our mentor helped us to contact three of the schools before we arrived in the country and having arrived in the country he guided us to the different schools and introduced us to the different principals. Once we were at the schools the principles helped us find teachers that were interested in participating in the study. The last school we got in contact with through an old friend who teaches at the school. We met him a couple of years ago through an exchange between The Gambia College and the Linneaus University. In the end we got to interview seven teachers at four different schools, three men and four women. We also interviewed some other school staff, these interviews were not planned ahead. But when we met people who were interested and who we found would benefit to the study we took the chance and conducted interviewes with them as well.

4.4 Implementation
During our first two weeks in The Gambia we mostly visited The Gambia College in order to investigate if the Department of Education are educating the students in the topic. During this time we also wrote the questions for the upcoming interviews. Kvale (2009) writes about the importance to reflect over the situation that the interviewed is put into and the stress it brings. With this in mind we asked our Gambian mentor to read the interview guide to make it possible for him to give us feedback before we started doing our interviews. Sometimes when you write you do not fully understand what you have written until someone else reflects upon what you have been writing. Our mentor believed that we were dealing with a sensitive subject and we did not want hurt anybody by being to quick with the construction of questions.
After this we started with our school visits observing teachers and the classes he or she was teaching for two or three days before making the interview. During these observations we were not using an observational scheme but we observed what was going on in the classrooms and took fieldnotes when we saw things that could relate to our chosen subject.

We made semistructured interviewees and were using an interview guide with questions that we could use to start of the interviews. The goal however, was to let the answers decide the direction of the conversation (Hedin, 1996 rev. 2011). The interviews took about five to fifteen minutes and took place in classrooms and staffrooms. We asked the interviewees were they thought would be a good place to conduct the interview in order for them to choose a place were they could feel comfortable. We chose to use a dictaphone during the interviews since it helps in order to be able to use direct quotes from the interviewees (Tjora, 2012). After the interviews were conducted we transcribed all of them in to our computer. We also went through our fieldnotes and related them to the material from the interviews.

4.5 Ethic consideration

From an ethic point of view it is important to reflect over the situation the interviewed is put into. To take part in an interview can mean an amount of stress over different aspects. What kind of questions will I get? And how about the confidentiality (Kvale, 2009)?

It was important for us to reflect over hierarchy between us and the people that we were going to interview. The interviewer always has power over the questions that are addressed to the informants. For us coming from a western country to interview teachers in an African country it was important to have in mind that the teachers might feel uncomfortable during the interviews and observations. With this in mind we were trying our best to be as open, interested and non stereotype as possible in order to create a mutual learning experience both for us and for the teachers involved.

We also arrived at the schools in company with our mentor who is looked upon with great respect in The Gambia. Parts of his work include visiting schools and evaluating teacher trainees. Therefor it was important for us to explain to the school staff that we were not there to evaluate or judge their work but discuss and learn from what they are doing.

According to Vetenskapsrådets guiedlines we have explained to all paticipants of this study that they will be anonymous and that all the information gathered will be used only for our degree project. We have also made them aware of that this study is voluntary and that they are participating by their own choise (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).
5 Results

In this chapter we present the results of our interviews and observations. We have divided the result into six different topics which are Definition of bullying, Class size, Environment, How teachers discipline children, Bullying and corporal punishment and Documents.

5.1 Definition of bullying

The majority of the teachers define the word bullying as something that goes from a superior individual to an inferior individual. Mostly from a teacher to a student or sometimes from an older to a younger student.

Most of the teachers interpret that bullying can be defined as hitting a child. Not all teachers define bullying as only hitting. They also say that harassing, threatening and only giving a student negative attention is a form of bullying. One of the interviewed teachers also expresses neglect as a form of bullying, “You do not take care of the child. If they have a problem and come to oy, you just send him or her away”.

One of the teachers define bullying as an act of power to someone who is inferior, not only from teacher to pupil but between the pupils. The teacher said that it did not only have to be physical but it could be mental torture as well. “You know, I would consider it as bullying even through words. Naming people could be an act of bullying to me”.

5.2 Class size

Two of the interviewed teachers express that the big classes creates a problematic situation and they think that the big population in the classrooms is the worst thing about working as a teacher. One teacher expresses that “If I need to give a standard assessment to a class of like 60 or more, it becomes difficult”. Both of these two teachers are working in governmental schools. In the governmental schools the student population is forcing the schools to teach the pupils in shifts. Half of the pupils have classes from morning until lunch and half of them from lunch until the evening. This means that some teachers are working from 7 am to 7 pm. A teacher working with the teacher trainee program at The Gambia College expresses that the large population in the classrooms makes it impossible to discipline the pupils without corporal punishment. He is questioning how the teachers are going to attend to the teaching whilst having to spend time explaining what is right and wrong to each child. During our observations we noticed that the teachers are missing a lot of things that are going on between the pupils in the classroom - such as hitting, pushing, teasing and name calling.
5.3 Environment

In two of the schools we were able to make observations during breaktime, at one private school and at one governmental school. In the private school the teachers are spending the break outside on the schoolyard. They have a big table with benches around where all the teachers are sitting and talking to each other. The children are left to independently play on their own. If conflicts between the children occur they mostly fight about it and sometimes come to the teachers to report. The teachers either chose not to care since they express that the problem is too small or they chose to perform corporal punishment. One young boy had to sit in the sun, leaning on his knees with his arms stretched up in to the air for about ten minutes because he “opened his big mouth”.

In the governmental school the teachers are also outside during breaktime. Some of them are sitting in the shade, some of them are walking around and some are playing volleyball with the children. We could see that the teachers that were walking around sometimes helped the children to solve conflicts.

English is the medium of instructions used in all of the schools. The rules about whether you are allowed to speak local languages during the breaks vary from school to school. In one school the children are allowed to speak local languages during the breaktime and they have even chosen to explain to the youngest children in both English and Mandinka. In another school neither the children nor the teachers are permitted to use local languages after entering the school gates. If a child speaks a local language it is likely that he or she will be corrected and disciplined by a teacher.

5.4 How teachers discipline children

Almost all the interviewed teachers, when they were asked to tell us about bullying and how they interpret the concept bullying, described how they used different ways of disciplining their pupils. Mostly they try to handle the situations without involving parents or anyone else outside the school. If this does not work they admit to tell us that they phone the students parents to find a solution. If the students are younger they call the parents almost immediately so that they can come to the school and talk to their child about the situation that have occurred.

Some teachers reprimand their students by telling them that their actions are wrong and instead of doing the same thing another time they should do the right thing. The teachers express that it is important to keep calm and integrate with the pupils instead of physically punish them. Sometimes, if the situation gets too complicated for the teacher to handle, they send the children to the principal. At one school the teachers brought up the situations at the weekly assembly so the other students would be discouraged not to do the same acts.
One teacher at a private school dealt with a boy who was disturbing during a test by letting him stand up by the bench while he was writing, the rest of the class was still sitting down. The boy stood up for about five minutes. At the same school another teacher dealt with a similar situation but this time the child involved was disturbing the class by singing during the test. The teacher told the child that even if we are happy and want to sing we need to be silent during a test so that we do not disturb our friends. This teacher expressed that “I do not beat the children. I give them their right. I give them all that they need and the support they need from me. That I give them”. The teacher who performed corporal punishment are about ten years older then the teacher who chose to only talk to the pupil.

5.5 Bullying and corporal punishment

The majority of the teachers are expressing uncertainty about the difference between bullying and corporal punishment and and the two concepts are sometimes mixed up with each other. They also express that bullying is about an adult disciplining a child. However, one of the interviewed teachers are defining bullying as something than can occur between pupils as well.

A teacher talks about and mentions bullying and she says that “you grow with it. It grows deep and it becomes a tradition”. With this she means that it is hard to prevent a child from abusing younger children once the child has done it a few times. She expresses that in order to make the children behave the teachers has to talk to the parents and advice them to discipline their children. The children need to learn at home so that they will be “afraid to tell lies”.

Some of the interviewed teachers express that the problem with ending the practice of bullying and corporal punishment is that it goes back in time and it is hard to change something that has been practiced for generations. One of the teachers says that “in Africa you raise the children by stick and that a lot of Gambians believe that you need to hit the children in order to make them listen and do what they are told.” Even though they are using the term bullying they are actually talking about corporal punishment.

The corporal punishment that we could see during our visit were affecting just a few pupils and often it was the same pupil over and over again. In these situations were even insulting words and outbursts used.

5.6 Documents

All the teachers working in private schools tell us that they do not have to consider any documents that deal with how to work with bullying. In the governmental schools all of the interviewed teachers declare that there is a document in the principal’s office and it is about how to discipline the children in a way that is proper and in line with the law. One teacher says like this.
Yes, we have those documents. And then, if you are given the documents you have to go through them and know the rules that are there. They say that you should not beat the child or you should not do this to the child. So all these rules are there and you just put it together and then you go take it in case.

The schools having teachers being aware of the documents dealing with rules around bullying had a principal that was knowledgeable in those issues. The principals at the other schools did not talk about bullying and corporal punishment at all.

5.7 Summary
The majority of the teachers defines bullying as an hurtful act from an adult to a child, most of the time from a teacher to a pupil. Their interpretation of bullying is sometimes mixed up with corporal punishment – two concepts that are given the same meaning. The class sizes are mentioned as one of the reasons why it is hard to end the practice of bullying which they interpret as corporal punishment. Tradition is also mentioned as a big reason why it is still being used. Few teachers express that physical punishments are used in the schools, however it is very common and it is most of the time affecting the same children. In one of the schools the teachers interacted with the children during breaktime and in one of the schools the teachers mostly interacted with each other. There are no existing documents about bullying. Less then half of the interviewed teachers know about or have read the documents about corporal punishment and all of them are working at governmental schools were the principal is interested and knowledgeable in the subject.

6 Analysis
6.1 Bullying as corporal punishment
It is obvious to us that the interviewed teachers are very insecure in how to interpret and explain the meaning of the term bullying. In almost all the cases the teachers explain and discuss the concept corporal punishment instead of bullying and in the teachers interpretation it is common that these concepts are given the same meaning.

The teachers articulate and we can also notice that there is an obvious hierarchy between the teacher and the pupils. The way they sometimes bully the children and use corporal punishment is an important tool to keep the power relation between the teacher and the student intact. It is clear for us that the teachers believe that they loose their power towards the student and that teaching will be impossible if “this tool” is abolished. According to the sociocultural perspective human beeings develop different tools in order to make it easier for us to interact. These tools are passed on through generations and can be very hard to change (Triandis, 1994). Bullying and corporal
punishment can be considered as such a tool in Gambian schools. It is a way of teaching that have been used for a very long time period.

However it is evident to us that corporal punishment is not only used in this way. Our results show that many teachers are performing corporal punishment in a way that is very similar to bullying and they are acting out frustrations against certain pupils who are not performing as the rest of the class. Our interpretation from the observations that we made shows that some teachers do not hide that they do not seem to like some of the children. Herlitz (2007) means that in collectivistic societies you, as a teacher, is expected to favourise pupils with whom you have a personal bond.

Based on our results we interpret that most of the teachers perceive that the problem with corporal punishment has to do with strong cultural traditions. Their way of talking about disciplining children show that they are part themselves of these traditions. According to Herlitz (2007) people who have grown up in collectivistic cultures do not feel comfortable about going against the groups wishes. It seems hard for them to stand by their own opinion when the main group is acting in a different way.

6.2 Class size

It is evident to us that the teachers feel that the number of pupils in each class is a problem that affects the teaching and the disciplining of the children. The goal from the Gambian goverment is that all children should be able to go to school and therefor the amount of pupils in the governmental schools are extremely high. The number of children can increase the use of corporal punishment since it is belived that explaining instead of hitting will take time from the lessons. It is also obvious to us that the large class sizes makes it impossible for the teachers to keep track of what is going on between the pupils in the class and it creates an environment were bullying is hard to detect. According to the frame factor theory there are certain frames within the school system that have been created by economy and political decisions, for instance class size is such a frame. The frames are never the cause of a result but they can either create or not create different options (Lundgren, 1999). The big population in the Gambian classrooms is not the cause of bullying and corporal punishment. However it does not create an environment where the teacher can choose between many alternative ways of disciplining.

6.3 Environment

We can observe that all of the interviewed teachers express that they have not heard of any national guidelines or documents dealing with bullying in schools. Only a few of the teachers are aware of the existing document about corporal punishment. In our interpretation it has to do with the principals commitment in these issues. In the school were the principal is aware and show interest in the subject as such the teachers are spending time with the pupils during break time and try to help them to solve conflicts.
We have noticed that not all schools and teachers are bullying the children and performing corporal punishment. There was a big differences between both schools and individual teachers. In our study it is clear that younger teachers are performing corporal punishment less then older teachers and in the present study corporal punishment was practiced more frequently in the private schools. Lundgren and Säljö (2012) explain that we do not only learn from what is written in books but learning takes place within the communication between people. If a teacher has been brought up in a context were it is expected to use corporal punishment as a tool for diciplinig the pupils then it’s a question of the cultural context and its impact on us humans (Säljö,2012).

7 Discussion

7.1 Results

In the analysis we stated that most of the teachers interpreted the concept bullying as corporal punishment. However there was one teacher who interpreted the concept bullying in a way more similar to the European perspective were it is looked upon as an hurtfull act from someone with power towards someone with less power. This particular teacher has taken part in a lot of exchanges with different theachers and teacher trainees from Sweden. He has also traveled to Sweden to teach in a Swedish school. We perceive that an enhanced exchange with teachers from different countries might be helpful in the efforts for preventing various forms of bullying. It can be a very good learning experience to meet someone with a different perspective, both for the Gambian teachers and the teachers that are visiting. According to Gustafsson (2008) your ideas and views of the world are creat and recreated in the meeting with other people and it gives you a different perspective on things you already thought you knew about. Lundgren and Säljö (2012) remind that the learning process takes place within the communication between people.

7.1.1 Documents

There are no existing documents on how to prevent and handle situations of bullying in the Gambia and the documents dealing with corporal punishment are not presented in the private schools. According to our information this might have it might be a question of economy as in the Gambia you have to pay school fees to be able to go to a private school. This means that the private schools have to build up a good reputation in order to get as many pupils as possible. If they eliminate the corporal punishm and change their way of teaching it can affect their reputation and also their number of children. As previously mentioned the human being passes on what works and what does not work to younger generations and by this tradions are created that can be very hard to break (Triandis, 1994). The private schools in the Gambia have been started by missionaries several years ago and therefor they carry many old traditions from schools in both Europe and America. The governmental schools do not have the same traditional “luggage” and therefor it might be easier to change the ways of teaching the children in
the governmental schools then in the private ones. This could also be a reason why none of the teachers at the private schools knew about any documents about corporal punishment.

7.1.2 Discipline
Our belief is that most of the teachers in our study are taking advantage of the power position when they are disciplining the children rather than trying to achieve mutual respect. This means that the children are acting in a proper way in front of the teacher but as soon as the teacher turns his or her back the children do not care anymore. They do not learn to act in a nice and polite way towards others, they just learn to do it when an authority is watching. This is creating a climate where bullying can thrive since it is almost always done behind the backs of the adults.

Even though it is illegal to hit or insult the children in the classroom in the Gambian schools (Appendix B) it is still legal to beat your children at home. It is also legal to beat someone else’s child if you believe that they are acting inappropriately in order to discipline them. Seen from our Swedish perspective we mean that believe that since children are witnessing the violence at home they learn that violence is a reasonable way to solve problems. The teachers have also been brought up this way and are unconsciously passing the traditions on to the next generation. Our results show that older teachers are performing corporal punishment in a greater extent than the younger teachers. The older teachers might have been taking their teaching degree at a time when corporal punishment was still legal in the classrooms. According to the sociocultural perspective people are likely to act in a similar way that they have been brought up (Lundgren and Säljö, 2012).

7.1.3 Class sizes
In the study we state that the class sizes are very large and that most of the people working with education are finding this very difficult. The schools are solving this problem through letting the pupils go to school in different shifts. One of the interviewed teachers that works within this system means that he is working a total of approximately twelve hours every day. Based on our experience it is very hard to be a good pedagogue if you are tired and in such moments it might be easier to solve a problem through various forms of authoritative methods than through dialogue. Lundgren (1999) remind that the frames within the school system can create or not create different options for the teacher.

7.1.4 The language barrier
Since the Gambia is a former English colony the official language is English. According to our observations most of the Gambians are lacking in their skills of the English language. In their home they mostly speak their mother tongue such as mandika, fulla, jola and wolof. As teacher trainees we have been taught that to be able to master a new
language you first have to be able to master your own. To give math lessons in English does not help the Gambian children, instead it creates frustration and misunderstandings, both for the pupils and the teachers. In order to get rid of corporal punishment, which is a goal in the Gambia (Appendix B), it is important to enhance the communication between the teacher and the child and to make it a good experience to communicate with each other. Triandis (1994) remind that it is important for human beings to create tools, or find common ground, in order to make it easier to communicate.

With the fact that not all Gambians fully master the English language, we believe that a lot of insults that we heard in the classrooms might not have been meant in the way that they were expressed. Even though we think that insults like “you ugly animal” can be considered as really horrible, that might not be the case if the person who expresses it as well as the person who hears it does not fully understand its meaning.

7.2 Discussion of method
As mentioned before we have used a qualitative method in this study. Looking back we believe that it was the best method to use as our aim was to create an increased intercultural understanding by studying how the Gambian teachers interpret and handle situations that from a Swedish perspective could be called bullying.

We have found our gathered materials from interviews and observations very helpful in our study. However we do believe that we could have get more out of the interviews if we had been acting in a different way. We could have been more active in the conversations and listening to the tapes afterwords we realized that there were answers that we could have discussed deeper with the interviewees. The reason for this is that none of us hade done these types of interviewes before and we learned and got better through the process. We believe that using a dictaphone might also have played a part. We got the feeling that the interviewees felt a bit anxious and stressed when we explained that we were going ot record the interviewes. This made us feel some stress as well since we did not want to put them in a uncomfortable situation. We also started to pay more attention to body language then the spoken words since that was not going to get caught on tape. During our observations we found it hard to focus on the things that were relevant to the study. Beeing a teacher student it was easy to get caught on how they were teaching rather then looking at discipline for example. It might have helped us if we had used a more strict observational scheme since we already knew what parts we were going to focus on. All in all we are content with the materials that we managed to conduct and we have both developed our interviewing and observational skills during this study.

According to the post colonial perspective we all carry old ideas from the colonial times without even thinking about it. This means that Europeans consider themselves as
superior and more knowledgeable than Africans for example and this might also go the other way around. These beliefs are unconscious (Tepic and Wickström, 2009). It is impossible to overlook the fact that when we arrived at the schools the teachers tend to expect us to come up with pointers and show them how to do their work. It is also impossible to overlook the fact that our personal beliefs about discipline has affected the whole field study. Not that we said anything out loud nor have written it in this study but unconsciously our study is a consequence of our beliefs. We decide what to use from the gathered materials and we decide what to focus on in the analysis and the discussion. All based on our views of the world (Tepic and Wickström, 2009). Even the subject for our study is what we find important and there is a risk that we tend to discuss the study in a way that says that the Gambian school system has not come far enough to focus on bullying yet, but it will get there eventually. This is an evidence that we unconsciously believe that the goal for every country is to be similar to the western society and share the same ideas and values.

According to Gustafsson (2008) we learn something in every meeting with different people and sometimes our ideas and beliefes changes. When we first went to the Gambia we were aware that corporal punishment was implemented in the schools since we had seen it before during school visits on earlier trips to the country. However, we also believed that the teachers were not reflecting on why they were acting in this way. During this study we have had to redefine our opinions since we have learnt that this is not the case. The teachers perform corporal punishment, yes, but their reflections are just as frequent as interesting.

By observing our interviewees for a few days before conducting the interviews we had a chance to look at the teaching situation from the Gambian teachers point of view. For instance we realized that a way of teaching that we take for granted in Sweden may not even be a consideration in a class of 60 pupils.

7.2.1 Consequences of professional relevance

During our field study we have realized that not everybody looks at bullying in the same way and the concept is not defined in the same way by everyone. For some teachers it is not even a useful word. We have also realized that not everybody find bullying as important as we do within the Swedish school system. This field study has made us change our views on intercultural relations. The trip to the Gambia has enhanced our intercultural knowledge and it will help us as teachers in developing good relationship with children and parents from different cultures. Through this study other teachers, who have not got the chance to make a similar journey, can take part of our experiences and have them in mind while working against bullying in Swedish schools. Lpfö (1998 revised 2010) states that it is the preschools obligation to help the children in developing an understanding for their own and other cultures and this field study will help us to thrive towards that goal.
References

Electronical sources


Literature


**Personal communication**

Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. For how long have you been working as a teacher?
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. How many children do you have in the class?
4. How old are the children?
5. How are their schooldays?
6. How long is your workday?
7. What is the best thing about being a teacher?
8. Do you have anything that you don’t really like about being a teacher?
9. If you were to describe the word bullying, how would you describe it?
10. Have you experienced any cases of bullying as a teacher?
11. How did you deal with that situation?
12. Do you have any documents at the school that deals with how to prevent or work with bullying?
Appendix B

In 1999 corporal punishment in schools was abolished in The Gambia. However, corporal punishment still occurs in the schools and for that reason the Ministry for Basic and Secondary Education has put together a booklet that has been handed out to all the schools in the country. The booklet contains alternative ways to discipline schoolchildren and also lists the law against corporal punishment as seen below.

- Cap 15.1 states that firm discipline shall be maintained and enforced in all schools, but all degrading or injurious punishments are prohibited, and no child shall receive corporal punishment of any form whatsoever safe as in hereafter in this regulation provided.
- Cap 15.2 states that corporal punishment may be administered by the teacher in charge only, or by an assistant teacher in the presence of the teacher in charge and under his/her direction and on his/her responsibility.
- Cap 15.3 states that a female pupil/student shall not receive corporal punishment same as in the most exceptional circumstances and then only at the hands of a female teacher and on her responsibility.
- Cap 15.4 states that all cases of corporal punishment shall be recorded in a book provided for that purpose.