

## Chapter five: conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

The results obtained from the discourse analysis applied to the dialogues used in the cartoon *The Fairly OddParents* does present different forms of direct and indirect verbal aggressions. The most common forms of verbal harassments were the direct ones, with 44 phrases or words, and 18 indirect aggressions. *Wanting to hurt others* was the category with more entries of direct verbal aggressions. In the case of indirect forms *insults* were the most common.

The classification used to determine who the perpetrators and victims of verbal aggressions were, showed that for both direct and indirect forms of verbal aggressions, the adults in the show were the ones who committed the vast majority of the assaults. Additionally, it was revealed that males did use more direct forms of verbal aggression than females. From the direct verbal aggressions found between adults, there were 17 phrases or words found from males and only 10 from females. The analysis also showed that females used more indirect forms of verbal harassment. There were 10 phrases or words found from females, whereas from males only 6 phrases were presented.

In addition, part of the contextual factors Potter and Warren (1998) used to code violence in their research were used in this study. The results showed that *The Fairly OddParents* rarely present consequences to verbal aggressions. From the 62 total assaults (direct and indirect), there were only 7 consequences presented and they were shown in a humorous way. This result demonstrates that at least in the episodes that were analyzed, the cartoon is not providing children any hint that leads them to understand that verbal aggressions do have consequences and that victims can be affected seriously. The consequences that were exhibited were not as high as the total amount of aggressions perpetrated and the consequences that were presented were comic. As Potter and Warren

commented, relating humor to violent acts trivializes the aggressions. Therefore, it is less likely that the spectators will consider those actions as something that may result in something harmful for the victim.

For this reason, the content cartoons for children exhibit should be considered as material worth examining since nowadays children are being exposed to television more and more hours. Additionally, children use television as a source of learning and they usually watch it alone which is not an ideal way for them to be watching. According to Dickinson (2000) it would be more appropriate if they watched television with an adult who can help them to assimilate what they are watching. The intervention of adults is considered to be a fundamental aspect to prevent the consequences violence on television might create, particularly the insensitivity children might develop as they are in constant contact with violence on television shows.

Media, especially television and the violent content that is presented on it have been related to bullying and aggressive behaviors among children. Bullying has resulted in severe consequences for the victims mainly, but also for the perpetrators. In Mexico, verbal violence represents the form of violence with the highest average among school children. The findings obtained from the analysis of discourse of *The Fairly OddParents* in Mexican Spanish demonstrated that children in Mexico who watch this cartoon are being exposed to different forms of both direct and indirect verbal violence. The results of this research also showed that in the analyzed episodes of *The Fairly OddParents* no real consequences or punishments to the verbal aggressions were exhibited.

The second part of the study which consisted in discussing one of the episodes with a group of children provided an opportunity to look at the opinions and comments children had about specific moments where a form of violence was exhibited. The answers obtained in the group discussion showed that children do classify certain actions as wrong or bad, but they do

accept or expect violence when it is from or to a villain or when it is a vengeance. The reactions of laughs children had to certain forms of violence proved that the analyzed cartoon did present a humorous form of violence, which might suggest that children are being desensitized to aggressive behaviors. Also, it could be seen that there are certain aspects of language that younger children do not assimilate or understand and that they might not be completely aware of the verbal violence that is being presented, nor of the consequences it may have.

Using Van Dijk's (2009) socio-cognitive approach in this investigation was a useful tool to understand the relationship that may exist among bullying, specifically verbal harassments (social relations), the language that is being presented in a popular cartoon that is intended for children in Mexico (discourse), and the forms of thinking and perceiving violent acts in the cartoon of a particular group of children (cognition). As mentioned previously, the reasons for such aggressive conducts among children might be diverse; nonetheless, television and the content children are exposed to is considered an important factor that may be influencing children's behaviors. If a television show is presenting different forms of verbal aggressions with few and humorous consequences, children's forms of thinking about violent conducts might be shaped and reinforced in a way that children will become used to these types of harassments without understanding the possible consequences of these forms of aggressions. Then, by using television as a source of knowledge, children may put into practice what they have seen on the screen, resulting in aggressive behaviors with their peers.

The findings obtained from the two parts of this research imply that Mexican children are being exposed to verbal forms of violence on television shows, particularly in the cartoon *The Fairly OddParents*. However, it is possible that other cartoons transmitted in Mexico present and/or promote this type of violence as well. Another implication might be that children do not understand or are not completely aware of the content they are being exposed

to in television shows. This might suggest that children could be imitating or using the verbal violent language they watch on television without them being aware of the possible consequences it has. These implications might be one of the reasons why verbal violence has become the most common form of bullying in Mexico. In the following section a suggestion to the case of violence in children's television programs which could be related to the alarming bullying problem in Mexico will be provided.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

In Mexico the bullying issue has created consternation among families, schools, and educational institutions. In Mexico City, different measures have been taken to confront this problem. An example of this is the manual *Escuelas aprendiendo a convivir: un proceso de intervención contra el maltrato e intimidación entre escolares. Bullying* that was created by the Secretariat of Education in Mexico City. This manual aims to promote a non-violence culture in the educational community. In addition, different programs have been implemented in schools and communities to confront the alarming situation of bullying (Secretaría de Educación del Gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2010).

Mario Delgado Carrillo, the Secretary of Education in Mexico City, declared that children need to be taught to coexist peacefully without violence (Martha Debayle, 2010). Additionally, the president of the CNDH said that the strategy to eradicate the bullying problems is education; that efforts need to be made by teachers, parents and public institutions (Brito, 2010). Thus, authorities do agree that a possible way to eradicate this crisis is through education.

The most recent program implemented in Mexico City is "Educar se pone padre", where according to the governor Marcelo Ebrard, the objective is to get parents involved in the educational process for a non-violent coexistence among school children (Pantoja, 2011). Ebrard mentions that the violence that is seen in the streets comes from what children see and

learn in their household. However, the experiences children live with their families might not be the only cause for bullying, media and what children watch in television is a significant influence for this audience.

Therefore, the suggestion given to this problem, which could be executed at the same time as the measures that are already being implemented, is media literacy. Media literacy refers to being critical and having the capacity to analyze the messages media sends to inform, entertain, and sell (Tallim, 2010). Torres & Mercado (2007) comment that media literacy is an urgent necessity in schools and teacher education curriculum because media has taken a very important place in almost every aspect in people's lives.

Torres and Mercado (2007) comment that media is supposedly used to serve democracy, to inform the society truthfully. Nonetheless, the authors mention that in the United States, media conglomerates have created associations with the government and the federal regulating agency, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), to protect their interests and to maintain and increase their power "by controlling what all of us watch, listen to, read, think, believe, taste, dress, look like, speak and how we perceive ourselves" (p.538). Furthermore, the authors say that this alliance between powerful social institutions and media does not occur exclusively in the United States, but everywhere.

Since children are considered as the most vulnerable audiences, providing media education would be giving the young spectators the tools needed to understand the means of control and to defend themselves from the messages presented on television. Torres and Mercado (2007) state that critical media literacy aims to involve actively schools, children, teachers, as well as parents. The authors refer to a media literacy that is composed of three dimensions:

1. The development of a critical understanding of how corporate for-profit media work, driven by their political and economic vested interests.
2. The search for and support of alternative, non-profit media.

3. The characterization of the role of teachers in helping students and their parents to become media literate users and supporters of alternative media. (p.537)

The Association for Media Literacy (AML, n.d) is a group composed by teachers, parents, consultants, librarians, cultural workers, and media professionals; the AML mentions that the educational systems in countries such as Canada, the United States, England, and Australia have given some priority to media literacy, their main objective is to try to help students increase their awareness of the nature of media, the messages they transmit, the techniques used, as well as the impact they have on society.

Media literacy is a measure that has been taken into account other countries and very well could be a good example to follow in Mexico. "Media education does not aim to shield young people from the influence of the media, and thereby lead them to better things, but to enable them to make informed decisions on their own behalf" (Buckingham, as cited in AML). Providing students with the necessary tools to understand what they are being exposed to constantly through media, and especially by television, may help pupils be aware of the power mediums have and understand how they manipulate spectators.