

A Systemwide Approach to Changing Attitudes Towards the Acceptability of Bullying or Harassment in Schools and Reducing Its Prevalence

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Since 1989, an increasing number of school staff and parents in Western Australia have responded with concern to the problem of student bullying/harassment and its far reaching effects on student welfare - on student mental, social and physical health. Investigations, programs and workshops that evolved within the Swanbourne District schools using the School Psychology Service, enabled concern to be developed into an interest in undertaking effective strategies to effectively reduce bullying in Western Australian schools. Strategies began on an individual student or situational basis. Programs were developed within small group and whole class contexts with positive results. It became more apparent that there was a need to develop whole school strategies to handle the number of requests and to establish effective long-term solutions within the system.

In order to understand the source of bullying behaviour it was necessary to develop a broader picture of its genesis within the family, the school, the community and society within Australia and overseas. The question of violence and the misuse of power by stronger members of the community over weaker members was raised. Modifying commonly held attitudes and practices was only possible by working initially from individual referrals and requests, consulting within schools, collaborating with colleagues and building a knowledge base. General acceptance of its adoption throughout the system became legitimised across one district by the example of three schools that modelled this approach. This culminated in a forum at a district workshop to explain the process and the results.

This paper provides background information on the field and illustrates through the experience at the Swanbourne District, how a comprehensive approach can be developed to change attitudes towards the acceptability of bullying or harassment in schools, leading to strategies to reduce its prevalence. Suggestions for a system wide approach are offered as well as advice for working practitioners within schools.

BACKGROUND

Some background information on the area can assist in understanding terminology, theories and research. This understanding provides a basis for

implementing school programs which develop helpful belief systems and which lead to effective responses to bullying incidents.

Definition

Most of the research done in this area uses the term 'bullying' for simplicity. Bullying tends to connote physical aggression in males whereas the term harassment is more inclusive of females and implies more non-physical forms of aggressive behaviour. For students the terms 'teasing and bullying' seem most useful.

A variety of definitions are offered in the literature. A review suggests that there are three main parameters of bullying: it is repetitive (prolonged over time); it involves an imbalance of power; and may be verbal, physical, social or psychological.

Bullying is a behaviour which can be defined as the repeated attack, physical, psychological, social or verbal in nature, by those in a position of power which is formally or situationally defined, with the intention of causing distress for their own gain or gratification. (Besag, 1989 p. 4)

A broader definition sees bullying as 'a form of socially acceptable behaviour as in a highly competitive approach to academic, sporting or social success which by intent makes others feel inferior or cause distress' (Besag, 1989, p. 4.).

A range of behaviours can be displayed. For instance physical bullying includes hitting, kicking and stabbing (with objects or weapons); psychological bullying includes threats and extorting money; social bullying involves spreading rumours and ostracism; and verbal bullying involves negative and persistent teasing or name-calling with regard to a range of student attributes such as abilities/disabilities, gender, age, physical characteristics, family, ethnic, cultural or religious background. Sexual and racial harassment are sub-categories within the definition of bullying.

Incidence of bullying

International studies indicate that the incidence of bullying in schools is widespread, with at least 10% of children probably involved as a victim or a perpetrator (examples cited in Besag, 1989; Roland & Munthe, 1989; Tatum & Lane, 1989). Verbal attacks rank highly as the most common form of bullying in most studies and are considered very potent in racial harassment (Roland & Munthe, 1989; Kelly & Cohn, 1988).

Bullying is often a covert problem. It goes unnoticed by teachers due to the speed at which it can occur when teachers are not observing, the indirect and subtle types of behaviour exhibited and the difficulty the victim has in responding or requesting adult assistance. There appears to be a high degree of non-referral by students and underestimation by teachers of the amount of bullying that goes on in their schools. An example is a study by O'Moore & Hillery (1991) which states that teachers only identified 22 per cent of the self-confessed bullies and 25.2 per cent of the victims of bullying. A three month phone-in service for young people to talk about bullying in the United Kingdom supported claims in other studies that at least half are reluctant to tell anyone (La Fontaine, 1991). If parents are surveyed (as opposed to

students or teachers) as many as 25 per cent of parents have come across the problem and 75 per cent of those parents have found it the worst problem their children have been required to face (survey cited in Besag, 1989).

Studies indicate a wide discrepancy of reported rates between schools and classes within schools (Stephenson & Smith, 1988). Schools which have specialist settings and ethnic minority groups are prone to a higher incidence of bullying (Kelly & Cohn, 1988).

Australian studies

Few studies have been conducted in Australia, but results so far indicate that at least 1 in 10 students are commonly subjected to bullying by other children (Rigby & Slee 1991). Western Australian surveys reflect similar levels (Swanbourne District, 1992). In line with other research, preliminary surveys in the Swanbourne District indicate that students in transition years are more likely to be vulnerable (first year and middle primary and the first two years of high school).

Research in South Australia (Rigby & Slee, 1992) highlights that schools with less supportive attitudes towards victims have a higher incidence of bullying. They found that the incidence varied inversely with the average level of support within the school for the victims.

Causes

A number of theoretical frameworks are used by educators and psychologists to explain how peer bullying develops. An understanding of the peer culture is vital as well as an exploration of the family, school, community and other societal factors.

The interplay of the characteristics of the young person with the environment is also a dynamic that requires analysis. The literature clearly divides into causal factors for the perpetrator of the bullying and the sufferer. The use of the terms 'bully' and 'victim' are useful for research purposes.

BULLY AND VICTIM STUDIES

Investigations into the characteristics and background of the bully and victim serve to describe predisposing factors which result in the greater likelihood of young people taking the position and behaviours of victim or bully. Victim/bully studies are limited in two main ways - many define bullies with more observable physically aggressive behaviour (which often excludes females) and do not always take into account the different categories of victims and bullies. In fact some young people take on both roles. The characteristics commonly ascribed to bullies and victims are now considered.

Bully studies

Many of the research findings on bullies are derived from broader studies on violence and criminology. Bullying represents the improper use of power by an individual or group of individuals over others. Due to their lack of power, children are particularly vulnerable.

Some bullying may be accepted, especially in boys, as part of growing up. For instance, the National Committee on Violence (NCV) in its 1990 report

Violence: Directions for Australia concluded that the acceptance of violence is deeply embedded in Australian culture. The Committee claimed this was demonstrated in values and practices in aspects of Australian life such as families, schools, media, sports and economic inequalities. The NCV Report states that there are '... correlations between aggression in children and certain characteristics in their parents, notably maternal rejection and use of physical punishment and threat' (1990, p. 61). It concludes that '... the experiences of childhood and the influence of the family are paramount in determining whether or not an individual becomes violent in his or her behaviour' (1990, p. 102).

Family characteristics in bully studies typically indicate that bullies are raised in homes where there is lack of maternal affection, marriage breakdown, where alcoholism is common, and where inadequate or inconsistent discipline is usually physical in nature (Council for Cultural Cooperation, 1988; Elliott, 1992).

A number of studies indicate that bullies tend to have a less positive attitude to school work and staff than victims. They tend to be hyperactive, extroverted and have below average reading achievement (Lowenstein, 1977). Bullies are less popular than the average student (Hoover and Hazler, 1991) but are more able to elicit peer support. They take a leadership role using dominance which is often confused with leadership and their popularity decreases with age (Besag, 1989). Bullies tend to be aggressive, well coordinated and dominant with high energy levels (Olweus, 1978).

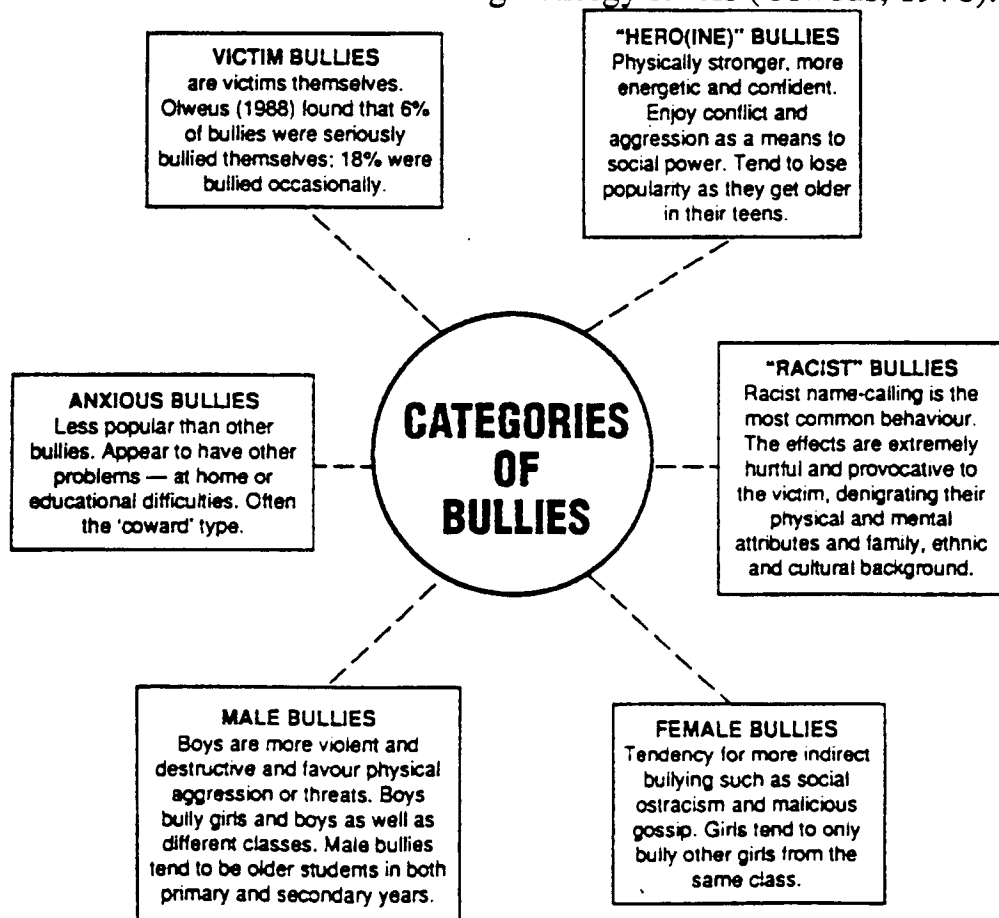


Figure 1 Sub-categories of bullies

Different categories of bullies

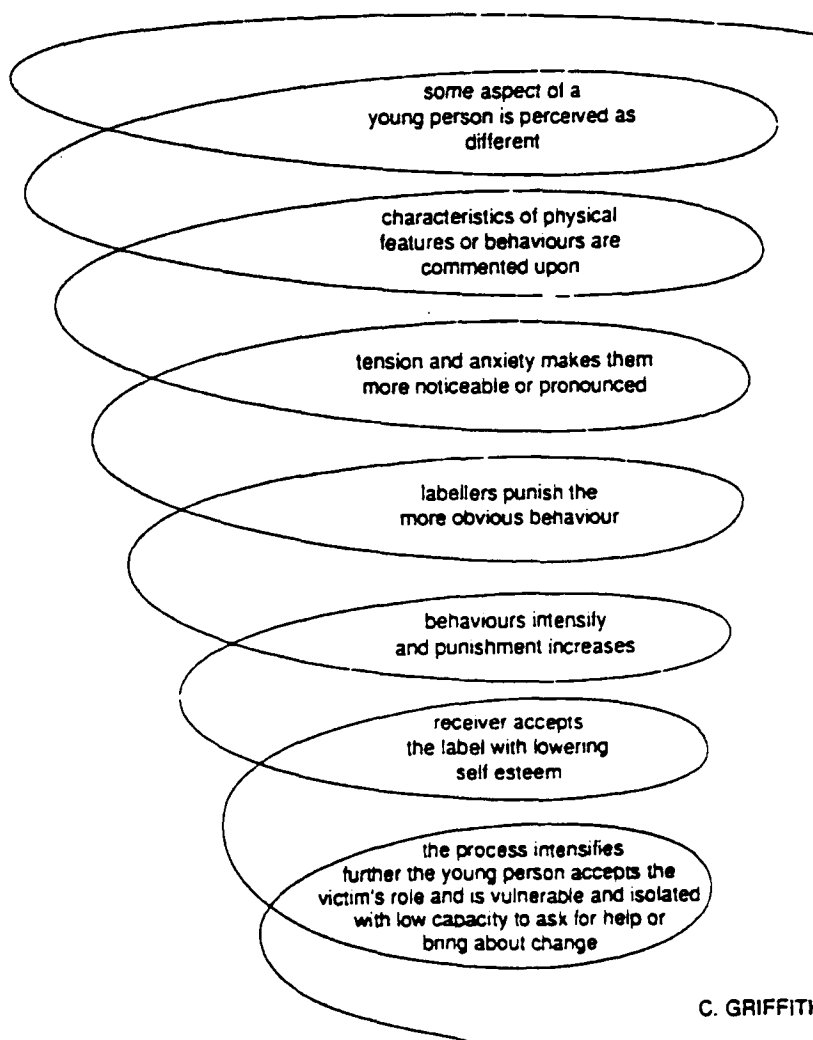
Figure 1 illustrates the different categories of bullies derived from the literature. All bullies and victims may not fit in to these categories.

Victim studies

Victim studies tend to focus on the process by which individuals develop poor self-concept and low self-esteem in a social context. This can be explained by the process of labelling. Reinforcement and social learning theories assist in explaining how these labels are maintained.

The model shown in Figure 2 describes the process whereby individuals develop and integrate a label into their cognitive belief system producing affective and behavioural responses which are strengthened by the consequences and outcomes. It is a model which also explains one of the factors that strengthens the bully role.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL TO BECOMING A VICTIM



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Figure 2 A model which describes the process by which an individual accepts the victim's role and the bully's role is strengthened

Although violence is deeply embedded in Australian society, compliance in children is highly valued as a means of control. Young people brought up in a school and home environment where they are expected to 'do what they are told' and not to ask questions are more likely to accept a passive victim's role. Studies indicate that victims come from over-protective families and develop close dependent relationships. High parental expectations contribute to an inability to meet these expectations and also lack of assertiveness (Olweus, 1978). The majority of victims are found to have low self esteem, below average popularity with peers and poor scholastic attainments (Council for Cultural Co-operation, 1988; Hoover and Hazler, 1991). Floyd (1985) reports that teachers found victims to be co-operative and eager to please and relate to adults, but to have immature social skills.

Some characteristics found commonly associated with victims of bullying includes being anxious, physically weaker, less energetic, more sensitive and cautious with poor communication skills. A proportion of the victims had co-ordination problems and low aptitude in sport (Besag, 1989). Olweus (1988) identified the provocative type victim who was found to be quick-tempered, restless and lacking in concentration (cited in Council for Cultural Co-operation, 1988). Figure 3 illustrates different categories of victims derived from the literature.

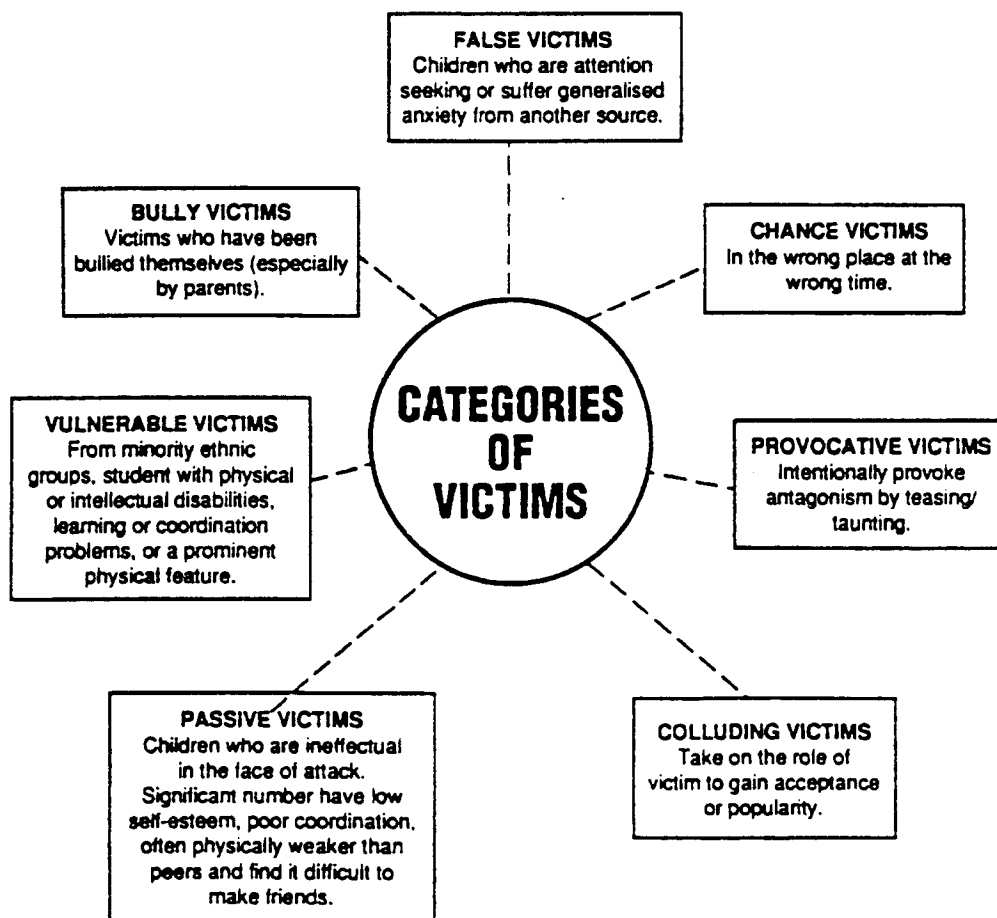


Figure 3 Sub-categories of victims

Effects

The effects on the victim and the bully have been shown to have negative short term and long term consequences. For many victims it impacts on their future ability to cope with conflict and to develop fulfilling long-term relationships. For many bullies it impacts on their future inappropriate use of power to solve conflict. One study of bullies indicated a four times higher incidence of criminal behaviour by the age of thirty (Olweus, 1989).

Symptoms displayed by victims can be very similar to other forms of abuse. The emotional effects on the victim include: shame that they are so unlikable; guilt that they are in some way to blame; lowering of self-concept, esteem and confidence; displaced emotions such as anger; increase in vulnerability; and inability to seek help or bring about change. Apart from the negative effects on the child's social and emotional development their learning outcomes can become severely effected through a decrease in work output, truancy and school refusal (see the detection check-lists in Panels 1 and 2).

Detection

Children who are victims usually display a number of the following symptoms shown in Panel 1.

Panel 1 - Symptoms for individual students as victims

Class/School Attendance

- Truancy

- School refusal or reluctance to attend school

- School refusal on certain days or lessons (eg sports lessons)

- Lateness for school

- Reluctance to leave school

- Constant use of library at break times

Academic

- Significant decrease in work output and results

- Distracted in class

- Problems with retention and short term memory

- Reluctance to participate in class discussion

Physical

- Tiredness

- Psychosomatic complaints: frequent headaches, stomach aches

- Bed wetting - usually younger children

- Loss of appetite

- Unexplained bruises and injury

- Torn clothing

Emotional

- Personality changes from confident to loss of confidence, greater irritability

- Mood swings

Lethargy
Sudden outbursts of temper

Social

Isolation from peers in class and at play time
Preference to interaction with teachers (younger students may be clingy)

Other Signs Outside School

Requests to change transport arrangements to and from school
Requests for extra money
Taking and 'losing' valuables from home
Withdrawal from social activities with peers
Withdrawal from extra-curricular activities
Sudden reluctance to do things in the community eg go to the shops, pinball machines, swimming pool etc
Increase in negativity and aggression towards siblings
Sudden outburst of temper and/or withdrawal.

Note: Some caution needs to be taken in drawing conclusions about the source of these behaviours due to parallel symptoms with child abuse victims and certain stages of child development.

Staff can employ a variety of detection strategies to detect students being victimised by bullying: Observation of students in group or class context, for example, choice of seating and participation in groups; open class discussion; completing a class sociogram; and finding out the student's feelings about school through active listening approach with the student, with other students and parents.

Panel 2 - Symptoms for whole school

Class/School Attendance

High levels of truancy
High levels of school refusals
Numbers of students avoiding certain classes or refusing to attend
Students requesting teachers to escort them between classes

Transport

Staff or parental complaints about bullying on buses
Increase in the number of students requesting change in transport arrangements from public to private transport

Break Times

Constant use of the library at break times
Large number of complaints about bullying in the playground
Numbers of students requesting teacher supervision at break times

Personal Equipment

Number of incidents where personal valuables are stolen, deliberately misplaced or destroyed

Parents

Frequent complaints by parents of student reluctance to attend school due to peer relationship problems

Discipline

Number of students requiring discipline for fighting
Numbers of students unsettled and in conflict after break time
Detection Strategies for Whole School
Increase playground supervision - check isolated areas at odd times

Use of class, staff and/or parent surveys

Open staff discussion on the topic (formal or informal)
Open parent discussion on the topic (formal or informal)

CHANGING ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY**Initial situation**

The Swanbourne District comprises 4 secondary schools, 24 primary schools, 8 pre-primary centres and a variety of specialist classes such as education support and intensive language. Feedback through school newsletters and knowledge of the community, indicated that parents of the more prestigious schools in the area valued competitiveness and high achievement. Students who were 'not even in the race' were ready targets for bullying. The area is generally an affluent one with largely middle to upper income households. There are also pockets of families on low incomes and students attending from residential facilities providing alternative home care and migrant students attending from outside the district.

In 1989 schools generally perceived problems related to teasing and bullying to be isolated cases, referring these problems to the school psychologist when they had reached a dysfunctional stage, for example, school avoidance. An impression was given by a number of schools that better schools had fewer problems. This was indicated by initial resistance by some schools to consider a whole school approach to behaviour management, a number of senior staff emphasising that problems in their schools were rare and expressed surprise when other schools perceived as being prestigious, committed time and resources to the Managing Student Behaviour (MSB) Program. A common response was 'I didn't know that school had problems'.

Precursors to change**School staff**

Schools were developing a growing awareness of the need for whole school approaches to various identified problems due to Ministry of Education requirements in 1989 to produce school development plans, management information systems and school priorities. By the end of 1991 most schools were in-serviced by school psychologists in behaviour management systems

using the Managing Student Behaviour (MSB) or Assertive Discipline Programs.

An emphasis on pastoral care and general student welfare became a priority for many schools. Many schools for instance, included positive self-esteem as a student outcome for the school.

Greater awareness of equity drew attention to the negative effects of racism, and the public debate on legislation against the incitement of racial hatred contributed. Widespread publicity and in-service training on 'effective schools' gave extra weight to the need for a whole school approach to curriculum and behaviour management approaches.

School psychologists

Changes to the school psychology service involved the provision of contracted services to schools on the basis of the school identifying issues and school priorities. This led to the identification clusters of needs across schools and a shift from individual to group and systems work to improve effectiveness and efficiency eg. district in-service training on self-esteem, teasing and bullying and behaviour management. School psychologists developed a team approach, sharing expertise and exchanging services to meet particular contracted demands.

Parents

Parents became more involved in decision making through school decision making groups especially in the identification of school priorities. Schools were increasingly competing for students to maintain school numbers due to a diminishing student population and new provisions for students to cross boundaries. Schools consciously promoted their programs and approaches to pastoral care to attract and retain students.

Mobilising change

My initial work in the area of bullying evolved from a direct request in 1988 to assist with a class identified as having teasing and bullying problems. A workshop style program with the teacher assisting proved highly successful in greatly reducing the problems and creating a more congenial classroom atmosphere. This became the start of developing programs and accessing research and resources.

Student referrals

Other school psychologists also noted an increase in the number of referrals related to teasing and bullying across the district. Since I had already developed a program, school psychologists requested access to my programs and consultation on particular incidents. This initial phase focussed on either whole class or small group work approaches in the primary schools. In some bullying programs I co-worked with another psychologist as well as working directly with groups or classes on an exchange of service basis.

Parent requests

The Parents and Citizens' Associations of three schools requested talks on teasing and bullying which I conducted. These were well attended and included staff members.

School requests

Observations of bullying in pre-primary settings led to a request for a whole day workshop on self-esteem, the development of positive peer relations and ways of preventing and reducing bullying. Further requests followed from other schools for brief introductory workshops for staff.

District level requests

Due to concerns raised by parents and the recognition of the efficacy of a whole school approach, two principals developed and conducted whole school surveys. Parents were consulted and informed of the results. The results of these surveys formed the basis for developing action strategies. Subsequently a district-based committee funded a further whole school survey in a secondary school and a district workshop for school staff to consider implications and strategies.

Wider community

Media interest in the problem of bullying in schools was sparked by a local radio talkback show in 1990. One parent rang in voicing concerns about severe problems affecting her child in relation to bullying. A number of parents subsequently rang in, voicing similar concerns. The Ministry of Education was asked to respond. As a result of my work in the Swanbourne District, I was asked to be the spokesperson.

Other requests followed including a magazine article and a story on ABC Television's 7.30 Report in which staff from two Swanbourne District schools were able to convey the effectiveness of their approach to reducing teasing and bullying in their school. Further awareness of the issues and research became available statewide due to two workshops (1991 and 1992) requested at the state-wide School Psychologists' Association conference.

Program outcomes

School psychologists in the Swanbourne District ran programs to reduce bullying in a number of schools in response to referrals. The work involved problem clusters in classes and groups using a program devised to increase empathy for the victim, teach problem solving techniques and encourage student co-operation and friendships (Griffiths, 1991).

Evaluation of these programs using student, teacher and parent feedback, indicated that the programs effectively reduced teasing and bullying and improved student relationships. The presenting problem was mitigated as a result.

Three schools developed a whole school approach to bullying. Principals of two schools conducted whole school surveys involving students, staff and parents, resulting in whole school strategies. In order to ensure the acceptance of a whole school approach to the problem of bullying a district workshop was conducted. Fifty staff and 16 schools were involved from K-12 including administrators and key teaching staff. Six schools were placed on a waiting list for a future workshop. The workshop was conducted in such a way that participants felt they could share openly. Written feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Most participants found the workshop

extremely worthwhile (not one indicated that it was less than worthwhile) and were eager to put further strategies into place.

Participants gave credence to a whole school approach as a result of issues being explored by a variety of means: exploring and sharing personal experiences (victim empathy and understanding the bully); summarising research findings including theory on causes, incidence and effects; using the experience of actual students (from tape recordings); colleagues reporting on the results of surveys and programs; classroom teacher reporting on the effectiveness of the problem solving method; demonstration of effective programs from interstate and overseas using video excerpts; collaboration and discussion by participants on experiences with other schools, using 'scenarios'; and participants planning action strategies for their own school. Further requests for developing whole school programs have continued in 1993.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

The ability of schools to reduce the prevalence of bullying is based on the premise that school policies and practices have a large effect on the amount of bullying that goes on. Evidence that this is the case is provided from two main sources - differences on the incidence of bullying between schools (previously outlined) and significant reductions in its incidence as a result of whole school strategies. Olweus (1991) demonstrated that significant reductions could be achieved as a result of a nationwide campaign he developed in Norway consisting of workshops, videos and booklets.

Panel 3 - System-wide prevention and intervention

Prevention and intervention strategies need to be addressed and adopted at all levels in the

Statewide

Acceptance that bullying exists in all schools. Recognition that schools with anti-bullying programs are good schools. Ready access to personnel and resources to set up programs.

Whole community

Positive practices and programs to achieve positive practices in:

- parenting
- sports coaching
- police relationships with young people
- safety houses
- after school care
- linking schools and teachers to other community groups

Across schools

Network support and sharing expertise on practices which reduce bullying
Development of Transition programs between home (or child-care) to pre-primary, pre-primary to year one, primary to high school.

Whole school approach

- Whole school policy development on behaviour management, pastoral care systems and school ethos
- Whole staff in-service on bullying
- Workshops for parents on bullying
- Student workshops on bullying
- Peer support program
- Peer counselling program
- Class teacher training in situ
- Friendship themes and focus as part of curriculum
- Supervision of playgrounds
- Development of more effective playgrounds and activity areas
- More activities provided at break times

Whole class approach

- Development of classroom policy, ethos and practices
- Specialised classroom workshops with school psychologist and teacher as co-facilitator
- Sessions by teacher as part of curriculum
- Regular class meetings where students raise issues
- Peer tutoring and peer support practices
- Co-operative versus competitive classroom practices
- Cater for range of styles and levels of learning

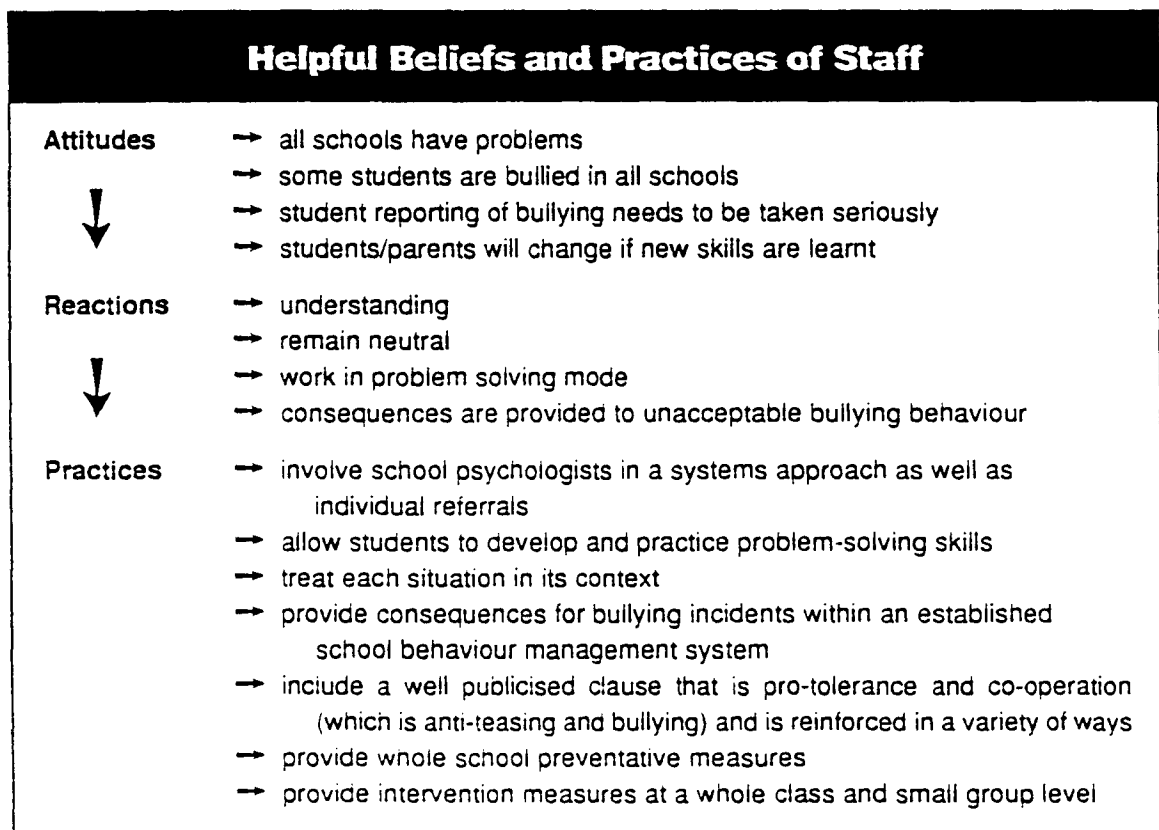
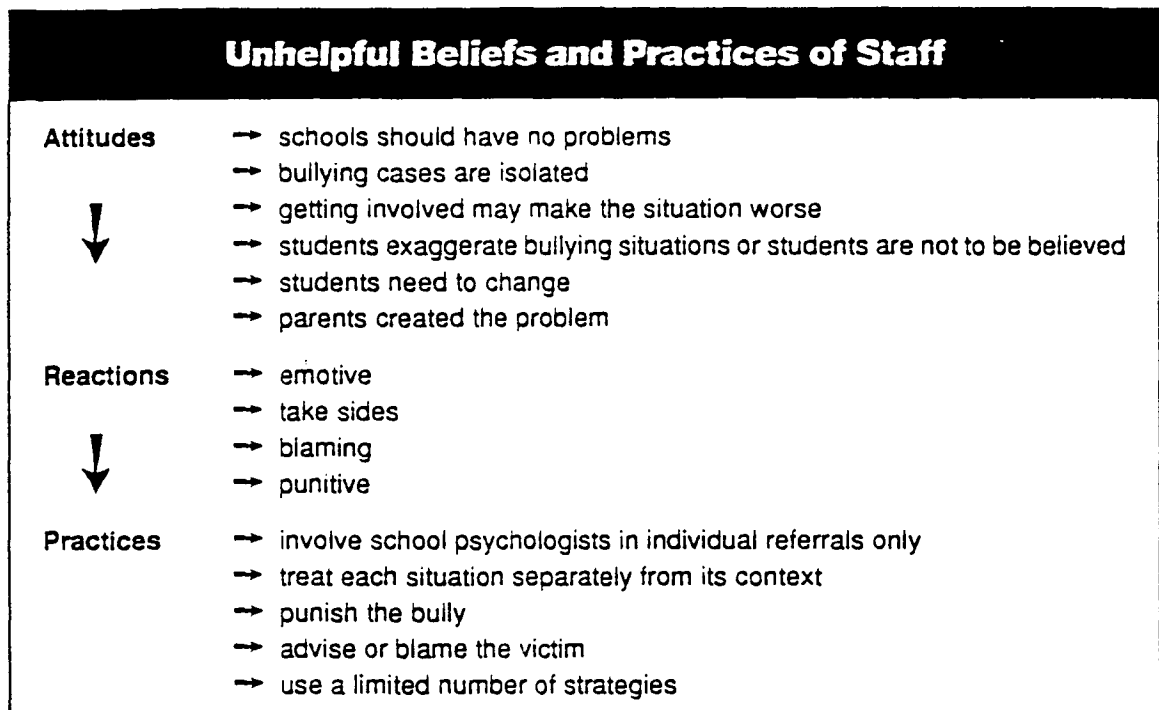
Intensive small group work

- For victims, assertiveness training and self-esteem work
- For bullies, pro-social skills, anger control victim empathy and problem solving skills including 'common concerns' method

Individual counselling

- Individual counselling for student(s), parent(s) teacher(s)
- Mediation between students
- Problem-solving/conflict resolution skill techniques
- Problem-solving skills using techniques such as role play and imagery rehearsal to be taught.

Figure 4 presents a summary of the links between attitudes, reactions and practices of staff to school bullying. By contrasting unhelpful beliefs and practices of staff with helpful beliefs and practices It also suggests the types of attitudes needed to bring about practices reducing the prevalence of bullying in schools.



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Figure 4 Reducing bullying in school: Unhelpful and helpful beliefs and practices of staff

Guiding principles

By trial and error, it was found that there are some essential guiding principles involved in programs on bullying:

Ground Rules

Always establish ground rules with workshop groups (students, parents or staff) such as respecting differences of opinion, a confidentiality clause and the right to 'pass' on any activity.

Surveys of Bullying

School or class surveys need to remain confidential. This is due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic. The person running the survey maintains neutrality, understands its purpose and will participate in class discussion resulting from completing the survey. The survey is linked to a program which is already underway or will be put into place soon after the survey. Staff students and parents receive feedback on surveys in simple objective terms starting with positives.

Parents

Parents are informed about class or school programs by letter or ideally at a parent information evening. By understanding the problem-solving approach, parents are less likely to interfere in unhelpful ways.

Students

The problem of bullying is viewed as a student/peer problem and most of the focus of any program is on students developing skills and providing opportunities to solve conflicts themselves with adults offering a support structure.

Program Focus

The focus of all programs on bullying is positive. Thus a class or group program is better named friendship classes or friendship groups as against 'groups on bullying'. The question is always 'What do we really want? What do we have when we don't have teasing and bullying?'

Small Changes

Change in small realistic stages ensures less student resistance. One technique to assist in this process is the use of continuums to devise steps from negative to neutral to positive behaviours.

Negative

Neutral

Positive

bullying teasing tolerant considerate caring friendly

Behaviour Change

Describe the faulty behaviour and focus on change instead of labelling the student.

Problem-Solving

Model the problem solving approach when working with groups

Getting program support

For a whole school approach to operate, it is vital that there is support for the program by all parties involved including students, staff and parents.

School's needs to be established

Canvas suggestions from staff and parents; use surveys/questionnaires to develop a school profile, determine the extent, years/groups most affected, and the times and places where bullying occurs; provide feedback to staff parents and students about the school's needs. The level of program intervention needs to relate to the intensity of the problem.

Mobilising Staff Commitment

The majority of staff need to agree to support the program or agree to support colleagues (such as the pastoral care team). The principal and senior staff need to promote actively the ethos that tolerance and co-operation are expected which means teasing and bullying are not acceptable in the school. It is desirable to have regular discussion and review through a school committee such as the pastoral care team which takes responsibility for devising a program to suit the school's needs

Involving students

Educate students on the benefits of a 'no bully'/pro-tolerance environment. Involve students in developing and promoting the 'no bully'/pro-tolerance ethos. Give students opportunities to develop conflict resolution skills. Develop ethos and procedures that say 'It's OK to tell' or seek that help is acceptable.

Parent involvement

Workshops or information sessions are needed for parents to assist their understanding of the problem and the effectiveness of using problem-solving methods to resolve conflicts. Parenting skills workshops should be provided to assist parents in developing effective communication and assertive non-aggressive discipline.

Mellor (1990) summarised three pre-requisites for a successful anti-bullying policy:

recognition by the school that the problem exists;

openness in discussing it; and

owning the problem where teachers, parents and students have a vested interest in facilitating the anti-bullying policy's success.

CONCLUSION

Until recently Swanbourne District schools tackled the problem of bullying by the common practices of punishing the bully and advising the victim 'not to provoke' or to 'ignore' the situation. Some parents suggested children should 'fight back' or felt their only recourse was to transfer their child to a different school. The commonly held belief was 'that children can be cruel', but that learning to cope with bullying was a healthy part of growing up.

As schools became more self-governing in line with Ministry of Education (Western Australia) policies, accountability in relation to student learning

outcomes became a requirement. The negative effects of bullying and harassment on student behaviour and learning outcomes became increasingly apparent. School psychologists received increasing numbers of referrals related to the problem, which resulted in the development of more systematic approaches based on research evidence of effective strategies. The successful reduction in bullying in schools where programs were conducted led to interest by other schools and greater openness in discussing the problem.

Growing awareness of the problem statewide led to media attention and further requests for information and strategies. At a time when schools are more prepared than ever to explore the problem and develop programs, it is important that support and consultation is available. Ideally, statewide services need to be accessible to link research and resources.

We should not wait until the problem reaches the proportions it has in other countries where it took student suicide (Norway) and murder (UK) related to bullying to attract funding to develop programs to reduce bullying in schools. Bullying and harassment in schools represents not only a challenge but also an opportunity to review and continue to develop stronger pastoral care systems, effective behaviour management systems and address school equity issues.

Bullying behaviour has negative long-term implications for both the victim and the bully. It is present in all our schools. We can not afford to dismiss this problem. It represents a challenge that many practitioners in schools will need to address.

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WHAT IS BULLYING?

Consider the following situations and decide whether you feel they constitute bullying or not. Put a 'yes' by the ones you feel are bullying and a 'no' by the ones you feel are not. Be prepared to share your thoughts with other parents when you have completed the activity individually.

Try to make your mind up quickly, don't spend too long agonising over each one.

SITUATION

BULLYING?

Yes or No?

Every time Joanne walks past Maria she gives her hair a little tweak.

Joel kicks Dean's bag over the floor.

Tania and Susan won't let Rachel play with them.

Dean's parents have split up. Mark tells everyone else in the class.

Liam and Peter refuse to talk to George for a week.

Jenny tells Tony that if he doesn't give her \$1 each week she will beat him up.

Peter tells Phil that if he doesn't do everything he tells him to he will tell the teachers that it was Phil who kicked the ball through the window.

Tracey knows that Soo Lin is afraid of spiders. She puts a spider on her hair.

A group of girls sets fire to Serena's hair because she 'doesn't fit in'.

Sarah and her family go to church each Sunday. The other children in her class begin to call her 'Jesus freak'.

John has a disability which means that he cannot always control his movements. When he gets excited his hands jerk up. A group of boys mimic him whenever he tries to join in the football game.

**BULLYING
Yes or No?**

Dena keeps on telling Susan to wear deodorant.

Joclyn has nicknamed Tara 'scruffy'. Now all of the pupils call her that too.

Terry spits in a can of coke and says he will make Jake drink it.

Teresa tells the rest of her classmates that Caroline's family eat muck.

David spends a lunchtime following Simon and tapping him on the arm, despite Simon's requests to be left alone.

A group of older boys will not let anyone else play football at break. They take the balls away or barge into the other children's games.

Every time Peter passes a gang of girls they wolf whistle and make comments about his body. One day they grab hold of him and kiss him.

Each time that Charissa walks into the class a group of pupils giggle and whisper to each other.

Look over the scenarios you felt definitely were bullying: what was it about these situations which made you feel this way?

In a group of 2/3 take it in turns to share your responses to the situations. Note any differences and similarities in opinion. It is likely that there will be some differences of opinion about what is bullying and what is not.