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Edited by Peter K. Smith, Debra Pepler, and Ken Rigby

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1 Working to prevent school bullying: key issues

Ken Rigby, Peter K. Smith, and Debra Pepler

A brief historical background

Over the last two decades, bullying in schools has become an issue of widespread concern (Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Olweus, Catalano and Slee, 1999). This is not to say that in earlier times bullying in schools was ignored. There was much animated public discussion of bullying in English private schools in the mid-nineteenth century following the publication of the famous novel *Tom Brown's school days* (Hughes, 1857). This book evoked strong expressions of abhorrence towards, and condemnation of, the practice of bullying, and various suggestions were made on how it could be countered (see Rigby, 1997). However, the systematic examination of the nature and prevalence of school bullying only began with the work of Olweus in the 1970s in Scandinavia.

The volume of research since then has clarified much about the nature of bullying, and the suffering it can cause (see Rigby, 2002; Smith, 2004). Certain pupils are clearly more at risk of being involved as bullies or victims, or sometimes both (bully/victims), by virtue of personality, family background factors, characteristics such as disability, and the nature and quality of friendships and peer-group reputation. Also, there is considerable evidence that the experience of being a victim can exacerbate outcomes such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, mistrust of others, psychosomatic symptoms, and school refusal (Hawker and Boulton, 2000). In addition, a career as a bully in school predicts increased risks of violence and abuse in later life. There is now a clear moral imperative on teachers and educators to act to reduce bullying in schools; and a moral imperative on researchers to try to give the most informed advice in this respect.

The most tragic outcome of victimisation is suicide. It was the suicide, within a short interval, of three boys in Norway that led in 1983 to the first major anti-bullying intervention by schools, at a national level. The reports of an evaluation of this intervention in Bergen, with supplementation by the developing Olweus Bullying Prevention programme

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(see chapter 2; and Olweus, 1993, 1999), indicated reductions of 50% in bullying and alerted many educationists to the possibility that interventions to counter bullying could be effective. However, the evaluation of the national Norwegian programme in Stavanger produced near-zero results (Roland, 1989). Since then there have been numerous attempts in many countries to demonstrate that intervention programmes to counter bullying can result in significant reductions in bullying behaviour. On the whole, evaluative reports (written by researchers largely responsible for the anti-bullying programmes) have indicated some consequent improvement in children's peer relations, but generally much less than the reduction of 50% in Bergen (Olweus, 1993); this includes some programmes based on the Bergen project (chapters 4 and 5). Some interventions have been much less successful or even failed to show any significant improvement.

What can explain this diversity of outcomes? These programmes have typically contained some common and some distinctively different elements. Hence, it is difficult at this stage to identify the crucial elements in the anti-bullying programmes or to say which programmes are the most effective. Most of the programmes to counter bullying have resulted in a degree of success, at least on some outcome measures. This is encouraging. But the task of describing what is 'the best practice' for schools to follow on the basis of evaluative studies of interventions remains.

The nature of programmes to counter bullying: general features

Anti-bullying programmes generally contain some common elements. They recognise the need for the school community and especially the teaching staff to be aware of the prevalence and seriousness of the problem of bullying in schools. To this end, time is spent discussing these matters with teachers and in some cases with parents and students.

It is widely accepted that countering bullying requires a 'whole school approach' in which the elements and initiatives in a programme are carefully co-ordinated. Co-ordinated action, it is often said, is needed at different levels: namely, the school, the classroom, and the individual student. How this is to be done is typically incorporated in a school anti-bullying policy that describes the stand that is being taken against bullying and the procedures and actions that are to be taken in its implementation. This is sometimes described as the indispensable core feature of an anti-bullying policy. The policy may also provide guidelines on how bullying behaviour is to be discouraged and how victims of school bullying can be helped.

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Variations in anti-bullying programmes

There have been considerable variations in anti-bullying policies in what is actually included and what is most emphasised. In some programmes a great deal of attention has focused upon motivating teachers to address the problem of bullying and providing them with relevant training. Given that relatively little (if any) content about bullying is included in the pre-training of teachers (Nicolaidis, Toda, and Smith, 2002), addressing the problem through ‘in-servicing’ prior to implementing a programme is regarded as essential, and may include numerous sessions conducted by those directing the programme. Some programmes make use of anonymous questionnaires completed by students (and sometimes also by teachers and parents) to provide reliable data on the prevalence and nature of the bullying that has been taking place in the school. Discussing such data is seen as a preliminary step to engaging in the development of a well-supported anti-bullying policy.

Programmes typically include both preventative and interventive procedures. However, the emphasis on one or the other may vary widely. Some programmes place major emphasis upon developing a positive classroom climate on the assumption that, if classrooms are characterised by positive relations between teachers and students and among students, children will not be inclined to engage in bullying (Roland and Galloway, 2002; and chapter 3). Curriculum work plays a major part in some anti-bullying programmes. This may include providing information about what constitutes bullying, the harm it does to victims, and the help children can receive from their school if they are victimised. In some programmes, emphasis has been placed on countering social prejudice and undesirable attitudes such as racism and sexism. Specific techniques thought to be relevant to countering bullying may be taught, such as assertiveness, anger management, and helpful bystander behaviour (Rigby, 2003). Discussions may be encouraged among students, leading to them formulating rules about how they believe they should behave in relating to each other (Olweus, 1993). Literature, film, and role plays may be used to develop more empathic and insightful ways of interacting with each other.

Emphasis may also be placed upon surveillance and monitoring of student behaviour outside classrooms. It is known that most bullying occurs during breaks from lessons and that bullying tends to be lower when there is more supervision by adults. Peer support programmes such as befriending are becoming common. Some programmes involve students who have been trained as peer mediators to assist in identifying and resolving conflicts. Such involvement is, however, controversial with some educators maintaining that in cases of bullying, adult authority is needed.

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The area in which there is most variation between programmes is that of working with students who have been identified as bullies. The most commonly used procedure employs rules against bullying and consequences for breaking them. These may take the form of non-physical penalties or sanctions, such as the withdrawal of privileges or, in extreme cases, suspension from school. Parents of the bullies may be asked to come to the school to discuss how the bully's behaviour can be changed. This approach has been incorporated into anti-bullying programmes adopted in a number of European countries and in North America. In some programmes responsibility for investigating charges of bullying and recommending sanctions has been delegated to students who function as members of so-called bully courts (Mahdavi and Smith, 2002). Such punitive measures are seen by some as not only likely to discourage bullying behaviour but also to 'send a message' to deter others who might otherwise engage in bullying. However, it is often difficult to devise and apply clear rules relating to some forms of bullying such as excluding individuals from groups and rumour spreading. A miscarriage of justice resulting in resentment on the part of the bully may lead to a redoubling of efforts to continue the bullying in less detectable but equally damaging ways.

In cases of extreme bullying, community conferences are sometimes held. Victims are encouraged to express their grievances in the presence of those who had bullied them, and also with the relatives, friends, or supporters of those involved in the bullying incidents in attendance. Here the aim is to evoke in the perpetrator(s) a sense of shame about what they had done; but to do so in circumstances in which they feel accepted as persons by their supporters and can be effectively reintegrated into a caring community (Hyndman, Thorsborn, and Wood, 1996).

In contrast to methods that, in varying degrees, employ a punitive approach, some anti-bullying policies promote non-punitive problem-solving approaches. These include the use of mediation between students in conflict, conducted either by staff or appropriately trained students. Where there is a notable imbalance of power between the individuals in conflict, it is frequently argued that mediation is of limited value, since the mediator cannot reasonably act in a neutral manner.

Some programmes make use of the No-Blame approach developed by Robinson and Maines (1997). The teacher or person conducting the intervention first meets with the person who has been victimised and obtains a vivid picture of how the victim has been harmed. Subsequently a meeting is convened which includes the bullies and the victim, and also

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other students who are expected to influence the outcome of the meeting in a positive way. The teacher explains to the group how the victim has been hurt by the bullying and seeks proposals on how the situation can be improved. Responsibility for solving the problem is then left to the students; the outcomes, however, are carefully monitored.

A more complex process for dealing with bully/victim cases, especially among adolescent students, is that of the Shared Concern Method devised by Pikas (1989, 2002). Directed towards resolving problems of group bullying, this approach seeks initially through meetings with individual bullies to communicate and elicit a concern for the plight of the victim and also to acknowledge that each member of a bullying group is, to some degree, concerned that other members might turn on him or her. Further meetings are conducted, first with the victim, then with the bullying group, and finally with the bullying group together with the victim to ensure that acceptable relations are established. Although there is some evidence of its effectiveness (Smith and Sharp, 1994), this approach requires that its practitioners are thoroughly trained in its application and in some quarters it remains controversial (Ross, 1996, 2002).

Other approaches aimed at effecting positive behavioural changes in students involved in bully/victim problems include providing training in social skills and anger management, and actions directed towards raising self-esteem. To date there is little evidence that such measures can reform bullies; however, training aimed at developing assertiveness skills among victims appear to have greater chances of reducing the victimisation of some students (Field, 1999).

Measuring bullying and related phenomena

Defining bullying

There is no universally agreed definition of bullying. Some authorities have viewed bullying as essentially the *desire* to hurt or put someone under pressure (Tattum, 1993). However, increasingly researchers have come to agree that bullying involves negative or hurtful *behaviour* (Olweus, 1993); and the majority add that – as distinct from wider definitions of aggression or violence – bullying must also involve an imbalance of power with the less-powerful person or group being repeatedly and unfairly attacked (Rigby, 2002; Ross, 2002). This could be summarised as ‘the systematic abuse of power’ (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

It is common to distinguish between physical, verbal, and indirect forms of bullying. Examples of the latter category include deliberate

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exclusion and rumour spreading that is intended to damage someone. Sexual and racial harassment are sometimes viewed as types of bullying.

Outcome measures to assess the effects of interventions

In evaluating interventions, researchers are generally most interested in changes in bullying behaviour. Sometimes global indicators encompassing physical, verbal, and indirect forms have been employed. More commonly, separate indices have been created, and it has been reported at times that significant changes occur in one type of bullying but not another. Data from which measures are derived may come from a variety of sources. These include self-reports from students answering questionnaires anonymously or (less commonly) elicited in face-to-face interviews.

Further information may be obtained through teacher and/or parent ratings of individual students. Students are sometimes asked to nominate which of their peers are most involved in bullying others and/or being targeted as victims. Finally, direct observational methods may be used to assess the prevalence of bullying behaviour in a school; in some cases video recordings have been used (Pepler and Craig, 1995).

Some degree of standardisation in the use of questionnaires has been established, for example using the Olweus questionnaire, although there is still much variation in the questions being asked by different researchers. Some favour the use of single-item measures whilst others employ reliable multi-item scales (Petersen and Rigby, 1999). Typically, the severity of the bullying is assessed by questions that require students to report the frequency with which they have bullied others and/or have been victimised by others, using such categories as daily, weekly, monthly, or never, and also the period over which the victimisation has occurred. In addition to behavioural indicators, use has also been made of measures of attitude, for example, feelings towards victims and readiness to intervene as bystanders when bullying occurs (Sanchez et al., 2001).

Research design

Different methods have been used to infer the effects of interventions, and again some variety is present in the chapters in this book. Most commonly, researchers have used a basic *pre-test*, *post-test* design and have assessed the direction and degree of changes that occurred over the period when the intervention programme was applied.

It is recognised that changes could be due to extraneous factors, such as the effect of the pre-testing (increasing awareness of bullying),

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the maturation of students over the period of intervention (rendering them more inclined or less inclined to becoming involved in bully/victim problems), and historical events that could influence bullying behaviour (such as an anti-bullying media campaign or a highly publicised suicide due to bullying). Accordingly, many studies have made use of *control groups* to take into account such effects (see Cook and Campbell, 1979). Selecting suitable control schools equivalent to the intervention schools presents difficulties because researchers can normally only draw upon schools that opt to be in the study.

There have been two main methods used in comparing pupil outcomes before and after an intervention. One is the more obvious: this is a *longitudinal* study, following the same pupils over the course of the intervention. A major issue in interpreting such data is that age-related changes can occur, independently of the intervention. Large-scale surveys based on self-report questionnaires consistently show that reports of being bullied decline rather steadily over the late primary and secondary age ranges (Smith, Madsen, and Moody, 1999). Thus, simple main effects for the intervention group over time are difficult to interpret. However, if it is possible to use well-matched control groups, then differential changes over time between the intervention and control groups should clarify what are intervention effects.

The other research procedure that has some practical advantages (not requiring control groups from other schools) is the *cohort time-lagged design*, or *selection cohorts design*, in which data for children who have experienced an intervention are compared with data from 'untreated' children who were in the same age/year group as them at an earlier time (see Olweus, 1993; and chapter 2). This quasi-experimental design has the disadvantage of comparing children who may have been subjected to different historical events. However, it does control for age-related changes in victimisation.

Designs sometimes differ in the time period over which measurements are taken; some studies have used repeated measures to assess both short- and longer term effects. Some studies have utilised retrospective reports, for example, students and teachers have been asked to give their judgements of what changes they have noticed in student behaviour and attitudes, and to what causes the changes may be ascribed. Clearly, this procedure relies on subjective impressions and has questionable reliability. Finally, studies have differed according to the number of schools included in the intervention programme and whether analyses have been conducted based on results from individual schools or pooled data from all the involved schools.

In this book, we have included only relatively large-scale studies in preference to studies using data from one or two schools; at the same

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time, it is acknowledged that some useful small-scale evaluations have been conducted. We mention briefly here four examples.

Some smaller scale evaluation studies

Styria, Austria

This small-scale programme took place for ten weeks in Austria between February and April 1997 (Singer, 1998; Spiel, 2000). Four classes from two different schools participated; out of these, 2 acted as the experimental (intervention) group and 2 as controls. A total of 97 pupils aged 12 and 14 years participated.

The intervention was a shortened version of the Olweus programme, with measures at school, class, and individual level, mostly focusing on the class level (setting up class rules) because of the short time scale of the programme and because only two classes from each school participated (Singer, personal communication). A German version of the Olweus questionnaire was used for data collection before and after the implementation of the programme. Outcomes for victimisation, and for bullying, showed no reduction in the intervention schools; also there were no significant differences in either victimisation or bullying rates between intervention and control schools. The authors suggest the short duration of the programme and the low level of commitment on the part of some of the participants as possible reasons for the programme's lack of effectiveness.

Kansas, USA

This study took place in 2 inner-city elementary schools (1 intervention, 1 control) over 3 school years from 1995 to 1998 (Twemlow et al., 2001). Matched age groups of third graders (numbers from 26 to 64) were compared over successive years on disciplinary referrals and suspension rates. The programme had 4 components: zero tolerance for behavioural disturbances such as bullying; a discipline plan for modelling appropriate behaviour; a physical education plan designed to teach self-regulation skills; and a mentoring programme for adults and children to avoid involvement in bullying and violence.

There were significant drops in disciplinary referrals, and for suspensions, in the intervention school, compared to little change in the control school. Teacher reports and academic results in the intervention school were also encouraging. A larger scale randomised study of elementary schools in Kansas is in progress.

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New South Wales, Australia

A small-scale intervention aimed at reducing bullying in a single co-educational high school in New South Wales, Australia, was conducted between 1995 and 1997 (Petersen and Rigby, 1999). Students from years 7, 9, 10, and 11 participated, there being 758 students in 1995 and 657 students in the same years in 1997.

The programme emphasised student participation in an anti-bullying committee which advised upon and implemented a range of anti-bullying initiatives. In addition, cases of bullying were addressed using a non-punitive method of dealing with bullying problems: the Method of Shared Concern of Pikas (1989). A pre-test/post-test design was employed without a control group. The programme was evaluated using the Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ) self-report measure (Rigby and Slee, 1995), and by retrospective reports from students who rated the effectiveness of specified components of the intervention. The results indicated that, while there was no overall reduction in bullying in 1997, there was a significantly lower proportion of year 7 students reporting being bullied by peers than previously. Student evaluations of the effectiveness of the methods indicated that the activities of the student anti-bullying committee were rated highest, especially the work of the 'school welcomers programme' for new enrolments.

Evaluations of school interventions in Italy

Menesini has reported on a number of interventions to reduce bullying in Italian schools (Menesini and Modiano, 2002). An example is a small-scale study conducted with third-grade students at an elementary school in Modena over one school year. The participants consisted of 101 children in an experimental group and 76 in a control group. Emphasis was placed on curricular activities, which included the discussion and sharing of personal experiences, role-playing activities, and the use of literature, video, and movie stimuli. An adapted Olweus questionnaire was used to assess changes in 'being bullied'. As is common, there was an increase in the control group in reportedly being bullied by others over time; by contrast, the proportion of students reporting being bullied in the experimental group decreased over the same time period. There were corresponding positive findings for reports of bullying others.

A further study conducted in two middle schools in Tuscany over a 6-year period included the creation of a school counselling service and a whole school policy against bullying (Menesini, 2000). A sharp decline in being bullied was reported between 1993 and 1996 and thereafter a

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levelling off. No significant change was found in the level of bullying others before 1996, but a significant decline in bullying others did occur between 1996 and 1999.

A more recent study has been carried out between 1999 and 2002 in schools in Venice (Menesini, 2003; Menesini et al., 2003). Teacher training, curricular work, and peer support in 2 primary and 4 middle schools produced some decline in being bullied in experimental relative to control classes. In three secondary schools the emphasis was on enhancing good communication between teachers and students about bullying and relational problems. Student ratings ($N = 263$) of the presence of bullying at each of the three schools was lower in each school after this intervention.

Plan of the book

In this book we attempt to take forward the process of understanding best practice, by including reports from 13 major intervention projects – in Norway, Finland, England, Ireland, Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, the United States, Spain, and Australia. These provide an array of different projects, methods, and outcomes, in different countries, but with a common objective: to reduce or prevent school bullying. It is important to learn from both their successes and their less-successful outcomes. In our final chapter, we summarise what might be learned and suggest important themes for future research and practice.

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