

## **Anti-bullying strategies in schools – What is done and what works**

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In this review, we discuss what schools can do about bullying, and what the evidence base is for the effectiveness of such actions. We draw on findings internationally but with some focus on the U.K. We consider the various proactive, peer support and reactive strategies that schools can and do use, to reduce bullying. We next consider the effectiveness of monitored program-based interventions, which are now quite numerous and whose findings have been subjected to meta-analyses. Finally, we suggest some future directions for research and practice.

### **Causes of bullying**

Since aggressive behaviour and inequalities of power are commonplace in human groups, including peer groups in school, bullying will often be a temptation; although undesirable, it should not be seen as pathological. But many factors may contribute to the likelihood of bullying happening. At the broadest level are societal factors, such as tolerance of violence, bullying and abuse of power in society, and portrayals in the mass media; and at the community level, neighbourhood levels of violence and safety, and socioeconomic conditions (Bowes, Arseneault, Maughan, Taylor, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2009; Elgar, Craig, Boyce, Morgan, & Vella-Zarb, 2009). At the school level, the school climate and quality of teacher and pupil relationships can have powerful effects (Anderson, Beinart, Farrington, Longman, Sturgis, & Utting, 2001; Utting, Monteiro & Ghate, 2007); and these can also operate at the class level (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). It is through the school and the peer group that most anti-bullying interventions have tried to operate, although work with parents and families is clearly also relevant. For example, involvement in bullying others is

associated with family predictors such as insecure attachment, harsh physical discipline, and being a victim with over-protective parenting (Curtner-Smith, Smith & Porter, 2010). Parental maltreatment and abuse is a likely risk factor in the bully/victim or aggressive victim group (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 2000).

Individual factors such as temperament, hyperactivity, empathy, self-esteem, and popularity can be factors in predicting bullying roles (Farrington & Baldry, 2010). Whereas some bullying children are popular, victims may have few friends, or friends who can not be trusted or who are of low status (Hodges, Malone & Perry, 1997) and may lack some social skills (Fox & Boulton, 2003), while identity-based bullying is a risk factor for those in groups perceived as different from the majority (e.g. Mishna, 2003). Although less studied, Caravita, DiBlasio and Salmivalli (2009) found that defending is predicted by feelings of self-efficacy and high sociometric standing, such that defenders can feel confident and empowered to defend, despite the strength and popularity of some bullying children.

### **School-based interventions – proactive; peer support and reactive**

The brief background on the causes of school bullying is relevant to the consideration of school-based interventions. Some of these are targeted at the whole school, or class; some at the behaviour of those doing the bullying; some at those who are victims; some at bystanders or likely defenders. Some further relevant areas of intervention or change, such as family-based interventions, or wider societal changes, are outside the scope of this review.

### **Reporting, recording and auditing for bullying**

Many schools use various forms of reporting systems and some kind of incident report form. These range from traditional paper-based systems to computer programmes. Schools need a variety of reporting systems for bullying, including paper-based, online and peer

support systems. Reporting systems need to be non-stigmatising and protect vulnerable students. An efficient centralised recording system can monitor behaviour, target students for additional support (e.g. peer support) and provide evidence for the effectiveness for a school's of anti-bullying work. Schools with effective reporting and recording systems often identify vulnerable students at intake using information provided by their feeder primary schools.

In addition, researchers have developed several methods to get the kinds of incidence figures discussed earlier. These can be useful for schools if they wish to find out how effective their anti-bullying work is. A widely used approach has been to use pupil self-report *questionnaires*, usually anonymous; this method is most suitable for large surveys, for example surveying a whole school. Although a school may devise its own questionnaire, there are a lot of pitfalls in questionnaire design so it may be best using an established version. Some examples are available from the Anti-Bullying Alliance website in England ([www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk/default.aspx](http://www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk/default.aspx)). Besides incidence, questionnaires can give information on where bullying happens, what pupils have done about it, etc. However if it is anonymous, individual bullies or victims cannot be identified.

Peer nominations provide an alternative pupil-based approach. Here pupils are asked to nominate classmates for involvement in roles such as bully, or victim. This has been used quite often for research purposes, and is probably best done by someone from outside the school so that pupils can respond in confidence. Two common instruments are by Slee and Rigby (1993), and the Salmivalli Participant Role Scale (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Multiple informants can provide good reliability in identifying bullies or victims, but this method is time consuming (involving individual interviews), and ethical issues are raised by asking pupils to identify others in this way.

## **School-based interventions**

Some school-based interventions are targeted at the whole school, or class; some at the behaviour of those doing the bullying; some at those who are victims; some at bystanders or likely defenders. The following sections discuss particular strategies that can be and are used in schools. We have broadly divided these into:

- proactive strategies can be used as a whole school approach and designed to make bullying less likely to happen
- peer support, which uses students themselves to prevent and respond to bullying
- reactive strategies, which are ways of dealing with bullying incidents once they have occurred.

Some of the evidence on the use and perceived effectiveness of these strategies comes from a national survey of schools in England, carried out between 2008 - 2010 (Thompson & Smith, 2011). The following sections discuss particular strategies that can be and are used in schools. We have divided these into broadly proactive strategies in the school and playground, designed to make bullying less likely to happen; peer support (which is both proactive and reactive); and reactive strategies, as ways of dealing with bullying incidents once they have occurred.

### **Proactive strategies**

#### *Whole school policy on bullying*

A whole school policy is a short written handout or brochure, available for everyone in the school community. It should define bullying, state the responsibilities of all concerned in the school if it happens, and clearly explain what actions will be taken to reduce bullying and deal with incidents when they occur. Since 1999, schools in England and Wales have been legally required to have some form of anti-bullying policy. School policies vary in scope (Smith, Kupferberg et al., 2012), but provide a framework for the school's response

involving the whole school community: pupils, teachers, learning mentors, school support staff, governors and parents/carers.

There is only modest evidence so far that having a good policy translates into lower rates of school bullying or violence. In Welsh schools, a significant association was reported between lower levels of bullying, and pupils reporting that the school had clear rules on bullying (Lambert et al., 2006).

#### *Adult modelling of behaviour*

Adult modelling of positive relationships and communication is used by a vast majority of English schools, and was rated highly by staff. School staff must lead by example and effectively ‘practise what they preach’, as students needed the ‘emotional intelligence of good role models’ (Thompson & Smith, 2011).

#### *School councils*

School councils involves students – usually elected representatives- who meet regularly with members of school staff to discuss and decide on policy issues, which can include anti-bullying work. This is the main form of pupil voice in most schools. School councils are inclusive for students, not only providing opportunities for student feedback but opportunities for schools to listen to them. Specialised forms of school councils include anti-bullying committees which can be effective in providing feedback about anti-bullying work from a student forum. If schools use this form of pupil voice, student recommendations and feedback must be acknowledge and acted upon, otherwise it becomes ‘tokenistic’ (Thompson & Smith, 2011).

#### *Systems that support parent/carer involvement*

Involving parents and carers in anti-bullying work has been a priority in government guidance. Parental involvement in anti-bullying work can range from regular newsletters to consultation on policies to after-school clubs to support parents of at-risk children. Parents

can be directly involved in responding to bullying incidents either through informal meetings to restorative conferences. Many schools have specific staff to liaise with parents (home-school workers; parent support advisors). Some schools find it difficult to engage parents at all, with, for example, special e-safety presentations poorly attended (Thompson & Smith, 2011).

### *Working in the playground*

A playground policy includes a strategy for appropriate behaviour in breaks and playtimes, liaison between teaching staff and lunchtime supervisors, encouraging prosocial playground games and activities. An effective playground policy and well designed play area can help to reduce rates of bullying (Safe to Learn, 2007; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Bullying in school predominately takes place outside the classroom in corridors, school grounds and outside the school gates (Blatchford, 1998). Work on the physical environment of the playground includes structuring or redesigning it to provide more creative opportunities for pupils during break and lunch times, and reduce boredom and bullying. This can be a participatory and inclusive process for pupils; strategies include playground design exercises, mapping existing use, identifying danger areas and bullying hot spots (Smith & Sharp, 1994). One study reported that improvements to the school grounds resulted in a 64% reduction in bullying (LTL National School Grounds Survey, 2003). Features of good practice include the efficient checking of the school site, setting up safe play areas or quiet rooms, and close supervision at the start and finish of the school day.

In some countries, including the U.K., playtimes are not supervised by teachers, but by lunchtime supervisors (often, volunteers from the local community). Lunchtime supervisors have a pivotal role in implementing any playground or school anti-bullying policy, but often receive little or no training for this. Training sessions can provide them with additional skills in organising games, recognising bullying behaviours, interviewing

pupils, and dealing with bullying and conflict situations. An important aspect is distinguishing bullying from playful fighting. Such training can also raise the self-esteem of lunchtime supervisors, and their status in the school community. One study found that trained lunchtime supervisors brought about a clear decrease in bullying in the playground in primary schools (Boulton, 1994).

#### *Curricular materials/approaches*

Classroom activities can be used to tackle issues associated with bullying, progressively and in an age, gender and culturally appropriate way. Such curricular approaches raise awareness of bullying and the schools' anti-bullying policy, and there is some evidence that they can develop skills, empathy, and assertiveness in confronting bullying (Smith & Sharp, 1994; Boulton & Flemington, 1996). These can include more passive activities such as literature, audiovisual materials and videos; and can take more active forms, such as drama/role play, music, debates, workshops, puppets and dolls (in early years); group work and the use of virtual environments recent computer-based games where child can act out roles and see consequences.

While there is some empirical basis for these effects, they may only be temporary if curriculum work is not backed up by continuing anti-bullying work and policy (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Schools with the most successful approaches to bullying take full account of pupils' views and dedicate curriculum and tutorial time to discussing relationships and matters like bullying. Curriculum work was most effective when delivered through creative, interactive lessons but skilled staff are essential to effective delivery (Thompson & Smith, 2011).

An evaluation of two e-safety films used by secondary schools, Childnet International's *Lets Fight It Together* about cyberbullying for KS3 and Child Exploitation and Online Protection's (CEOP) *Exposed* about sexting (i.e. sending sexually explicit

images and texts using mobile phones) for KS4 were part of a DAPHNE III project on cyberbullying. Both films and resources were rated as good by the students and staff (<http://bullyingandcyber.koinema.com/en/>).

#### *Co-operative Group Work*

Here, pupils work together to solve a common task (e.g. design a newspaper; ‘jigsaw classroom’). Cooperative group work has the potential to involve and integrate vulnerable, bullied children in the class peer group, and has been shown to help in this respect; but the activities can be disrupted by bullying children (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994).

#### *Quality Circles*

Quality circles (QCs) are problem-solving groups of pupils formed for regular classroom sessions. Subjects can include bullying. There are a set of procedures to follow about group formation; data gathering and presentation of outcomes. Paul, Smith and Blumberg (2010, in press) reported on the use of QCs in a UK secondary school in the context of understanding and reducing bullying and cyberbullying. QCs were an effective means of gathering information on bullying and cyberbullying in school. The use of the QCs was an engaging process for pupils, and encouraged young people to provide a realistic perspective on the bullying problems occurring in school. Pupils suggested a range of solutions to these problems, and the information gained was useful to staff in understanding how bullying was changing over time (for example, new forms of cyberbullying); and gave some suggestions for intervention.

#### *PSHEE: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education*

PSHEE provides school staff with a clear opportunity to work on bullying, particularly within the sections on citizenship, emotional health and well-being, and safety. PSHEE is intended to develop awareness through discussion of different types of bullying; raise awareness of the consequences of bullying and anti-social behaviour; promote assertiveness

in challenging and coping with the effects of bullying; develop confidence in coping with bullying, and giving and receiving support; and develop strategies for conflict resolution. PSHE can be a main way of delivering anti-bullying work to the whole school through the curriculum but the subject needs skilled, enthusiastic staff to deliver it effectively (Thompson & Smith, 2011).

### *Assertiveness training*

Through regular in-class or after school sessions, pupils (e.g. victims or those at risk) learn specific strategies for dealing with difficult situations – such as attempts to bully them – in assertive rather than passive or aggressive ways. They can talk about their experiences, and learn and practice effective responses. Various skills/techniques are taught, such as ‘broken record’ or ‘fogging’. Although expensive and time-consuming, training has been shown to help victims develop useful strategies and it works best with periodic refresher sessions. However, it does not solve bullying on its own (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

### **Peer support schemes**

Peer support uses the knowledge, skills and experience of children and young people themselves in a planned and structured way to prevent and reduce bullying. Selected students are trained to be *peer supporters*, to deal with interpersonal conflicts, social exclusion and bullying in proactive and non-violent ways. Peer support schemes can also be used reactively, to respond to bullying incidents and support all involved. In primary schools, buddies and befrienders generally look out for pupils at breaktimes, who are upset or lonely. Playleaders or Playground pals lead structured games activities. In the secondary sector, peer supporters, usually from older year groups, can be used to support younger students at transition and can also provide one to one mentoring/counselling for bullied students in a designated room. Schemes include peer mentoring; peer listening/counselling and peer mediation.

There are various ways to contact peer supporters. Primary schools might have a bench in the playground where children can go if they are feeling sad or have no one to play with; a trained peer supporter will then go to talk to them. In secondary schools, there is more commonly a confidential area such as a private room, manned by peer supporters at lunchtimes, where pupils can go to seek help or, alternatively contact can be made through a worry/bully box or the school intranet. Peer supporters can be identified by badges; a special notice board with their photographs and special introductory assemblies.

The success of peer support schemes is dependent on active commitment of staff and that clear objectives and ground rules are established for all aspects of the process. The evaluations of peer support in relation to peer supporters, users of the schemes, and school climate, are considered in another chapter in this book (Cowie & Smith). Particular types of peer support schemes and some evaluations of their effectiveness are presented in the next sections.

#### *Circles of friends/Circles of support /Supportive friends*

In these circles, volunteer pupils are trained to befriend and support other pupils who are identified as isolated or rejected by their peers and hence vulnerable to bullying. Training involves increasing empathic skills, developing a flexible and creative method to form positive relationships with peers, and ingenuity in devising practical strategies to support victims.

#### *Befriending*

In befriending schemes, peer supporters are trained to offer support and friendship to pupils in everyday situations. Some schemes are based on playground buddies (clearly identifiable by special caps/clothing) helping lonely or bullied children during breaktimes or lunchtimes. Other schemes focus on organising playground games, or on running lunchtime clubs which are open to all but offer companionship to lonely pupils. Befrienders

can be the same age or older than their target group. They are supported or supervised by school staff and need training in listening skills, confidentiality issues, assertiveness and leadership. Playground buddy schemes can be helpful but may be underused if users feel exposed or stigmatised. Buddies may be teased about special cap/clothes. Usually running lunchtime activities can avoid these problems (Smith & Watson, 2004).

#### *Peer mentoring*

Peer mentoring schemes aim for a supportive relationship between two pupils, combining practical advice and encouragement. They are especially used for supporting a pupil at challenging times (e.g. joining a new school, bereavement or bullying). Peer mentors are known to the rest of the school (e.g. through assemblies, PSHEE, newsletter) and are contactable via a 'bully box', the school intranet, or referral by member of staff. In secondary schools, older pupil mentors can help train younger ones. Mentoring is most effective when agreed ways of working are clear and there is good staff supervision and support of the mentors (Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Smith & Watson, 2004).

#### *Peer mediation*

Peer mediation is a problem solving process. It encourages pupils to define the problem; identify and agree key issues, discuss and brainstorm possible options; negotiate a plan of action and agreement and follow-up and evaluate outcomes. Pupil mediators are trained in conflict resolution skills and in helping individuals resolve disputes. There is little hard evidence of the efficacy of such schemes (Baginsky, 2004), although in one study a peer mediation scheme in three Canadian primary school playgrounds helped reduce physically aggressive playground behaviour by over a half (Cunningham, Cunningham, Martorelli, Tran, Young, & Zacharias, 1998).

#### *Bystander (defender) training*

This involves intervention action on the part of pupil bystanders when they witness peer victimisation; defenders try and intervene to stop the bullying or comfort pupils who experience bullying. Rigby and Johnson (2006) showed a video depicting bullying in the presence of bystanders to late primary and early secondary school students in Australia: 43% indicated that they were likely to help the victim. Significant predictors of bystander behaviour included being in a younger age group (i.e. primary school), having rarely or never bullied others, having (reportedly) previously intervened, a positive attitude to victims, and believing that parents and friends (but not teachers) expected them to act to support victims. Girls reported more defending behaviour than boys.

### *CyberMentors*

A U.K. charity, Beatbullying, launched a new form of virtual peer support called CyberMentors in 2009. Students are trained in 2-day workshops. Staff are briefed separately by the Beatbullying trainers. Cybermentors and mentees log on and mentor on demand. The website, moderated by Beatbullying staff, has a software filter to protect the identity of mentors and mentees and screen online dialogue. Cybermentors can refer mentees on to senior cybermentors and counsellors for further support if necessary. The CyberMentor scheme has been evaluated by Banerjee, Robinson and Smalley (2010), Thompson and Smith (2011) and more recently as part of a DAPHNE III project on cyberbullying (<http://bullyingandcyber.koinema.com/en/>).

The training is rated highly by students, although some staff wanted more feedback and continuing support after the initial training session for students. Of those cybermentors and cybermentees completing an online questionnaire, most were female, aged 11-18 years. Cybermentors and mentees who reported cyberbullying incidents said that most lasted several weeks; involved social networking sites and that the victims knew the perpetrators,

who were about the same age. The Beatbullying website was rated as easy to use and safe and cybermentors as easy to contact and talk to.

### *General evaluation of peer support schemes*

Cowie and Smith (2010, and this book) argue that as a means of reducing bullying, peer support schemes could operate (a) through a general improvement in the school environment, (b) through helping individual pupils who use the scheme to stop being victimised, and (c) to reduce general rates of bullying throughout the school. The evidence from a number of studies is that there is good evidence for the first: schools using well-managed peer support schemes are seen as being more caring and concerned about pupil well-being, and the schemes are known and supported by pupils and staff. In addition, there is good evidence that the peer supporters themselves generally benefit from the experience (Houlston & Smith, 2009). There is certainly evidence from individual cases for (b): some pupils, who use peer support schemes for reasons of being bullied, do report being helped. However there is only very equivocal evidence regarding (c): most of the relevant studies do not report significant changes in general levels of bullying behaviour as a result of implementing a peer support scheme.

Evaluation studies also show that the success of peer support schemes varies considerably. Crucial issues include the selection and training of peer supporters; the gender balance in recruitment (there are often more girl than boy volunteers, particularly in the secondary sector); adequate and continuing supervision by an accessible member of staff; effective promotion of the scheme; and sufficient take-up that peer supporters feel positive in their role (Cowie & Smith, 2010).

### **Reactive strategies**

Reactive strategies deal with bullying situations when they have arisen. Their success/effectiveness is dependent on clear and effective pupil reporting systems to enable

pupils to report bullying incidents, including confidential and varied routes to report bullying; effective and fair investigation; listening strategies; and follow-up systems to ensure that agreements are sustained. Reactive strategies range from more punitive or sanction-based approaches, through restorative practices, to more indirect and non-punitive approaches. In England, the DfE recommends that bullying should always incur some form of sanction: “Schools should apply disciplinary measures to pupils who bully in order to show clearly that their behaviour is wrong” (DfE, 2011). Many professionals however prefer less direct approaches, at least for less severe cases of bullying. A school’s philosophy on this should be evident in their anti-bullying policy.

#### *Direct sanctions*

Direct sanctions are not so much one strategy or method, but a collective term describing a range of punishments used by schools, which may vary in severity and be used on a graded scale if bullying persists. Sanctions can range through reprimands/ serious talks from the Headteacher; meetings involving parents or carers; temporary removal from class; withdrawal of privileges and rewards; disciplinary measures such as detentions; punishment such as litter-picking/ school clean-ups; through to temporary or permanent exclusion. Direct sanctions are expected to impress on the perpetrator that what he/she has done is unacceptable and promote understanding of the limits of acceptable behaviour; give an opportunity for pupils who bully to face up to the harm they have caused and learn from it; deter him/her from repeating that behaviour; signal to other pupils that the behaviour is unacceptable and deter them from doing it; and demonstrate publicly that school rules and policies are to be taken seriously.

There is little evidence on the effectiveness of direct sanctions. In England, Thompson and Smith (2011) found that the vast majority of schools (92%) used direct sanctions to respond to some bullying incidents, more than any other strategy.. However,

only 62% of schools reported that the bullying stopped as a result. In secondary schools, direct sanctions were the preferred strategy for physical bullying; bullying through damaging belongings; race-related bullying; homophobic bullying and cyberbullying.

Direct sanctions work best as a clear set of consequences expressed in the anti-bullying policy and mostly used within the framework of other strategies (e.g. restorative approaches). Some secondary schools now use a 'seclusion' or 'isolation' room as a form of internal exclusion for problematic behaviour, including bullying.

### *Restorative Approaches*

Restorative Approaches emphasise a restoration of good relationships, rather than retribution. They cover a hierarchy of flexible responses, ranging from informal conversations through to formal facilitated meetings or conferences. In a *short or 'mini' conference*, an informal meeting is held between the pupils involved, led by a trained member of staff, in which incidents and harm caused are examined, and the offender(s) are asked to discuss possible means of reparation. In a *full restorative conference*, a formal, structured meeting takes place involving pupils, along with their parents/carers, friends, and school representatives, who are brought together to discuss and resolve an incident. The staff member leading the conference is highly trained, and prior to this large meeting, holds individual interviews with the participants to ensure a full conference is appropriate, and that everyone is completely prepared for it.

The underlying principle is to resolve conflict and repair harm by focusing on the perpetrator, who is made aware of the victim's feelings, encouraged to acknowledge the impact of what they have done and given an opportunity to make reparation; those who have suffered have the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made (Restorative Justice Consortium, 2005). In practice, schools may resort to sanctions

if a pupil refuses 'to restore' or does not abide by the decisions reached. Such sanctions can be placed in a restorative framework.

Restorative approaches are being increasingly used in schools for all types of anti-social/inappropriate behaviour, including bullying. The majority of anti-bullying leads in local authorities in England recommended restorative approaches for bullying, with 69% of schools actually using restorative approaches, second only to direct sanctions (Thompson & Smith, 2011). Effective use of restorative justice depends on pupils being able to talk about feelings and relationship issues. A good 'seedbed' for this is *problem solving circles/circle time*. Although used more in the primary sector, circle time experiences can facilitate simple restorative approaches such as restorative reminders, restorative discussions, and restorative thinking plans and could be used with Yr 7s.

Some evaluations have reported successful outcomes of restorative practices in schools. In the U.K., a national evaluation found that 92% of conferences were resolved successfully, and three months later, 96% of agreements remained intact (Youth Justice Board, 2004). Most school staff reported that their school had benefited, although no general improvements in pupil attitudes were found at a whole school level. Other evaluations acknowledge that while restorative approaches may offer a more positive approach to repairing harm, they raise important concerns about restorative practices becoming 'a form of social control', as much of the language is derived from the criminal justice system (e.g. offender, perpetrator and victim) (Cremin, 2010). Sherman and Strang (2007) recommend that to be effective, restorative practice needs to be adopted as a whole school approach fully supported by senior management, and with adequate training in restorative techniques for staff. Without this radical change to a restorative ethos, tensions can arise between the prevailing practices of the school, often sanction-based, and restorative principles. Thompson and Smith (2011) collected 285 bullying

incident forms from 35 case study schools, which showed that those schools using restorative approaches with whole staff training and the consistent application of restorative strategies were more successful at stopping bullying (79%) than less consistent (64%) and non-restorative schools (58%). Direct sanctions were still used if students 'refuse to restore'.

#### *The Pikas Method or Method of Shared Concern*

The Shared Concern, or Pikas method, was developed in Sweden by Pikas (1989, 2002) as a non-punitive counselling based approach used to deconstruct the group dynamic of bullying. It uses a combination of individual and group meetings, structured around five consecutive phases: individual talks with suspected bullies; individual talk with the victim; preparatory group meeting; summit meeting; and follow up of the results. This approach is expected to sensitise bullying children to the harm they are doing to the victim (enabled by a lack of hostile blaming attitude on the part of the interviewer), encourage positive behaviours to the victim, and also encourage provocative victims to change their behaviour in positive ways.

In an independent evaluation (Smith, Cowie & Sharp, 1994), 21 primary and secondary school teachers were trained in the Pikas method; all felt that it was an appropriate and helpful response to bullying, and among pupils who experienced it, three quarters reported that bullying had decreased following the intervention. This improvement was attributed to pupils being given the chance to openly express their feelings, and formulate their own solution to resolve the situation. However in some cases the bullying child(ren) had switched their attention from the initial victim, to another child outside of the group. The authors concluded that the Pikas Method is a useful short term intervention for reducing bullying behaviours, but in the case of very persistent bullying, further interventions may be required. A recent Australian evaluation found that the method was

‘well endorsed’ by practitioners using it; ‘highly successful’ in improving the situation for bullied students and ‘generally helpful’ in improving the attitudes and behaviour of bullying pupils. Further research was needed to identify which cases were most suited to the application of the Pikas Method (Rigby & Griffiths, 2010).

Thompson and Smith (2011) found that only 5% of schools in England (mostly primary) used the Pikas method, with little staff training to support delivery. It was seen as an ‘educative process’ for those involved. However many schools had no knowledge of the method or confused it with information gathering after a bullying incident.

#### *Support Group Method (Seven Steps approach)*

The Support Group method (formerly called the No Blame approach) was developed by Robinson and Maines (2007). It is a non-punitive approach which aims to change problem behaviours through a mixture of peer pressure to elicit a prosocial response, and self realisation of the harm and suffering caused to the victim. There are seven steps: the facilitator talks individually to the bullied pupil; a group meeting of 6 to 8 students is then set up, some suggested by the victim but without his/her presence; the facilitator explains to the group that the victim has a problem, but does not discuss the incidents that have taken place; the facilitator assures the group no punishment will be given, but instead all participants must take joint responsibility to make the victim feel happy and safe; each group member gives their own ideas on how the victim can be helped; the facilitator ends the meeting, with the group given responsibility for improving the victim’s safety and well being; follow-up individual meetings are held with group members one week after the meeting to establish how successful the intervention has been.

The Support Group Method works on the premise of lasting change rather than retribution, and is expected to develop emotional awareness, peer support and social skills, and empathy of pupils involved. Young (1998), in a slight adaptation of the method,

reported that of 51 support group sessions studied, 80% resulted in immediate success and 14% a delayed success; with the remaining 6% having only limited success. An evaluation by Smith, Howard and Thompson (2007) assessed the use of and support for the Support Group Method within 59 schools across England. Just over half of the schools surveyed rated the effectiveness of the method as very satisfactory, while 30% said it was rather satisfactory and the remainder were neutral. The Support Group Method was found to be adapted considerably in use, so that the 'seven steps' were not always followed as above; issues of parental involvement, and backup availability of sanctions, were commonly mentioned. No direct evidence was provided as to whether the Support Group Method was able to support and improve the behaviour of pupils who bullied others.

Thompson and Smith (2011) found that 10% of schools used the support group method, with over a third of anti-bullying leads in local authorities recommending its use for bullying. The strategy was used most for relational and verbal bullying. It was seen as encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions through empathy with the bullied student. Some schools use it because it was non-confrontational and avoided 'punishment', with others refusing to use it as it avoided directly assigning blame or responsibility.

### **Program interventions**

So far we have discussed individual components of anti-bullying interventions; but of course, most schools use some combination of these. For example in England, a survey of 148 schools in 2002 that had used a government anti-bullying pack, Samara and Smith (2008) found that many schools reported using other methods; for example, 80% used circle time, 74% used drama/role play, 57% trained playground supervisors, 28% used either Support Group or Pikas (i.e. non-punitive) approaches; these figures indicate that many schools use a variety of methods in combination.

Internationally, there are programs available with a structured set of components and sequence of activities. These include the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) in Norway, KiVa in Finland, and SAVE and ANDAVE in Spain. There are now a considerable number of pre/post test studies that have examined the effect of program-based interventions against bullying; a detailed description of 14 such studies can be found in Smith, Pepler and Rigby (2004), and a discussion in a Special issue of the *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (Spiel, Salmivalli & Smith, 2011).

#### *The OBPP in Norway*

The first program intervention was the Norwegian Nationwide campaign against bullying, which was launched through mass publicity in 1983, and involved a survey in schools; resources for teachers (curricular materials and videos) and advice for parents. This was developed by Olweus into the OBPP (Olweus, 1999). The fully-evolved OBPP has school-level components (such as a Bullying Prevention coordinating Committee, introducing school rules against bullying), classroom-level components (such as class meetings and meetings with parents), individual-level components (such as serious talks and intervention plans for involved students), and community-level components (such as supportive partnerships with community members); for full details see Olweus and Limber (2010).

The First Bergen Project (1983-85) involved 42 schools using an early version of the OBPP as an addition to the Norwegian Nationwide campaign. The effect on rates of bullying was dramatic with reported victim rates falling by around 50%, for both boys and girls. There were also reductions in anti-social behaviour and general improvements in school climate. A second Bergen project (1997-98) involved 14 intervention schools and 16 comparison schools. Bullying decreased by between 21-38% in intervention schools, with no change or increase in comparison schools. A first Oslo project (2001-2002) was used in 37 schools, which showed reductions of some 30-45% in victimisation and

bullying. More recently, Olweus and Limber (2010) report findings associated with a New National initiative in Norway, with reductions in the range of 37%-49%. The success of the OBPP in Norway is thus substantial and well-replicated.

*The OBPP outside Norway*

The program has been used outside Norway, but with less consistent success (see also Olweus & Limber, 2010). In Canada, the Toronto project, 1991-93 (Pepler, Craig, O'Connell, Atlas & Charach, 2004) used a program largely modelled on the OBPP with a range of school, class and individual level interventions in four elementary (primary) schools. A peer mediation program was also used in three schools. Rates of victimisation showed a reduction of about .5%, and rates of bullying actually showed a small increase, of about 2%. In Germany, the Schleswig-Holstein project, 1994-96 (Hanewinkel, 2004) used the OBPP school, class and individual level interventions, in 37 primary and secondary schools. There were quite small decreases in victim and bully rates up to age 16, but some increase at ages 17-18. In the Netherlands, Fekkes and Verloove-Vanhorick (2006) worked with 15 intervention and 30 control schools, using a program modelled on the OBPP with an emphasis on written anti-bullying policy. They found that victim rates decreased by 25% in intervention compared to control schools in the first year, but with no significant effects at second year follow-up. In the USA, Limber (2004) reported on the South Carolina project, 1994-95, with 11 intervention schools and 28 control schools, using the OBPP with added peer community involvement measures. No significant effects were found in victim rates, but bullying rates were reduced by some 25% in intervention schools compared to some increase in control schools. Bauer, Lozano and Rivara (2007) reported on the Seattle project, 2003-2005, with 10 intervention schools, and 3 control schools, using the OBPP. There were no significant main effects on victim rates, attitudes to

intervene, or perceptions of safety, but there was a significant improvement in intervention schools in perceptions of other students as likely to intervene.

As Olweus and Limber (2010, p.397) comment in their own review: “Although these findings are clearly encouraging, it should also be noted that the results from these studies have not been uniformly positive”. In summary, the OBPP has proved highly effective in Norway, but so far, has not translated so effectively into other cultural contexts.

*Programs with more limited similarity to OBPP*

In England, the main program intervention was the Sheffield project, from 1991-93 (Smith & Sharp, 1994). This used 23 intervention schools and 4 control schools. It embodied developing a whole school policy, plus a choice from a range of other intervention components (curriculum work, quality circles, assertiveness training, playground work, peer support). There was a reduction in victimization rates of around 17% in being bullied for primary schools, but only around 3-5% in secondary schools; there was however a high positive correlation between the amount of effort put in by schools, and the outcomes achieved.

In Belgium, the Flanders project, from 1995-97, used a program modelled on the Bergen (early OBPP) and Sheffield programs (Stevens & van Oost, 2004). It worked with 18 schools, 3 primary and 3 secondary schools each in Treatment with Support; Treatment without Support; and Control. Comparing the Treatment to Control schools, the finding was a mixed pattern of positive changes in primary school and zero outcomes in secondary schools. Support by the research team made little difference.

*Spain: SAVE*

The SAVE (Sevilla Anti-Violencia Escolar) project was carried out in Seville between 1995-96 and 1999-2000. The intervention program was inspired by the Sheffield and Bergen projects but developed independently. It had four parts: the democratic

management of interpersonal relationships; co-operative group work and the curriculum; training in emotions, attitudes and values; and direct interventions for pupils at risk or involved in bullying (Ortega, del Rey and Mora-Merchan, 2004). 10 schools participated in the intervention program, with pupils aged 8-18 years. Five of these schools took part in a post-intervention survey four years after the initial survey. Three different schools participated in the post-test as control schools; however these schools did not have pre-test data, so this was not a full experimental design.

For numbers of pupils involved, in the intervention schools there were reductions of 57% for victimization, and 16% for bullying. The proportion of bully/victims (those taking part in bullying and also being bullied) decreased by 57% and that of bystanders increased by 7%. The post-test results showed a significantly lower incidence of bullying problems at intervention schools, compared with control schools. There was an increase of 16% of children reporting that relationships with their peers were positive, and a reduction in long-term victims (those reporting being victimized for a year or more) of 41%.

*Finland: KiVa project*

A recent and ongoing program in Finland, 2006-2009, the KiVa Koulu program, is both innovative in its methods and producing findings on a level with the OBPP in Norway (Salmivalli, Kärnä, & Poskiparta, 2010). KiVa includes universal interventions (e.g. via the classroom) and targeted interventions (individual discussions with victims and bullying children, and using prosocial, high-status peers to be defenders). The classroom work includes an anti-bullying virtual learning environment; the KiVa computer game uses simulated characters and episodes learn facts and try out strategies, which can then be applied to everyday life at school. Evaluations have been encouraging, with reductions of around 34-37%. You need to mention that, as in other program interventions, KIVA is more effective in the primary sector than secondary.

### **Overviews and meta-analyses of large-scale interventions**

There have been several reviews and meta-analyses of the anti-bullying program studies such as those reviewed above. The most thorough have been Ttofi, Farrington and Baldry (2008) and Ttofi and Farrington (2011); in the latter review, a meta-analysis of 44 school-based intervention programmes internationally, found that on average, these reduced bullying by around 20-23% and victimisation by around 17-20%. There is considerable variation in outcomes, as shown in the previous section. Ttofi and Farrington also examined, across programs, which program components are most associated with success. For reducing victim rates, most associated with success were use of videos, disciplinary methods, work with peers, parent training, and cooperative group work. For reducing bullying, most associated with success were parent training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, school conferences, videos, information for parents, classroom rules, and classroom management.

The overall conclusion of reductions of around 20% or more appears a robust finding, and quite encouraging. The conclusions drawn about individual component effectiveness are an important step forward, but some (such as the desirability of focussing on older rather than younger children; or not using peer support strategies) have been criticised (Smith, Salmivalli & Cowie, 2012). Their analysis was limited historically in that the interventions surveyed cover some 25 years, whereas methods of intervention have been and still are being developed and changed. Some of their analyses (for example, suggesting that work with peers is relatively ineffective; or that disciplinary methods are advantageous) depend very much on how terms such as ‘work with peers’ and ‘disciplinary methods’ are interpreted. A surprising result reported from their meta-analyses is that the programs worked better with older children. This is contrary to a review made by Smith

(2010), who examined where direct within-program comparisons could be made between older and younger pupils; from these, it was clear that there were usually better findings (or sometimes no difference) with younger pupils. Olweus and Limber (2010, p.393) also remark that “it may take longer time to achieve consistently good results in grades 8-10 than in lower grades”. The different findings from the Farrington reviews here may result from comparisons being made across quite different projects (rather than within-project), plus the omission of some studies (such as the Flanders project) where the data available was not suitable for some of their analyses.

### **Conclusions**

The advent of cyberbullying in the last decade poses new challenges for anti-bullying interventions. There is considerable overlap in involvement in traditional forms of bullying and cyberbullying, but some distinctive features of cyberbullying also require other forms of intervention, including education on rights and responsibilities online (Bauman, 2010). Interventions also need to build on our increasing knowledge of roles in bullying, motivations for bullying, and the impact of the peer group. Empathy and responsibility training may be challenging for certain children, for example those exhibiting callous-unemotional traits (Frick & White, 2008). Caravita et al. (2009) showed the importance of peer factors in effective defending, and this has been built on in the KiVa project (Salmivalli et al., 2010).

Over the last two decades a range of anti-bullying interventions have become available, and are disseminated and widely employed, in schools in western industrialised countries. Reviews suggest that these have some success and are worthwhile in terms of reducing suffering and ultimately enhancing school climate and good citizenship. There is still much to be learnt, particularly about the effectiveness of specific intervention components. One area of continuing controversy is the relative effectiveness of more sanctions-based or

disciplinary approaches, with non-punitive approaches (with restorative practices perhaps located between these). Another area of debate is whether we should pursue ‘bullying-focussed’ solutions, or work generally on relationships and school climate and improve ‘convivencia’ – a Spanish word that is the opposite of bullying and implies respect and co-existence. Finally, cyberbullying provides new challenges, as being a relatively new form of bullying with its own characteristics and somewhat different modes of effective intervention (see Willard, 2006; Mora-Merchan & Jäger, 2010). Nevertheless, school bullying is an area where research and practice have gone hand in hand over recent years, with good evidence that the outcomes have improved pupil well-being and happiness.

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