AN EVALUATION OF AN ANTI-BULLYING INTERVENTION IN TORONTO SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of the Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention. The effectiveness of the Anti-Bullying Intervention was examined with quantitative and qualitative data gathered before and 18 months after its implementation.

The results of this research confirm that bullying continues to be a pervasive problem in Toronto schools. There were some improvements in students' reports of bullying as assessed at the individual, peer, and school levels. Over the first 18 months of the program, children reported increased teacher interventions to stop bullying. More bullies indicated that teachers had talked to them, but there were no differences in the proportion of bullies or victims who had discussed their problems with parents. Fewer children indicated that they could join in a bullying episode following the intervention. There was an increase in the number of children who admitted to bullying, but a decrease in the number of children who had been victimized during the past five days. These inconsistent results raise several issues related to implementing the Anti-Bullying Intervention.

Violence is becoming an increasing concern within our communities. To understand and intervene in the problem of violence, we must consider its developmental roots. Aggressive habits learned early in life form the foundations for later behaviours (American Psychological Association, 1993). Children's experi-

ences within their family, peer group, school, and broader community are influential in the development and maintenance of aggressive behaviour patterns. This paper examines the problem of bullying at school, which is one type of aggressive behaviour that may portend problems of violence later in life (Farrington, 1993). The development, components, and 18-month evaluation of the Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention are described in this paper.

Bullying comprises physically or verbally aggressive behaviours directed at a child who is powerless to defend him or herself (see Olweus, 1991). The behaviour is repeated over time and there is a power differential between the bully and the victim, by virtue of size, reputation, or numbers. Bullying may be direct or indirect and comprises a continuum of behaviours including teasing, gossip, subtle social exclusion, extortion, verbal attacks through to severe physical abuse. A Bullying Survey conducted in Toronto schools indicated that bullying is a pervasive problem: 15% of the students acknowledged bullying others more than once or twice during the term and 20% of the students said they had been victimized more than once or twice during the term (Ziegler & Rosenstein-Manner, 1991). Observations of children on the school playground indicate that bullying occurs frequently; however, teachers and other children intervene very infrequently to help victims (in 4% and 11% of the episodes, respectively) (Craig & Pepler, 1994a). The behaviours of bullies, victims, and peers unfold within the wider system of the school where adults are unaware of the extent of the problems and other children are unsure about whether or how to get involved.

In response to the results of this Bullying Survey, the Toronto Board of Education implemented a pilot Anti-Bullying Intervention in four elementary schools. It was modelled after a national intervention in Norway which was designed to: increase awareness of and knowledge about the problem, including dispelling myths; actively involve teachers and parents in planning and implementation; develop clear rules against bullying behaviour; and provide support and protection for victims, with an emphasis on eliminating their isolation within the peer group (Olweus, 1987). The Norwegian program comprises a systemic approach to reducing bullying with components at each of the school, parent, classroom/peer, and individual levels (Olweus, 1991; Roland, 1993). It combines primary and secondary prevention: all children in a school participate in activities to increase their understanding and to provide them with skills to deal with bullying. Individual children who experience problems related to bullying and victimization are provided with additional guidance.

The Norwegian program reduced bully/victim problems by 50% over two years, with no displacements of bullying from the school yard to unsupervised locations (Olweus, 1991). Other positive effects included a reduction in theft, vandalism, and truancy, as well as an increase in students' satisfaction with school (Olweus, 1991). Based on follow-up data, Roland (1993) cautions that the most successful effects were seen in schools with a strong commitment to implementing the program; whereas few, and sometimes detrimental effects were evident in schools which made minimal implementation efforts. Similar intervention efforts are currently being conducted in the United Kingdom (Sharp & Smith, 1993). Preliminary evaluations of the U.K. intervention indicate significant decreases in physical and verbal bullying (Smith & Sharp, 1993).

The Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention was based upon the Norwegian model with adaptations for Canadian educational methods, cultural norms, and ethnic diversity. There are important differences between the Norwegian and Toronto experiences in the precipitating factors and program development. Following three pre-adolescent suicides apparently linked to extensive victimization, the Norwegian government mandated that every classroom in every school in the country would have a program to combat bullying (Olweus, 1991). In Norway there was a coordinated, nationally based effort with the Ministry of Education financing both the development of the program and its evaluation. Norwegian schools were provided with a video and a package of written materials on the background and management of bullying. Roland (1993) notes that the Norwegian campaign had been founded on 10 years of efforts during which research fostered public and professional concern about bullying which was translated into wide media coverage and support for the intervention. In the U.K., the development of interventions has been directed by researchers such as Smith and his colleagues or by professors of education, such as Tattum (1993).

Our Canadian experience is different and considerably more modest. Rather than being provided with a fully developed nationally mandated program, teachers and administrators with extensive practical experience, but limited knowledge of the research and literature on bullying, were given the task of developing the intervention. The Toronto schools have gradually developed the Anti-Bullying Intervention from the bottom up, with school staff working toward identifying solutions to the problem of bullying in their own schools. There has been no established policy or anti-bullying code for schools, no specially prepared films available to carry the message, no curriculum manual for teachers, and no prepared pamphlets for parents. Although a nationally supported program would be most beneficial in the current Canadian context where violence in schools is a growing concern, there has not been a national outcry to instigate such a broad effort. Therefore, the current intervention and evaluation reflect an implementation within an education system in which control and initiative essentially reside within individual schools and classrooms, with resources available from central board services, upon request. The Anti-Bullying Intervention has relatively modest costs, and if effective, may be broadly generalizable to other school contexts.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TORONTO
ANTI-BULLYING INTERVENTION

The pilot phase of the Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention began in the fall of 1991. During the previous summer, two team leaders were designated from each of the four Toronto schools involved in the pilot intervention. These team leaders met to learn about bullying and the Norwegian Intervention Program and to consider the adaptation and implementation of an anti-bullying program at their schools. The planning team recognized that the Anti-Bullying Intervention would only succeed with the motivation and support of administrators and teachers in the schools, hence this became a primary goal for the first year of implementation. Team leaders from the four pilot schools have continued to meet over the past two years to address concerns and further develop program components.

The school, community (parents), class/peer, and individual levels of the Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention are described in turn as they have been adapted from the Norwegian intervention. The implementation across schools has varied somewhat; however, all schools have introduced three critical elements: staff training, codes of behaviour, and improved playground supervision (for a fuller description, see Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1993).

School Level

In the Norwegian intervention, core components at the school level include a school conference day, improved recess supervision and playground organization and equipment, regular staff meetings for continuing education, and monitoring of the program within the school (Olweus, 1994). Olweus prepared a 32-page booklet for teachers to inform them of the problems of bullying and strategies for addressing them (Olweus, 1994).

In Toronto, the goal of eliciting motivation and support for the intervention was met in all schools during the first year of implementation. Teachers participated in a school conference day on bullying and victimization. Adult supervision was increased on the playgrounds and in the hallways, prime locations for bullying according to students' reports. Additional play equipment was purchased for outdoor activities. Codes of behaviour were being developed and implemented in all schools. The behaviour codes state the behaviours that are not allowed, but also identify positive rights and responsibilities of those within the school (students and adults). Consequences for misdemeanours are clearly spelled out for the students, staff, and parents. A common understanding and commitment to the school-wide policy is the first step in creating a school climate that discourages bullying (Tattum, 1993).

Parent Level

In Norwegian schools, there were regular parent-teacher meetings to inform parents of the problem of bullying and of the signs associated with a child's victimization. Parents and teachers worked together to enhance school climate, increase supervision during recess and lunch, and promote school/home contact. In addition to meeting around the problem of bullying, resources were available to support parent involvement. Olweus developed a four-page booklet which was distributed to parents of school children throughout the country (Olweus, 1994). A video depicting various bullying scenes involving both boys and girls was developed and shown to teachers, parents, and children. The bullying episodes are graphic and deliver a cogent message about bullying and its consequences.

The Toronto Board of Education has recently produced a booklet on bullying and an excellent film to raise sensitivity and concern for the problem of bullying within a Canadian context.[1] A pamphlet for parents has yet to be prepared and distributed. Parents of children in the four pilot schools haves been informed of the program through newsletters and parent meetings. Parents have been encouraged to talk to their children about bullying and to be aware of potential signs of victimization.

Classroom Level

Within the Norwegian program, there were several components at the classroom level. Class rules were established in collaboration with the children, such as no bullying will be tolerated, anyone witnessing bullying is responsible for intervening or getting assistance, and efforts will be made to include isolated children. Another important component at the class level was regular class meetings to discuss the rules and any infractions, to develop fair sanctions, and to encourage an awareness and concern for victims.

In Toronto, a number of activities on bullying were introduced to change students' attitudes and behaviours related to bullying, such as drama and language units relating to bullying and exclusion. Teachers used short stories and novels with bullying themes to stimulate class discussions. Classroom discussions were also provided through "Learning Circle," which allows students to talk in a safe and structured way, without threat of judgement. This activity trains children to listen respectfully and provides teachers with the opportunity to relate the anti-bullying concepts to real, everyday incidents and interactions among the classmates. A mentoring program involving small groups of students with a teacher was implemented in the senior grades. Like Learning Circle, it provided an opportunity for students to address interpersonal, non-academic concerns in a comfortable and supportive climate.

Although not part of the Norwegian program, the three primary schools in the Toronto program have implemented a peer conflict-mediation program which trains children to intervene in conflicts on the playground and elsewhere. The conflict mediation does not exclusively target bullying, but includes any interpersonal conflict which children need help in resolving. Mediators can initiate the intervention, or they can respond to a child's request. Teacher support is always available to assist in mediating a conflict and is critical in a bullying situation where there is a power differential. An example of this type of intervention is the Peacemakers program (Roderick, 1988).

Individual Bullies and Victims

In Norway, the core components at the individual level include serious talks with bullies and victims, as well as with their parents. In response to bully/victim problems, Toronto teachers have talked to students collectively, and to bullies and victims individually. Talks with bullies emphasize the unacceptability of bullying and reiterate established sanctions. Talks with bullies' parents inform them of their children's difficulties and enlist their cooperation in disciplining bullying behaviour and monitoring for further occurrences. Talks with victims encourage them to speak up and confirm the school's intention to follow-up to ensure that the victim is protected from further harassment. Talks with victims' parents enlist their support in identifying victimization and providing support for their children. Toronto schools adopted the same approach and were asked to keep logs of bullying episodes as a form of documentation and communication about those children involved and steps taken to address the problems.

The Toronto program was evaluated with the questionnaire developed by Olweus and used in the Toronto Bullying Survey (Ziegler, Charach, & Pepler,

1993). Pretest questionnaires were completed prior to program implementation in the fall of 1991. Preliminary assessment data were collected six months after the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Intervention and are reported in detail elsewhere (Pepler et al., 1993). The preliminary evaluation indicated a 30% reduction in reported incidents of bullying when children were asked, "How many times have you been bullied in the last five days?" Fewer children reported spending time alone at recess and at lunch following six months of intervention. There was, however, no significant change in children's reports of the prevalence of bullying in the last two months, racial bullying, peer intervention, or in discussions about bullying with adults. Children reported significantly less adult intervention in the spring than in the fall. Finally, fewer children reported being uncomfortable observing bullying in the spring than in the fall.

We recognize that a comprehensive intervention such as the Anti-Bullying Intervention takes considerable time and effort to implement across the various systems. The preliminary results are, nevertheless, encouraging with respect to the possibility of reducing bully/victim problems in school. In the next section, we describe the subsequent assessment, conducted 18 months following the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Intervention.

METHOD

Both quantitative and qualitative assessments were conducted to evaluate the first 18 months of the Anti-Bullying Intervention. The quantitative assessment provided information on the reduction of bullying in the schools and behaviour change. The qualitative assessment provided an evaluation of the process of implementing the Anti-Bullying Intervention.

Participants

The four pilot schools were selected because of their interest in the problem of bullying and willingness to commit time, energy, and resources to the intervention. The four schools are all located in dense urban areas and their students represent a wide variety of ethnic groups. Three of the schools had children from Kindergarten to Grade 8 (ages 5-14); the other school was a senior school, with grades 7 and 8 (ages 12-14). All students in split Grades 3/4 to Grade 8 (8 to 14 years old) completed the questionnaires. With students transferring in and out of the schools over the study period, the samples of students who completed the questionnaires at pretest and 18 months were not identical. At pretest, 1,052 students (547 boys and 505 girls) completed the questionnaire and at the 18-month assessment, 1,041 students (502 boys and 539 girls) completed the questionnaire. For the qualitative assessment, 78 teachers (74%) completed the Classroom Activities Questionnaire and eight team leaders were interviewed (two at each of the four schools).

Instrument and Procedures

The self-report questionnaire used in the previous Bullying Survey (Ziegler et al., 1993) was administered at the pretest and 18-month assessment. This English translation was based very closely on the questionnaire developed by Olweus for use in schools in Scandinavia (Olweus, 1989). The self-report questionnaire pro-

vides a definition of bullying for the students. Students answer 40 questions about their own experiences of bullying and victimization; their talks with teachers and parents; interventions by themselves, peers, and teachers; and general information such as the location of bullying. The reference period for the questions is approximately two months—since the beginning of the school year for the fall administration and since March break for the spring administration. Multiple responses are provided for each question.

Pretest data were collected in November and the 18-month data were collected at the end of May. These administration times were selected to equate the reference periods and to ensure that students had sufficient experience to report on bullying during the current school year. As in the Norwegian evaluation, the questionnaires were sent to schools with accompanying instructions and were administered to classes by teachers. Students completed the questionnaires anonymously, noting only their gender and their class.

The Classroom Activities Questionnaire was sent to teachers and completed at the same time as the student questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses whether various components of the Anti-Bullying Intervention have been implemented at the classroom level. Questions are provided in Table 1. Face-to-face interviews with team leaders at each of the four schools were based on an interview protocol developed by Olweus. In the interview, the success of implementing change at both

TABLE 1

Classroom Activities Questionnaire

Below is a list of classroom activities which may be part of the Anti-Bullying Intervention. Please place a checkmark after any which you use or have used during the school year in your classroom.

1. A written code of behaviour.
2. A written code of behaviour which mentions bullying.
3. A written code of behaviour which mentions bullying and specifies consequences for bullying.
4. Curriculum units on friendship and interpersonal respect.
5. Class meetings to talk about bullying.
6. Learning circle.
7. Books and stories about bullying, with class discussion.
8. Role-play or drama about bullying and solutions to it.
9. Talks with individual children who are bullies.
10. Talks with individual children who have been bullied.
11. Talks with parents of bullies or victims.
12. Talks with students who have witnessed bullying, but not intervened or gone for help.
13. Discussions about racism and how to avoid and/or combat it.
14. Discussions about sexism and how to avoid and/or combat it.
15. Learning or cooperative groups which are structured to include children who need to learn to appreciate one another.

If there are other strategies and activities you use to discourage bullying, please describe them. If there are other resources (training, curriculum materials, administrative support, other) that you feel you need in order to have a greater impact on bullying in your classroom and at your school, please describe them.

the behavioural and attitudinal levels was assessed. There were questions about the playground, supervision, a policy for consistent responses and consequences for bullying, increased intervention in bully-victim situations, and curriculum units on bullying and victimization. Questions also tapped whether there had been a change in the awareness and attitudes of staff and students toward bullies and victims.

RESULTS

Quantitative Assessment

Effectiveness of the Anti-Bullying Intervention was examined at each of the school, parent, peer, and individual levels (see Table 2 for percentages). The frequencies of responses for different elements of a question were first calculated, then a z-test for proportions was used to calculate differences in the frequencies of responses between the onset of the program and the 18-month assessment.

School level. Students were asked about the teachers' reactions to bullying situations. Over time, the proportion of students answering that teachers sometimes

TABLE 2

Percentages of Students Responding Positively to the Bully/Victim Questions at the Pre-intervention and 18-Month Evaluations

Bully/Victim Questions	Pre	18 Months
School Level		
Do teachers stop bullying? (sometimes or always)	47	55*
Have teachers talked to you about your bullying? (bullies only)	42	50*
Have teachers talked to you about being bullied? (victims only)	47	53
Parent Level		
Have your parents talked to you about your bullying? (bullies only)	42	42
Have your parents talked to you about being bullied? (victims only)	62	59
Peer Level		
Do you try to stop bullying if you see it?	33	30
Do other children try to stop bullying?	48	45
Do you feel unpleasant when watching bullying?	81	80
Do you think you could join in bullying?	18	15*
Individual Level: Bullies		
Have you bullied this term? (more than once or twice)	7	9*
Have you bullied in the past 5 days? (once or more)	16	21*
Individual Level: Victims		
Have you been bullied this term? (more than once or twice)	12	15
Have you been bullied in the past 5 days? (once or more)	28	23*
Have you spent recess alone?	14	20*
Have you been racially bullied?	5	9*

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed)

or always intervened increased ($z=3.81$, $p<.001$). Approximately half of the children who admitted to bullying indicated that teachers had spoken to them about their bullying behaviour and this proportion also increased significantly over time ($z=2.15$, $p<.04$). Approximately half of the children who indicated they had been victimized reported that their teachers had talked to them. There was a slight, but non-significant increase in the proportion of victims who had received support from teachers from the pre- to 18-month assessments.

Parent level. Parents appeared to be less informed of their children's bullying at school than teachers. Fewer than half the children who admitted to bullying had been spoken to by their parents and this remained consistent over 18 months of the intervention. Conversely, parents appear to be somewhat more aware than teachers of children's victimization. Fifty-nine percent of victims indicated that their parents had spoken to them about the problem. This proportion also remained stable over the first 18 months of the Anti-Bullying Intervention.

Peer level. There was no change over the 18 months in the proportion of children indicating they would try to stop bullying if they witnessed it, nor in the proportion of children who indicated that other children try to stop bullying. Similarly, there was no change in the proportion of children who reported feeling somewhat or very unpleasant when watching bullying. There was, however, a decrement in the proportion of children reporting they could join in bullying another child whom they did not like ($z=2.35$, $p<.02$). The data on peer involvement in bullying and victimization suggest that additional efforts are required to engage children's cooperation in addressing the problem.

Individual level. Over the 18-month period, there was a small, but significant increase (7% to 9%) in the proportion of children who indicated they had bullied more than once or twice during the term ($z=2.65$, $p<.01$). Similarly, there was also an increase in the proportion of children who admitted to bullying at least once during the past five days ($z=3.48$, $p<.001$).

The proportion of children indicating they had been victimized more than once or twice during the term remained relatively constant over the 18-month period (range 12% to 15%). On the other hand, fewer children indicated they had been victimized during the past five days ($z=2.47$, $p<.02$). The discrepancy in these two items likely represents differences in the accuracy of the children's memories of events in the last five days compared to the last two months. Over time, significantly more children indicated they had spent recess alone ($z=3.12$, $p<.01$). With regard to racial bullying, which involves a verbal attack on another child's family, culture, and ethnicity (Tattum, 1993), there was an increase over time in the percentage of children indicating they had been racially bullied ($z=2.13$, $p<.04$).

Qualitative Assessment

A qualitative assessment was conducted to ascertain the extent to which the Anti-Bullying Intervention had been implemented and to describe various components of the intervention as they had been developed within the four pilot schools. There were two phases to this assessment. First, teachers from the four schools completed a checklist indicating which of the Anti-Bullying activities they

had used during the school year. There were two additional open-ended questions about other strategies that teachers use and resources they would find helpful. (The classroom activities and open-ended questions are listed in Table 1.) The second component of the qualitative assessment comprised structured interviews with the two Anti-Bullying team leaders at each of the schools. Data from the qualitative assessment are summarized at the school, parent, classroom, and individual levels.

School level. Each of the four pilot schools offered workshops for teachers to continue discussions of bullying and victimization at school. There was a request in some schools for more specific guidelines for intervening and following through in a bullying incident. Thirty percent of teachers indicated they have a code of behaviour which specifically mentions bullying and specifies consequences for bullying behaviours. When interviewed, all the team leaders indicated that a whole school policy on bullying was in the process of being developed. The process of developing the school policy varied across schools. In one school, each class submitted suggestions for the general philosophy and specific guidelines for students' behaviour. The teachers then reviewed these suggestions and devised a two-level code: one level emphasizes a positive learning environment, while the second included specific expectations and consequences for students. This preliminary code will be discussed with the entire staff and shared with parents.

There have been improvements in school playgrounds and supervision on playgrounds and in the hallways. The team leaders report a more consistent response from teachers to bullying on the playground. In all schools, efforts have been made to inform lunchroom supervisors about the Anti-Bullying Intervention. The lunchroom supervisors are usually women from the community who work part time supervising the children during lunch hour. They generally lack specific training in behavioural management techniques. Workshops for lunchroom staff provided information on bullying, a common language to prevent and intervene in conflicts, and strategies for intervening in conflicts on the playground. The difficulty of these workshops is that the lunchtime supervisors must attend on their own time, given financial constraints and the part-time nature of their work.

Parents. Throughout the year, the anti-bullying initiatives were shared with parents in newsletters and parent nights. When the problems of bullying were topics of discussion at parent nights, turnouts were often disappointing. The team leaders indicated a need to strengthen the liaison and communications with parents and the community.

Classroom and peers. A majority of teachers had employed classroom activities related to the Anti-Bullying Intervention: 71% had held class meetings to talk about bullying, 73% had established cooperative learning groups to ensure inclusion of all children, and 88% had led classroom discussions on racism. The concerns of bullying, racism, and sexism have been presented together within the school curriculum as issues concerning equity within the school environment. These have been addressed through activities such as videos, stories and novels, role-plays, current events, drama, and dance.

The initiatives mentioned in the program description have continued at the four pilot schools. These include conflict mediation on the playground and mentoring groups for students in older grades. In addition, social workers within two of

the schools have worked with small groups of older students using drama and role plays; in one school the students developed a video on bullying. Teachers' efforts to discuss bullying with bystanders (students who had witnessed it, but not intervened or gone for help) are not fully implemented: 41% of classroom teachers indicated that they talked to peers who witnessed bullying. This may, in part, explain the concern raised by one team leader that students have not yet taken the Anti-Bullying Intervention on as their mandate.

Individual bullies and victims. Teachers' reports suggest a high level of responsivity to individuals involved in bully-victim conflicts. Eighty-nine percent of teachers indicated they had talked to bullies and 94% of teachers had talked to victims. Some teachers remarked that it was easier to develop strategies to deal with bullies than to help victims escape their harassment. Fifty-five percent of teachers indicated they had talked with the parents of bullies or victims in their classes. One team leader noted that parents usually tell teachers about bullying problems; this draws the problem to the teachers' attention. Team leaders reported a number of incidents when they gathered all students involved in a bullying situation together for problem solving and counselling.

DISCUSSION

The results of this survey confirm that bullying continues to be a problem in Toronto schools. The quantitative analyses indicated some improvements in students' reports of bullying as assessed at the individual, peer, school, and parent levels. At the individual level, there was an 18% decrease in the number of children who reported they had been victimized in the past five days. On a less positive note, there was an increase in the number of children who reported having been victimized because of their race and an increase in the number of children who reported they had bullied others. At the peer level, there was a 17% decrease in the proportion of children who indicated they could join in a bullying episode, but there was not a corresponding increase in the proportion of children who reported feeling uncomfortable watching bullying. The reported frequency of intervention by the respondents themselves or by their peers did not change over time. At the school level, the reported frequency of teacher intervention increased over time: a higher proportion of bullies reported that teachers had talked to them. About the same proportion of victims had talked to their teachers prior to and following 18 months of intervention. Finally, there was no change in the number of students reporting that their parents had talked to them about either bullying or victimization.

A methodological constraint in this evaluation is the difficulty of discriminating actual behavioural change from changes in perception. For example, the increased number of reported bullies may reflect an actual increase in bullying or an increased awareness of the acts that constitute bullying, including verbal and indirect bullying, such as exclusion, gossip, and teasing. A change in perceptions may also be reflected in the discrepancy between teachers' efforts to combat racism and students' reports of increased racial bullying. The students' awareness of the problems of bullying and victimization may contribute to their high levels of re-

porting, even though the actual prevalence may have decreased or remained the same.

The efforts and assessments within the Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention are still in a formative stage. The inconsistent pattern of results reflects the challenges related to implementing systemic interventions to combat the complex problems of aggression at school. The process of developing and evaluating the Anti-Bullying Intervention has highlighted several important components in the implementation of such a program. These components, which are very similar to the six minimum criteria identified by Sharp and Smith (1993), are summarized below as guidelines for similar endeavours.

Defining Bullying and Developing an Awareness

When asked what they needed in order to have a greater impact on bullying in the classroom and school, teachers noted that bullying needs to be more fully described and defined for all parties. Bullying comprises a wide continuum of behaviours from direct physical assaults and insults to indirect behaviours such as exclusion, gossip, and racial slurs. Sharp and Smith (1993) involve staff, parents, and pupils in achieving a mutual definition of bullying. They note that this process and clarity of definition alleviate problems with those who discount bullying as "only playing" or "a bit of fun" (p. 48). Bullying involves the combined use of power and aggression and is common to many interactions, not just those between children. Within the Toronto schools, an increased awareness was evident when staff began to question their own behaviours and consider whether they comprised bullying.

Changing Attitudes, Communicating, and Providing Strategies for Intervention

In order to reduce the number of aggressive interactions at school, there must be increased understanding, together with attitudinal and behavioural changes at the individual, peer, school staff, and parent levels. These changes must be specifically targeted by elements of the program. A consideration of the consistencies and discrepancies among individual, classroom/peer, school, and parent levels may direct future intervention efforts.

School level. There are many players in the effort to reduce bullying at school and they all have important roles to play. These roles must be clearly scripted so that all parties have clear guidelines for action. first, the school policy must articulate a clear course of action to be followed by teachers and clear and predictable consequences for students who bully others. The evaluation indicates that students perceive teachers as more consistent in their responses to bullying. On the other hand, there was a marked discrepancy between teachers' and students' reports of intervention. The majority of teachers indicated they had talked to both bullies and victims, while only half of the bullies and victims indicated they had spoken with a teacher. It is possible that while teachers are increasing their efforts to address the individual needs of bullies and victims, they are still not aware of the extent of the problem as indicated by other research (Craig & Pepler, 1994a; Olweus, 1991; Ziegler et al., 1993). Continued efforts are required to increase the

awareness of teachers, administrators, and lunch-time supervisors and to ensure they follow through on their mandate to intervene in bully-victim problems.

To succeed in addressing bullying problems, school staff members must communicate among themselves. In talking to children, we have often heard complaints that some staff (particularly lunch-time supervisors) do not respond to their request for assistance, but redirect them to their classroom teachers. With training and a clear sense of their responsibilities, these staff could provide an immediate response to the problem and refer it to classroom teachers or the principal for follow-up. A system whereby bullying concerns are identified and communicated must be implemented within the school to ensure a consistent and reliable response to bullying problems by school staff.

Parents. In spite of clear guidelines to involve parents in the process, the current assessment suggests that these efforts are falling short. Just over half of the teachers had talked to the parents of bullies or victims in their classes. The students' reports, however, suggest that in a class of 25, there are likely to be five children who have bullied and five children who have been victimized within the past week. Parents must be made aware of the extent of bullying problems in the school community as a whole and provided with strategies to recognize and address bullying or victimization problems among their own children. Parents of victims often learn of the problem before the teacher and should advocate for their children within the school. Parents of bullies need to learn of their children's problems at school. Ideally, these parents should be engaged in attempts to manage their children's bullying at home to complement the school program and support generalization. While it has been difficult to engage large numbers of parents in discussions about bullying, some concerned parents have been important in maintaining the momentum within the Anti-Bullying Intervention. Coordinated efforts of teachers, parents, and students are essential to address the problems of bullying within the school environment.

Peer level. Peers play a critical role in bully-victim interactions. As onlookers, they can either reinforce the bullying actions or intervene to stop the bullying. A positive indicator of peer involvement was that fewer children said they could join in bullying. On the other hand, the current assessment suggests that other targeted attitudes and behavioural responses of peers have not been enhanced by the Anti-Bullying Intervention. There were no changes in the proportion of children who reported feeling unpleasant watching bullying nor in the reported peer interventions to stop bullying.

Approximately half the teachers reinforced the message that peers also have a responsibility. Teachers made a point of talking to students who had witnessed bullying, but had not intervened. It is important to help these children understand the victim's distress and develop a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their schoolmates.

The potential to involve peers is illustrated by our earlier observational study of bullying. Peers were present in 85% of bullying episodes on the playground and they were observed to intervene almost three times more frequently than teachers (Craig & Pepler, 1994b). It is essential, however, to teach peers appropriate strategies for intervention: Our observations revealed that half the peers' interven-

tions were appropriate, while half involved the use of aggression to combat bullying (Craig & Pepler, 1994b). Efforts to inform students about bullying occurred in most classrooms through discussions and related activities about bullying. In the present assessment the lack of increased peer involvement to reduce bullying problems raises concerns. Teachers noted that students who witness bullying need to be provided with strategies to intervene and/or seek help. Teachers requested more books, films, and curriculum activities about the problems of bullying, victimization, and bystander responses.

To ensure peer participation, teachers and school administrators must reinforce peer intervention efforts and model consistent responses to bullying. Conflict mediation programs within the Toronto schools have supported peer intervention on the playground. It is essential, however, that peers not be held responsible for interventions to stop bullying. While peers may be essential to identify bullying problems, adults must follow through to address the power imbalance within the bully-victim relationship.

Individual level. A critical feature of an anti-bullying program is communication between teachers and bullies. The bully must be provided with clear guidelines for what will not be tolerated and informed of the consequences. Data in the present evaluation suggest that teachers may not be identifying the bullies in their classes. Classmates are often more aware of bullying than teachers and should be encouraged to draw these interactions to the teachers' attention. Increased communication between teachers and victims is also critical. The power differential inherent in bullying implies that victims are not able to defend themselves, and most likely require the assistance of adults to shift the power balance away from the bully. Nevertheless, children are reluctant to report victimization for a variety of reasons, including fear of reprisals, shame, and a concern that adults may not be able to help. To support victims, we must override the traditional taboo of "tattling" or whining and support children in approaching adults about bullying problems. Hence, increased communication among teachers and students as well as serious consideration of students' concerns are central to anti-bullying efforts.

Recognition of the Process

For guidance in the implementation of an anti-bullying program, we can draw from the work done in England by Smith and his colleagues (Smith, 1991; Smith & Sharp, 1993; Smith & Thompson, 1991). The critical and core component of the DES Sheffield Bullying Project is a Whole School Policy (Sharp & Smith, 1992). In his attempts to implement the Bullying Project in England, Smith (personal communication, 1993) noted that it takes approximately 18 months for a school to establish and implement an anti-bullying program with a Whole School Policy about bullying. Tattum (1993) has also noted the long-term process of implementing an anti-bullying intervention, which can take up to three years to consolidate efforts at the administrative, curriculum, and community levels.

While the importance of a Whole School Policy was recognized at the initial planning meetings of the Toronto schools, this component has been difficult to achieve with the full involvement of staff, parents, and children. The burden of implementation of an Anti-Bullying Intervention resides with the school staff who

must realize that: (a) bullying occurs regularly in their school and is a problem that merits attention, (b) teachers have an important role in intervening to reduce the problem, and (c) teachers' behaviours and attitudes may inadvertently support aggressive behaviours by overlooking bully-victim problems or modelling the use of coercive power in interactions with the students. Given the substantial load placed on teachers for their students' academic and social instruction, it is not surprising that they have limited resources and energy for the problem of bullying at school. Nevertheless, if schools are going to be safe, positive, and supportive learning environments, we must eliminate the threats of verbal and physical harassment that pervade some children's lives.

The problem of bullying in schools is complex and part of the larger problem of violence in our society. The current intervention study provides guidelines for an initial model of prevention and intervention for this problem. Schools are the primary community institutions for our children. The values touted by the school both reflect community values and have the potential to modify them. Prevention efforts aimed at the young of our society have tremendous potential for change. A recent example of this is the environmental movement. School children across the country have been bringing the environmental message home to their parents and reducing waste and garbage within their own homes. Through an initiative such as the Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention, we have the potential to reduce aggression, coercion, and violence and thereby improve the relationships within our communities and within our society.

NOTES

1. The video commissioned by the Toronto Board of Education is entitled, "Bullying at School: Strategies for Prevention." It is available through King Squire Films Ltd., 94 Borden Street, Toronto, ON M5S 2N1, telephone (416) 922-6509.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article rapporte l'élaboration du *Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention*. L'efficacité de ce programme a été vérifiée à partir de données quantitatives et qualitatives recueillies avant le programme et 18 mois après le début de son implantation.

Les résultats de cette recherche confirment que l'intimidation physique demeure un problème répandu dans les écoles de Toronto. Quelques améliorations ont été constatées d'après le rapport des élèves sur l'intimidation physique tel qu'évalué au plan individuel, des pairs, et de l'école. Pendant ces premiers 18 mois d'implantation du programme, les enfants ont rapporté une augmentation des interventions de l'enseignant pour faire cesser les intimidations. Un nombre plus élevé d'enfants agressifs ont indiqué que les enseignants leur ont parlé du problème, mais aucune différence n'a été constatée entre la proportion d'élèves agressifs et celle d'élèves victimes qui en ont parlé à leurs parents. Après le programme, un nombre moins élevé d'enfants ont indiqué qu'ils pourraient s'impliquer dans un épisode d'intimidation physique. Enfin, un nombre plus élevé d'enfants ont admis avoir infligé de tels actes d'intimidation, mais un nombre moins élevé d'enfants ont déclaré en avoir été victimes lorsque mesuré lors des cinq derniers jours. Ces résultats contradic-

toires soulèvent plusieurs questions concernant l'implantation du programme *Toronto Anti-Bullying Intervention*.

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