

HAPPY SCHOOLS

Research on Bullying

Prepared by Anne Vize



The research conducted for *HAPPY SCHOOLS* has drawn on information from both Australian and overseas sources. The focus was on information and research published in the last five years, to ensure that the strategies and data were up to date and reflected current 'best practice' in the field of combating bullying.

This research document contains a brief summary of the current thinking on bullying, particularly in Australia. It has been divided into sections as follows:

- Definitions of bullying
- Incidence of bullying
- The thinking about bullies
- The thinking about children who are bullied
- The role of bystanders
- Strategies for dealing with bullying
- Reference list

Definitions of bullying

Ken Rigby (1996, cited on SOFWEB site, Jan 2006), one of Australia's foremost authorities on the problem, defines bullying as **'repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons.'** Rigby also provides a useful definition of what constitutes bullying in his book *Stop the Bullying: A handbook for schools* (2003): 'Bullying involves: a desire to hurt + hurtful action + a power imbalance + an unjust use of power + (typically) repetition + evident enjoyment by the aggressor + a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim.'

Griffiths (1997, cited on SOFWEB site Jan 2006) talks of any repetitive attack which causes distress, not only at the time of the attack but also by the threat of future attack. His definition includes verbal, physical, social and psychological elements.

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2001) describes repeated incidents involving bigger, stronger or more powerful child on a weaker or smaller child or group of children on a single child. Bullying can be verbal, physical, social or psychological.

Kids Helpline (in Healy, 2001) talks of any deliberate psychological, emotional and/or physical harassment of one person by another or a group – at school or in transition to/from school. This definition includes exclusion, intimidation, extortion or violence.

Lawstuff (in Healy, 2001) lists any cruel or offensive behaviour including physical violence, threats or harassment by one student or a group of students towards another eg. teasing, name calling, humiliation, sexist or racist remarks, exclusion.

The Bullying Online website (www.bullying.co.uk) says that 'Bullying includes:

- People calling you names
- Making things up to get you into trouble
- Hitting, pinching, biting, pushing and shoving
- Taking things away from you
- Damaging your belongings
- Stealing your money
- Taking your friends away from you
- Spreading rumours
- Threats and intimidation
- Making silent or abusive phone calls
- Sending you offensive phone texts
- Posting insulting messages on the internet or by IM (instant [text] messaging)

This site also mentions increasing incidence of 'happy slapping' where a victim is bullied while a group of bullies take photos using their camera phones or video. The photos are then posted on the net or circulated by mobile phone.

The NSW Dept of Education and Training (Anti Bullying Plan for Schools, 2005) states that 'Bullying can be defined as intentional, repeated behaviour by an individual or group of individuals that causes distress, hurt or undue pressure.' 'Bullying involves the use of power in relationships. Bullying can involve all forms of harassment (including sex, race, disability, homosexuality, or transgender, humiliation and domination and intimidation of others'.

Marshall (Commissioner to Children and Young People, Scotland, 2004, in a speech to the Anti Bullying Network conference, 'We're all in it together' Scotland, Nov 2004) gives this definition: '**Bullying involves hurting, scaring or picking on a weaker or smaller person. It happens when one person is more powerful than the other.** When two people the same size pick a fight, however wrong this might be, this is not bullying. When someone has power over another person there is always a possibility that bullying might take place.'

Key factors emerging from the definitions:

- Bullying is a *repetitive* behaviour
- Bullying involves a *difference in power balance*
- Bullying can involve *one person or a group*
- Bullying is *intentional*
- Bullying can include *a range of behaviours* from mild to severe
- Bullying can be *physical, verbal, social or psychological*.

Incidence of Bullying

Rigby (1997, in Healy, 2001) states that on average **1 in 6 children** are **bullied daily** in Australian schools. His claim is based on research derived from a sample of 26,000 school children. This statistic seems to be the one most widely quoted in the literature on bullying, and given the size of the survey, is likely to be fairly accurate.

Lawstuff (2000, in Healy, 2001) states: 'Studies show that bullying is common in Australian schools. Research says that as many as 20 % of children and students in Australian schools have been subjected to bullying and harassment.'

McNamee Neenan (2000, HealthScout www.oobdoo.net, accessed Jan 2006) comment: 'Studies suggest that up to 75% of American schoolchildren have been bullied, and as many as 10 percent to 15 percent face it on a regular basis.'

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on employment, education and training – Report on Violence in Australian Schools, 1994) stated that approximately 5 % of the school population were bullies and 1 in 7 students were being bullied. In some schools the incidence was as low as 4 % and in others it was as high as 30–40 %.

McNamara (1997) 'Approximately 15 % of schoolchildren are involved in bullying incidents. Six percent are bullies and nine percent are victims.'

Approximately 1 in 7 students will have bullying experiences either as victims or bullies (Olweus, 1991; Smith and Thompson, 1991, in Farrell, 1998).

Over half of primary (51%) and secondary students (54%) thought bullying was a 'big problem' or 'quite a problem' in their school and 51% of students in Year 5 reported that they had been bullied during the term compared with 28% in Year 8 (Dept for Education and Skills, UK, 2002).

Some 56 % of males and 46 % of females had experienced bullying, and 51 % of males and 18 % of females had experienced punch ups at school / college, in a sample of 5000 young people aged 12 to 20

years. The same study found 38 % of boys and 13 % of girls agreed with the statement ‘men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household’. Also, 20 % of boys said they had been slapped, kicked or punched by their girlfriends. One in 20 young people in the study felt sexual and other violence was a part of normal conflict. (Gilchrist, 2000 in Healey, 2001)

Seven percent of children report staying away from school because of bullying, and a further 13 % have thought about being absent. 15 % of children report ‘never’ or ‘hardly ever’ feeling safe at school.’ (Rigby, 2005)

Selekman, J and Vessey, J (2004) state that ‘bullying occurs equally by children of both genders.’ This article also highlights that bullying has two peaks in incidence – one which is given as around age 7-8 years, (early primary) and the other at ages 11-14 years (USA findings).

Rigby (2005) states that ‘bullying in fact tends to be higher in the early years of secondary school than in late primary’. This fact could be relevant when choosing age groups to pitch resource material at, and may indicate a gap in the market which could be explored.

A UK study found that 51% of Year 5 students reported they had been bullied during the previous term, compared with 28% of Year 8 students. This study found a wide variation in bullying reports between schools. Name calling was found to be the most common form of bullying in this study, as was bullying which caused social isolation (eg. gossip, rumours). In contrast to some research, this study found similar levels of physical bullying, name calling and social isolation between boys and girls, although some forms of physical bullying were higher for boys.

The thinking about bullies

Many researchers have described what is currently known about the typical ‘picture of a bully’. Although there are variations on the type of bully encountered at school, there *do* tend to be some common threads which can be drawn on to depict bullies. Wikipedia defines a bully as ‘an individual who tends to torment others, either through verbal harassment and / or physical assaults, or through more subtle means of coercion.’ It further states that ‘researchers accept generally that bullying contains three essential elements: 1) The behaviour is negative and aggressive 2) the behaviour is carried out repeatedly and 3) the behaviour occurs in a relationship where there is an imbalance of power between the parties involved.’

The bullying behaviour shown by girls and boys is different. Boys tend to be more physical in their bullying, and will push, shove, hit, kick etc. Girls tend to use more verbal or emotional means such as teasing, name calling and exclusion.

Selekman and Vessey (2004) write that children who bully are no more likely to come from a particular geographical area, be from a particular racial background or have a particular socio economic status.

Bullying can be a **learnt behaviour** which is copied from others. Thompson (et al, 2002 in Selekman and Vessey, 2004) report that bullies often come from **homes where aggressive methods are used** to manage difficult situations. This highlights the role that parental influence has on bullying. If children see that adults (parents or teachers) behave aggressively and use their power at will, to the detriment of weaker individuals, or even do not act when bullying happens to prevent or minimise it, they receive the message that bullying is acceptable. The United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child (2001) found that children who saw their family acting like bullies or showing violence in the home were more likely to be bullies at school (in Marshall, 2004).

Bullies have a need for perceived power and control, and enjoy a feeling of dominance or status in the eyes of the victim and others. Bullying rarely happens without an audience.

A link has been established by several researchers between **bullying behaviour in childhood** and **criminal or other anti social behaviour later in life**. However, there was no reporting found of the type of bullying which is linked with this later behaviour (ie. we cannot be sure if this is only found in children who have shown higher level types of bullying such as physical violence). Whitted and Dupper (2005) state that bullying seen in younger children is an antecedent to more violent behaviour later in life, and that children who bully are more likely to gravitate to other children who are also aggressive, and to become involved in gangs and other delinquent behaviour.

Some writers from the USA focus on high profile incidents such as the Columbine High School shootings in 1999 and the Santana High School shootings in 2000. It was found that, of the 37 school shootings in the USA between 1974 and 2000, 71 % of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, harassed, threatened, attacked or injured by others prior to the attacks taking place. (Lodge, J and Frydenberg, E, 2005) Although Australia does not have the same history of high level violence in its schools as the USA, there are perhaps still lessons to be learnt from the notion of the USA attackers feeling they are victims before becoming the aggressors in many of these situations.

The correlation between bullying and problem behaviour (of other kinds) is well established. Here are assorted comments:

- ‘Those who bully are more likely to drop out of school, use drugs and alcohol, as well as engage in subsequent delinquent and criminal behaviour’ (Farrington, 1993 in Morrison, 2002).
- ‘Research has identified school bullying as a risk factor associated with antisocial and criminal behaviour’ (National Crime Prevention 1999, in Morrison, 2002).
- Bullies are seven times more likely than non bullies to carry a weapon to school (Selekman and Vessey, 2004).
- 60% of boys who were classified as bullies in Grade 6 and 9 were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24 years, 40% had three or more convictions (Fox et al in Selekman and Vessey, 2004). This compares with 10% of boys who were not identified as bullies.
- ‘Often the bully is seeking to build a social network simply by bullying.’ ‘One who is a bully a lot of times has trouble with his peers and the only way he can get connected to his peers and get others to help him is to bully.’ (Hoffman, 2000, in McNamee Neenan, 2000)

Bullies tend to be **underdeveloped academically and socially**, and to have a higher incidence of being involved in **criminal behaviour** (McNamara, 1997).

However, to characterise bullies as social misfits and simple-minded thugs is to vastly overstate the reality. Several researchers quoted in Whitted and Dupper report that bullies may have quite well developed social skills and be adept at manipulation situations to avoid detection by adults. Bullies respond to reinforcers of their own bullying behaviour. These reinforcers are either tangible (stolen possessions, lunch money) or social reinforcers (response from bystanders).

Signs that a child is a bully include these:

- Constant teasing of other children
- Intimidation of others, making fun of others
- Constant physical aggression towards others
- Being chronically and continually ‘bossy’
- Being physically stronger than classmates, and especially the victims

- Being a strong need to dominate or subdue others and to get their own way
- Being impulsive, hot tempered and with a low tolerance for frustration
- Being oppositional, defiant and aggressive towards adults
- Being good at talking themselves out of difficult situations
- Show little empathy with other students
- Have a generally positive view of themselves
- Anti social behaviours at a young age (drinking, vandalism etc).

(McNamara, 1997)

Some bullies lack the ability to empathise with others. They simply do not grasp how other children feel as a result of their actions. Some have poor impulse control. (Rigby, 2003)

A study from the USA found that violent and bullying behaviour was reduced by reducing the exposure children had to media violence (TV etc). In one survey, 105 children in one school who reduced their exposure to media violence (TV viewing limited to less than seven hours / week and restricted use of video games etc) were compared with 120 children in another school who did not reduce their exposure to media violence. At end of the study, the children with reduced exposure to violence were less likely to see their peers as aggressive and were involved in about half as many incidents of aggressive playground behaviour as the control group. Benefits were seen both in boys *and* girls. The same study mentioned previous research which found children were exposed to around 200,000 acts of violence on TV by the age of 18 years. (Baker, 2001 in Healey, 2001)

In dealing with bullies, Rigby suggests that those who have bullied AND have experienced strong disciplinary action are at risk of becoming alienated from the school. These children need to be reconnected with the school community, and sometimes this can be effectively done through the use of a 'restorative justice' or at least 'no blame' approach (see Strategies section below).

Cyber bullying is an emerging bullying behaviour which involves texting, threatening emails, use of chatrooms, or the forwarding of confidential emails to others in order to publicly humiliate the victim. Derogatory websites can be set up to target a victim, as well as websites where students can vote for victims such as 'the biggest geek' (Snider and Borel, 2004 in Campbell, 2005). There are several key differences between cyber bullying and face to face bullying. With cyber bullying, it is only possible to *threaten* – actual aggression cannot be carried out. However the audience is potentially much wider, and the victim can retain a constant reminder of the bullying if they do not delete the text or email message, or choose to visit an offensive website on which they are targeted. Cyber bullies are also more easily able to remain anonymous. Cyber bullies may have the confidence to say things that they would not otherwise have the ability or inclination to say in a face to face situation.

The thinking about children who are bullied

The most important point to make about the 'victims' of bullying (though the word victim is itself controversial) is that the damage done is serious. Rigby (in McGrath and Noble, 2006) talks about 'low levels of psychological wellbeing and social adjustment ... high levels of psychological distress and adverse physical health symptoms ... repeated bullying ... impacts on the child's mental and/or physical health' and argues that the effects can last into adulthood.

Here is a brief summary of some major findings:

- Bullying can have negative emotional and physical effects which can lead to adverse consequences for learning and overall health and well being (Farrell, 1998).
- Victims are more likely to feel depressed, anxious, insecure and have a lower self esteem than other children. (Whitted and Dupper, 2005).
- Boys are more likely to be bullied by individuals, whereas girls are more likely to be bullied by a group (Rigby, 2003).
- Incidence of physical bullying decreases with increasing age.
- More boys are victims of bullying than girls.

Selekman and Vessey quote various researchers who describe victims of bullying as being:

- Different from their peers
- Either highly disliked or those who hold no status at all in the peer group
- Anxious and insecure
- With a lowered self esteem and poorer social skills
- More annoyed by and less tolerant of teasing by their classmates

Boulton, (2000 in Selekman and Vessey) states that ‘those who are bullied often suffer the psychological complications that result’ The article goes on to suggest that these may include ‘sleep disturbances, psychosomatic complaints, irritability, increased frequency of illness and disease related to chronic stress, and regression to younger behaviours... within the school environment, the victim may have impaired concentration, decreased academic performance, truancy from school or absence from special school activities or certain classes. They may fear rejection, being excluded or ignored, feeling betrayed, or being ridiculed in class with the spread of nasty rumours.’

The same article also cites Thompson (2002) who writes that victims of bullying may suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, and Fox (2003) who found that children who were bullied were five times as likely to be depressed as children who were not. Fox also found that boys who were bullied were four times more likely to be suicidal and that girls were eight times more likely.

Hunter and Boyle (2004, in Mackinnon, 2004) have studied the effects of bullying and the strategies used by victims of bullying, and found that children who were bullied more frequently had less ability to use helpful strategies in dealing with the bullying. Some children tended to try strategies such as hoping something would happen to change things, or wishing things would get better. Children who did not talk about the problem with others and their feelings were more likely to suffer long term harm. Children who thought they had no control over the situation were more likely to deal with it by ignoring or hoping it would go away.

Children who are the victims of indirect bullying may suffer social exclusion, as the bully endeavours to get others not to associate with the child. The victim’s status or reputation may be damaged. They may suffer the effects of racial or sexual taunts or harassment, which could include verbal approaches such as notes, rude pictures, sexual or racial taunts, or offensive gestures. It could also include physical bullying such as touching of private parts or other sexually focused behaviours (Committee for Children, 2003 in Whitted and Dupper, 2005).

Children who are bullied may tend to avoid certain areas of the school where they think they are likely to encounter a bully, or to avoid school completely and simply stay home. It is estimated that around 160,000 children stay away from school every day in the USA because of a fear of being bullied.

An extreme example of a victim of bullying is Curtis Taylor in Iowa, USA who was the victim of repeated bullying over three years. This included name calling, being bashed into a locker, and having his belongings vandalized. He committed suicide in March, 1993.

A UK study aimed to explore the thinking of children about bullying. This study found the **three most helpful strategies** were **making friends, avoidance strategies and learning to ‘stand up for yourself’**. The same study found that children thought telling teachers was associated with a wide range of risks, including breaching their confidentiality, failure to act, and an inability to protect the victim from retaliatory action. Parents were valued as sources of emotional support, and for contacting teachers when asked to do so. Some students feared non belief on the part of parents or that their parents might be worried or anxious if they told them. The children surveyed reported that they used confidential services such as counselling and voluntary organizations (probably most similar to organizations such as Kids Helpline here in Australia) as a source of support. This allowed children to express their feelings and to consider their options.

The UK study found that younger children felt that assertive communication was effective in dealing with bullies (although this level was quite low at 25%). The confidence in assertive communication dropped by Year 8 to only 10%. Older children were more likely to believe that hitting back would work in dealing with bullies. 23% of secondary and 15% of primary children thought this method would be effective. Younger children were more likely to believe that ignoring the bully would be effective (38% compared with 14%). Both age groups reported that it was easy to talk to friends about a problem with a bully. The percentage was high for both groups (68% for Year 5 and 71% for Year 8). The younger group were also likely to talk about the problem with parents. 51% of Year 5 and 31% of Year 8 children said they would find it easy to tell a teacher about a bullying problem.

The UK report concluded that there were some mixed messages received by children. These include:

- Adults *say* that bullying is a serious problem, but the experience of children is that it is often dismissed as ‘child’s play’
- Children are encouraged to report bullying, but then there is no action taken when they do
- Schools encourage reporting, but cannot protect children from retaliation, particularly after hours
- Adults claim they can be trusted, but telling an adult was seen as being associated with risks
- Adults say not to fight back, but this was seen as being an effective strategy, at least some of the time.

The report recommended that a child-centred approach be taken by schools in addressing bullying, and that the focus be on friendships and the reality of children’s experiences of bullying.

Vessey et al; Joyce, 2003, (in Whitted and Dupper, 2005) write that victims can be taught to ‘recognize attributes that place them at risk of becoming targets, to understand the consequences of their choices, and to modify their behaviour to minimize their chances of becoming victims.’ Vessey also explains that children can be taught to interpret social situations and to stay calm and react in a positive way, rather than crying, acting helplessly or aggressively or running away.

In the case of cyber bullying, Campbell and Gardener (2004, in Campbell, 2005) found that young people did not think adults would understand that they had an online life, so they wouldn’t understand cyber bullying. Some victims felt they would lose the right to use the technology eg. have their phone taken away from them. A British study found that nearly 30% of cyber bullied students told no one about the bullying.

The role of bystanders

Bystanders play an important role in most bullying situations. Many researchers discuss the role that bystanders play in school based bullying situations. Rigby (2004) writes that Canadian research has found that **85% of bullying incidents in primary schools take place in the presence of other children**. Teachers are generally not present on these occasions and are often not told that they have occurred. Rigby's own research in South Australia has shown that 92 % of children reported having observed verbal bullying at school and 60% had observed physical bullying.

Research from Finland has shown that there are a range of bystander behaviours:

- Supporting (eg cheering or encouraging the dispute or nastiness)
- Joining in
- Passively watching
- Intervening on behalf of the victim (Salmivalli et al, 1996; Kaukiainen, 1996).

1999 research (O'Connell, 1999; Craig 1999) quoted by Lodge and Frydenberg (2005) found that in playground situations, bystanders spent 54% of their time reinforcing bullies by passively watching, 21% of their time actively modelling bullies and 25% of their time actively intervening on behalf of victims.

Rigby writes that of the occasions where a bystander child chooses to object to the bullying behaviour, there is a 50% success rate in the bullying stopping. He says that in one of his studies, children (upper primary age) gave a variety of responses for how they would deal with a depicted scenario of bullying. These included telling a teacher, ignoring it or objecting. The reasons they gave included the following:

- It was the right thing to do
- I don't want anyone to be hurt
- I couldn't stand by and watch another person being bullied.

There were also some children in the study who were worried about the consequences of objecting:

- I might get hurt if I joined in
- If I got involved they might start bullying *me*
- I would not tell a teacher or I would get beaten up (as a consequence)
- It's much safer not to tell a teacher – they just don't listen to kids.

If bystanders are to play a part in stopping bullying, they need to be supported and protected from the consequences of their actions, or shown ways of indirectly or subtly addressing the behaviour without the bully becoming aware of who they are.

Research by Lodge and Frydenberg (2005) found that the **reactions of girls and boys** as bystanders was **different**. Girls were more likely to provide support for the victim, while boys were more likely to support the bully. Girls were also more likely than boys to say they would not get involved if they observed a bullying incident. Girls were more likely to feel sad, upset, angry or disgusted by the bullying, whereas boys were more likely to feel (or at least say they felt) indifferent.

Many children reported feeling guilt, anger, confusion and a lack of knowledge about what to do, as well as a fear of becoming a victim of the bullying. The same research found that the reactions of bystanders varied, depending on the relationship they had with either the bully or the victim. They were more likely to

be passive if they did feel an affiliation with either party.

Various researchers quoted by Whitted and Dupper (2005) wrote that bystanders could be negatively affected by observing bullying. They may be more focused on avoiding bullies in the classroom than on their own schoolwork, and so may suffer academically. They may fear reprisals from bullies if they speak out. They may feel severely distressed at witnessing the bullying. The entire school may develop a culture of fear and intimidation if bullying is allowed to continue unchecked.

Research by Naylor (Naylor et al, 2001 in Lodge and Frydenberg, 2005) found an increasing popularity of peer support and mediation programs, and stated that the existence of peer support programs can help encourage the 'seeking help' strategy.

Rigby et al (2005) suggests some strategies that teachers can use to encourage positive bystander behaviour, including:

- Discussing bystander behaviour in the classroom and talking about how often bullying happens at school and what the bystanders do
- Asking children what they would do personally
- Focussing on answers from children that suggest they would act positively
- Addressing the issue of inaction and talk about why children often feel powerless or cautious in these situations
- Discussing what to do in a situation that the bystander feels may be dangerous and how they can get help when needed
- Talking about how to reduce personal risk when intervening eg. verbally objecting rather than physically entering a fight or confrontation.
- Role play or practising verbal intervention strategies for bystanders to use
- Encouraging students to report back to the class about their experiences
- Discussing outcomes, encouraging positive behaviour and discussing problems and their solutions.

Strategies for dealing with bullying

The most common recommendation seems to be a **whole school approach**, that is an integrated set of strategies – policy formulation, data collection (to determine the degree of the problem), defining and using a range of strategies to deal with bullying, and follow up evaluation. Researchers seem to agree that any method chosen needs to be followed through completely and with a good understanding of how and why the method has been selected. There is also agreement that there should be whole school community involvement, so that there is 'ownership' of the various policies and procedures set up to deal with bullying.

'The most effective programs appear to be ones in which there is a school-wide program that is developed in a collaborative manner by the school and the wider community.' The goals of school wide programs should be to reduce or eliminate the problem in and out of school and to prevent future incidents of bullying. (McNamara, 1997)

Bullying is less likely in a school with a general ethos that bullying is unacceptable and which has supportive adults. (Andrew Mellor, Anti Bullying network, Scotland) This is supported anecdotally by comments about some of the more extreme cases of bullying, where it is alleged that schools did not do a lot to counter the bullying, or were unaware that it was happening.

A number of researchers quoted in an article by Whitted and Dupper (2005) state that ‘the most successful school based prevention programs do more than reach out to the individual child; they also seek to change the culture and climate of the school . . . the most effective approaches for preventing or minimising bullying in schools involve a comprehensive multi level strategy that targets bullies, victims, bystanders, families and communities’.

Sampson (in Whitted and Dupper, 2005) found that strategies for dealing with bullying which focused on conflict resolution, peer mediation approaches and increasing self esteem tend to be ineffective because they do not acknowledge the fact that bullying involves a significant power imbalance between the bully and the victim. Bullies carefully plan their approach and anticipate what their victim is going to do and how they will react. They are also generally careful to avoid detection by adults, and may rely on the fact that often victims will be reluctant to tell anyone what is happening. *ALL TOGETHER NOW* acknowledges the mediation method, but chooses not to recommend it in ‘Managing Student Responses’ (on the basis of this research).

A range of researchers quoted in Whitted and Dupper found that the most effective strategies involved changing the culture and climate of the school, in addition to focusing on the individual. A comprehensive, multi-level strategy was needed, at the school, classroom and individual level. The school principal (and others) need to send a clear message that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. This can be demonstrated through a clear anti-bullying policy document.

Teachers and others also need to model pro-social behaviour. The researchers quoted in the article describe how often adults were not able to identify bullying behaviour in the playground, or were not aware of the extent of the bullying problem. At times it is dismissed as being just part of normal childhood behaviour. A study in 2000 quoted in this article found that teachers often failed to intervene when a bullying incident happened in the classroom.

Classroom meetings were found (by Olweus et al, 1999 in Whitted and Dupper, 2005) to be useful in increasing student knowledge of bullying, and to show how to intervene. They could also be used for encouraging empathy and pro-social behaviours. The class can be used to help establish class rules about bullying behaviour, and to encourage a sense of responsibility for bystanders in dealing with observed bullying in the playground. Bystanders can be taught to stand up for a victim and to report bullying to adults, as well as to include victims in activities so that they do not become socially isolated.

A general analysis of the effectiveness of various strategies seems to show a range in how well the approaches taken in different countries have been in reducing the incidence of bullying. Various researchers show between 15% and 50% reductions in bullying across a range of research studies and countries. Some (unfortunately) also report an increase in bullying.

In general, interventions were more effective when ‘implemented in the early years of schooling [ie primary years] rather than in secondary school’, and that some sort of intervention was better than no intervention. Greater increases in bullying were noted in control groups which did not receive anti-bullying initiatives. ‘Level of school commitment and staff involvement influenced the success of interventions’ (Lodge and Frydenberg, 2005). In short, teachers *do* have the ability to affect the rate of bullying amongst children in their care.

Following are a series of *specific* strategies which are referred to in the literature.

The Restorative Justice Approach **(The Responsible Citizenship Program, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2002)**

This approach focuses on ‘shame management’ as it applies to various bullying categories. If used effectively, shame management can help promote better social functioning, whereas used poorly it can weaken social relationships. Restorative justice is a form of conflict management.

There is a need to include the presence and participation of a community of support for the offender and the victim. This should be made up of the people who care most about the offender and victim. There is a need for a confrontation between the two parties where it is made clear to the offender that the behaviour is not accepted by the community, but which still supports and respects the offender. The process of using a restorative justice conference has been found to be effective in addressing bullying in schools (Cameron and Thorseborne, 2001 in Morrison, 2002).

The Responsible Citizenship Program uses the principles of **Respect, Consideration** and **Participation**. Initially the focus is on creating a safe place where ‘stories of harm’ can be shared. As relationships develop within the school, students have the opportunity to learn conflict resolution skills through a focus on the feelings associated with conflict and how to resolve those feelings (this brings in the shame management aspect of the program). There is also a focus on peer to peer learning which helps instigate a cultural shift within the school.

The Conflict Resolution component of the program is summarised in the acronym **REACT**:

- **REPAIR** – Repair the harm which has been done
- **EXPECT** – Expect the best from others
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** – Acknowledge the feelings or harm which has been done
- **CARE** – Care for others
- **TAKE** – Take responsibility for behaviour and feelings

The Restorative Practices Method

The focus is on ‘someone being harmed’ – rather than on bullying or behaviour. If a child believes they have been harmed in some way, they have the right to request a conference where they can confront the person who has harmed them. Both the ‘victim’ and the ‘bully’ are brought together to discuss what has happened, and a solution is sought. The students come up with their own resolutions – initially these may be quite punitive but later tend to become more creative and positive.

The Friendly Schools and Families Approach

This program is based on the research conducted by the WA Child Health Promotion Unit, using a team of researchers headed by Prof. Donna Cross. A survey and research program was conducted during 2000 – 20002 to investigate bullying. A survey of parents and teachers in Western Australia found that 11 % of students had been bullied in the past six months in primary and secondary schools. The report mentions that bullying often occurs away from adult observation, so the actual incidence is likely to be higher.

The Friendly Schools Bullying Intervention Project was designed to assess the effectiveness of a whole school approach to bullying in primary schools. Approximately 2000 students in Year 4 and 5 were tracked during 2000 and 2001. The research found that the whole school approach was effective in reducing bullying using a self reported bullying measure. Students who stated they were bullied ‘lots of times’ were found to be up to five times less likely to report that they were being bullied *after* receiving the Friendly Schools intervention compared with students who did *not* participate in the program. There is information

about Donna Cross and the ‘Friendly Schools and Families’ program on the ‘Bullying No Way!’ website (see Reference list).

The No Blame Approach

This method involves discussing what has happened with both the victim and the bully and talking about **how the victim feels**. The focus is on **solving the problem** rather than on blaming the bully. It can be done by convening a group of children and asking them to find a solution to the problem.

There is a role for bystanders in this approach, whereby they are encouraged to see themselves as playing a part in stopping bullying by choosing to act. By doing nothing, bystanders are given the message that they are condoning the bullying. Responsibility for carrying out the solutions thought of by the group is given to all group members. Each student carries out their own solution, and then the group reconvenes a week later to talk about what has been achieved.

The website www.bullying.co.uk states that this approach is the one mentioned by parents as causing the most concern, in that it is seen as the ‘school doing nothing’ approach, where the bully ‘gets away’ with the behaviour. However, the use of the approach in the United Kingdom describes a success rate of about 80% where it was trialled in 55 cases. The ‘no blame’ approach can be used in a variety of strategies, and specifically in the two which follow, both recommended by **HAPPY SCHOOLS**.

The Method of Shared Concern

In this method, the bully is met with first, followed by any associates. The child affected by the bullying (the ‘victim’) is then spoken to, to avoid any suggestion that he/she is telling tales. Concern is described for what has happened to the victim, and the bully is invited to take responsibility for his/her actions and to make amends. Blame is *not* attributed to either party. It is simply a case of explaining **what the victim feels** when they are bullied. The method follows through by reviewing the bully’s attempts to help the victim, and fine tuning it.

This method is recommended by **HAPPY SCHOOLS** and features in ‘Managing Student Responses’.

The Support Group Method

Like ‘shared concern’, this involves a ‘no blame’ approach. This time however the victim is interviewed first, to establish the ‘players’ in the bullying incident. Then the method collects the bully (bullies) and bystanders in a group, and focuses on how to help the victim. Again, no punishment or blame is involved – just the search for solutions to the unhappiness of the victim.

This method is recommended by **HAPPY SCHOOLS** and features in ‘Managing Student Responses’.

An Anti Bullying Committee/Peer Mediators

Some schools develop a student committee which works together to combat bullying, under the leadership of a teacher. Peer mediators are often older students within the school who take on a role of acting if bullying is happening at the school. Peer group programs are seen as being effective, according to the website www.bullying.co.uk.

Co-operative Learning Activities

Some bullies have little or no experience at participating in a co-operative task and achieving a common goal. Setting up activities where they can engage in group activities with a goal can be useful for these students (Rigby).

Positive Power Use

Rigby suggests that some students who bully have a strong need to lead or be in a power position. This can be turned into a positive attribute if they are given a task which involves leadership or training in a socially acceptable way eg. sporting activities. There is a need to watch that the power given to the bullying student is used appropriately, rather than simply giving them greater power and control over others.

The other methods listed by Rigby which may be effective include:

- Teaching empathy – some bullies lack this ability
- Countering boredom – decrease the opportunity to bully where it is a ‘time filler’
- Using a whole school approach involving students
- Teaching social skills and assertiveness
- Addressing the influence of aggressive role models (eg on TV)
- Dealing with negative emotions (eg anger)
- Setting up an anti-bullying committee
- Addressing impulse control (in potential bullies)
- Developing and teaching strategies for bystanders
- Dealing with image issues (mostly for boys eg macho image, but increasingly for girls also)
- Countering prejudice (eg. racial bullying).

Rigby also notes that children who bully or are victims of bullying can produce fewer solutions to a hypothetical bullying situation than their peers. (Rigby, 1993)

Unhelpful strategies

Because bullying involves complex behaviours and breaches commonly accepted ‘moral’ codes, it is easy to treat it in a punitive way, and even to try strategies that can backfire. Here is a short list of *not to be recommended* ideas:

Insulting the bully/Clever replies: This method is described in some bullying resources as a useful way of dealing with bullying. Elliot (1998) suggests ‘think up funny or clever replies in advance... Practise saying them in the mirror at home’. However, the victim may not have the social and communication skills to use this method effectively. Rigby tends to suggest that this is not a useful strategy and will often be to the disadvantage of the victim. McNamara (1997) also suggests that although humour may be effective in defusing a situation, some children will not have the skills to use this strategy well. **ALL TOGETHER NOW** does *not* recommend this method – considering it too dangerous and unpredictable. In a worst case scenario, the unfortunate victim might well invite worse treatment as a consequence of an ill-fated attempt to be clever.

Being ‘tough’, and fighting back: Selekman and Vessey (2004) report that strategies which do *not* work include giving an instruction to fight back. Statements such as ‘just ignore them’ or ‘stand up and

fight’ are not helpful, do not support the victim, and allow the bullying to continue. The real problem is that by definition victims are weaker than bullies. To be urged to fight back is to invite worse treatment.

Saying that bullying is harmless and will toughen you up: Again Selekman and Vessey (2004) denounce this approach. Despite the popularity of old sayings like ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me!’ and the temptation to see bullying as somehow part of ‘normal’ playground behaviour, or even as useful training for a cruel world – the research is conclusive. Bullying damages the child affected – sometimes in the long term as well as the short term. It is worse than a nonsense to minimize it, and make the victim feel bad about being a victim. It exacerbates the problem. **HAPPY SCHOOLS** decisively rejects this concept.

Giving the bully a taste of his own medicine: This has various forms, from strong punishment, to humiliation before peers, and even worse. The teacher or other adult may feel that there is ‘natural justice’ in this method, but even if it suppresses the immediate bullying behaviour (in sight of adults at least), it is unlikely to touch the underlying urges which led to the bullying. The bully is probably going to end up more angry, and looking for revenge on someone.

Ostracising or isolating the bully: As with the strongly punitive approach (above), to make the bully suffer excessive psychological distress as a supposed means of education is to invite more problems than are solved. Excluding *seriously disturbed* children, who obviously need professional attention outside the school (psychologists or counselors with experience in the field), and a brief ‘time out’ solution, the solitary confinement option is not one to be recommended. It may suppress the behaviour temporarily, but fails to address the causes, and is likely to lead to an outbreak of some kind later.

Also ineffective is interpreting bullying as being purely an anger management problem. Teachers need to distinguish between children who have trouble managing their anger and children who are engaging in bullying. Peer mediation approaches are seen by the authors as ineffective *unless* there is significant adult support and involvement. A zero tolerance policy is ineffective without other programs in place, as is disciplining the bully without taking steps to protect the victim from reprisals.

Reference List

Bullying No Way! Researchers and practitioners – Donna Cross (www.bullyingnoway.com.au/talkout/researchers).

Bullying No Way! Researchers and practitioners – Peter Ross (www.bullyingnoway.com.au/talkout/researchers).

Campbell, M 'Cyber bullying: The case for new school rules' *Principal Matters* May 2005

Carnell, L Advice to pupils – The National 2006 Bullying survey. Bullying Online (www.bullying.co.uk/school/bullying)

Carnell, L Bullying policies – The National 2006 Bullying survey. Bullying Online (www.bullying.co.uk/school/bullying)

Child health promotion research unit *Friendly schools and families: The bullying reduction program that really works* (www.chpru.ecu.edu.au)

Department for Education and Skills (UK) Report on survey and focus groups undertaken by Thomas Coran Research Unit at University of London (www.dfes.goc.uk/bullying)

Elliot, M (1998) *Bullying* Hodder Children's Books, London, Great Britain

Farrell, A *Bullying: A case for early intervention* Paper presented at the Conference on bullying and harassment in 1998

Healey, J (editor) (2001) 'Bullying and Youth Violence' – *Issues in Society* series Vol 154 The Spinney Press, Australia

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1994) *Sticks and Stones – Report on Violence in Australian Schools* Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, Australia

Kia Kaha – Whole School Approach (www.police.govt.nz/service/yes/nobully/kiakaha/whole.html)

Leader newspapers *Support for victims of cyber bullies* Progress Press 25 Oct 2005

Lodge, J and Frydenberg, E 'The role of peer bystanders in school bullying: Positive steps towards promoting peaceable schools' *Theory into Practice*. Vol 44 No. 4 Pg 329 2005.

Lomax Smith, J *Friendly schools and families* Media release 2/8/2005 (www.ministers.sa.gov.au)

Mackinnon, S 'Talking about bullying can minimize long term psychological effects' *The Scotsman*, March 2004

Marshall, K *Bullying has no place in Scottish schools* – A presentation for the Anti Bullying Network Conference, Scotland Nov 2004.

- McGrath, H and Noble, T (eds) (2006) *Bullying Solutions*, Evidence-based approaches to bullying in Australian schools Pearson Education, Melbourne, Australia
- McNamee, J 'The longer you're bullied, the more powerless you feel' Healthscout Dec 2000 (www.oobdoo.net)
- McNamara, B and McNamara F (1997) *Keys to dealing with bullies* Barron's Educational Series Inc. New York, USA
- Murphy, E and Lewers, R (2003) *The Hidden Hurt* Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne, Australia
- Morrison, B 'Bullying and victimization: A restorative justice approach' *Trends and issues in criminal justice* No 219, Feb 2002
- New South Wales Dept of Education and Training Anti bullying plan for schools (www.det.nsw.edu.au)
- Rigby, K (2003) *Stop the bullying – A handbook for schools* (revised edition) Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, Australia
- Rigby and Blake 'Bullying and bystander behaviour at school' *Principal Matters* Aug 2004.
- Rigby 'Bullying in schools and the national safety school framework' *Teacher* July 2005.
- Selekman, J and Vessey, J 'Bullying: It isn't what it used to be' *Kidbits* Vol 30 No 3 Pg. 246. 2004.
- Whitted K and Dupper D 'Best practices for preventing or reducing bullying in schools' *Children and Schools* Vol 27 No 3 Pg. 167 2005.
- SOFWEB DE & T Policy on bullying in schools (www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/policy/index.htm)
- Wikipedia 'Bully'.