More examples of anti-bullying programs

Rigby (2002) describes a series of studies that evaluated programs designed to reduce bullying and victimisation in schools. Two of these studies, one conducted in Norway (grades 4–9, students aged 10–15 years), a second in Sheffield (UK) 6500 students, ages 8–16 years from 23 schools), are described here. For other examples of anti-bullying programs, see Rigby (2002).

The Olweus anti-bullying program

The Norwegian study was based on the work of Olweus (1991, 1993) and was implemented in schools located in two regions of Norway. The aim of the program was to reduce both “direct” and “indirect” bullying (e.g. verbal or physical assault or social exclusion). The anti-bullying program began with a conference day at each participating school attended by teachers, parents and selected students. Coordinating committees were established to support implementation of the program which involved restructuring of the school environment in a way that would discourage bullying while at the same time maintaining a warm, supportive school ethos (Rigby, 2002, p. 47).

Activities described by Rigby (2002, p. 47) that were undertaken as part of the program included:

- regular meetings by school staff to identify ways in which the school environment could be organised to encourage better peer relationships among the students
- meetings between teachers and parents to discuss issues in bullying
- improved supervision of students during recess and lunch times
- provision of playground equipment that would encourage students to become more engaged in play activities rather than bullying.

At the classroom level, practices to be encouraged included:

- with the cooperation of the students, devising class rules against bullying
- role-playing situations that would give students strategies for dealing with bullying
- use of cooperative learning methods in the classroom.

At the individual level, it was recommended that:

- non-hostile and non-physical sanctions be used when bullying occurred
- serious discussion be held by teachers with bullies, victims and their parents
• assistance be given to students who want better strategies to respond to students who bully them
• the provision of opportunities, where necessary, for students to move to another class or another school.

Olweus (1991) reported substantial reductions in students reporting that they had been bullied or had bullied others across the age range 10–14 years over an 8-month period and again, after 20 months. In addition, the occurrence of bullying was not shifted off the school setting to periods when students when travelling to and from school. There was also a reduction in vandalism, theft, drunkenness and truancy (Rigby, 2002, p. 48).

Interestingly, a second evaluation conducted by Roland (1993), three years after the Norwegian anti-bullying program had begun, did not confirm Olweus’s findings. However, Roland did find that the results were most positive in schools that implemented the program most carefully.

The Sheffield program

The Sheffield Program, implemented by Smith (Smith, Sharp & Cowie, 1994; Smith & Morita, 1999) in schools around Sheffield, was similar to the Norwegian study but had some distinctive features. For example, a core requirement for participation in the program was that schools implement a Whole School Policy against bullying (Rigby, 2002, p. 50). Each school community was required to prepare a written document setting out guidelines for staff, students and parents on how to deal with bullying. Strategies that the school could use included:

• development of resources related to bullying that could be used within the school curriculum
• training for those involved in playground supervision on how to identify and discourage bullying
• training for staff on how to help students to become more assertive
• training for students to become peer-counsellors whose role was to listen, rather than act
• training in working with bullies using the non-blaming Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, 1989).

Results of the program were generally positive, with genuine reduction in the number of students being bullied and bullying. The most positive results were associated with the extent to which the schools implemented the anti-bullying program.
Restorative justice approaches have arisen from similar approaches in criminal justice. In these approaches the traditional concept of simply applying punishment to the offender shifts to a practice of problem solving. For example, you may have heard of the term “circle sentencing” in criminal justice programs, which is a form of restorative justice. The “wrongdoer” is still held accountable for their behaviour and support is also provided for the community offended by the wrongdoing (Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006). These approaches are increasingly being applied to cases of bullying in schools. There are three main ways that restorative approaches are practiced in schools:

- **Community conferences:** This is a formal intervention which is used in cases of serious harm. The conference brings the wrongdoer (bully) and their victim/s together, along with their families and school personnel. A trained facilitator works through a series of scripted questions designed to understand the antecedents and effects of the incident. An agreement is made that leads to a feeling of restitution and repair of relationships. Plans are made to address the needs of the participants (such as counselling) and follow up is very important to ensure this happens and compliance with the agreement occurs.

- **Small group and individual conferences:** These conferences involve small groups of students involved in less serious incidents of harm. Parents might not be directly involved but are still informed about the process and outcomes. Follow up continues to be essential to ensuring support and compliance with the agreement.

- **Classroom conferences:** In this method whole classes may have a conference about the way various issues have affected teaching and learning such as bullying, disruptive behaviours and lack of respect for the teacher.


These processes cannot be used in isolation. They must form a part of a whole school philosophical change about managing students’ behaviour; there must also be an appropriate curriculum to teach students about the principles, and serious training of school personnel to carry out the approaches.

One of the underlying concepts of restorative justice is shame. In this practice, it is believed that bullies are less likely than other people to acknowledge shame and may transfer shame and anger to other people in antisocial behaviours (Morrison,
2002). As such Morrison claims that a “process of shaming” (p.3) must occur, this requires a confrontation between the “victim” and “offender”.

The Responsible Citizenship Program was introduced to a Canberra primary school as an early intervention strategy to address bullying. Five key principles underlie the program, known as the REACT keys:

- **Repair** the harm done (The concept of reparations)
- **Expect** the best from others (The idea that change is possible)
- **Acknowledge** feelings or harm done (Acknowledgment of the harm)
- **Care** for others (Building a community sense of care)
- **Take responsibility** for behaviour or feelings (Responsibility for behaviour without denigration).


All Year 5 students at the primary school participated in a curriculum in which they trained in these concepts. Students’ feelings of safety within the school community and their feelings of shame were also assessed. During the program it was noted that students developed more adaptive responses to manage feelings of shame. For example, the number of students who displaced their sense of shame after wrongdoing declined from 27% of students to 13% of students. Interestingly, the initial training in concepts of respect and consideration for others led to an initial decline in respect for others. However, respect for others increased again as training continued in the program. Morrison attributes this temporary decline to the fact that the program challenged students’ principles of respect. Teachers noted an improvement in students’ approaches to conflict and also reported that the class climate had improved. Students also reported that they now knew how to “fix things” when something went wrong and felt they now understood when they had “hurt someone” (p. 5).

Restorative approaches have received mixed reviews of their success and some academics have challenged the philosophy and meaning of the approach. For example, Hilary Cremin, a former teacher and now academic at Cambridge University, questions the concept of “shaming” in the approach and suggests that this idea of shame must be handled very carefully with children, while very careful training of facilitators must be ensured. Australian bullying researcher Ken Rigby (2008) also documents a series of concerns including a concern that shaming may make children feel resentful and stigmatised while application of the program is limited to situations where a trained facilitator can manage the process. McGrath and Stanley (2006) also question whether or not the approach is really a “non-punitive”
approach, as schools may still have to enforce a punishment or “reparations” if the bully does not accept responsibility for their actions. Advocates of the approach counter these claims by reasserting the need for careful training of facilitators and the promotion of a new philosophy of care and respect for children, including the bullies.

Activities

1. Read a report about Hilary Cremin’s views from Cambridge University:

2. Can you detect a common thread running through all of these approaches to bullying? Compare your answer with your peers and see if you can detect the common variable that seems to make these programs more or less effective.

3. Do some of your own research to find out about other approaches used to address bullying in Australian Schools:
   - **The Rock and Water Program** developed by Freerk Ykema
   - **The Bounce Back! Program** developed by Helen McGrath, Toni Noble and colleagues
   - **The P.E.A.C.E. Pack** developed by Phillip Slee and colleagues.

References


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