

## **INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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# SUBMISSION TO THE NEW SOUTH WALES LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

## THE NATIONAL CENTRE AGAINST BULLYING

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL CENTRE AGAINST BULLYING (NCAB)

NCAB is a peak body Chaired by Alastair Nicholson, former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia. The organisation is sponsored by The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, a children's charity founded in the wake of the Port Arthur shootings.

Governance of the organisation is provided by the Executive Committee. Members serve for one to two years and are selected by the Chair for the range of skills they offer.

The Advisory Council is composed of members who are knowledgeable in relevant fields and represent individual, organisational and sectoral positions. This group formed the original National Coalition Against Bullying, which was established in 2002 to advise and inform the Australian community on the issue of the bullying of children:

Based on the Kandersteg Declaration against Bullying in Children and Youth 2007, NCAB's remit has been broadened to include safety and wellbeing in the school and community. The participants at the Joint Efforts Against Victimisation Conference in Kandersteg in June 8th to 10th, 2007 pledged long term commitment and determination to promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying and victimization in children and youth. The Declaration was the result ([www.kanderstegelARATION.com](http://www.kanderstegelARATION.com))

The Centre's vision is 'Creating Caring Communities for Children', and its mission is to provide national leadership in addressing bullying and other negative behaviours and achieve safe and connected environments for young people in communities, schools, homes and in cyberspace.

It aims to do this through

- 1 Changing attitudes about bullying, and related issues, and increase awareness of the harm it causes to individuals and society.
- 2 Building the capacity, knowledge and skill base of a range of sectors to enable them to address the issues of bullying and wellbeing
- 3 Driving evidence-based practice in the fields of bullying and wellbeing.

NCAB has undertaken some outstanding work since its inception in 2003. These include developing national recognition as the key group of experts in the field of school bullying, and delivery of three international conferences where cutting-edge research and classroom practice has been introduced to the education, research, not-for-profit sectors and wider community. NCAB members contributed a chapter to *Bullying Solutions*. This book was launched in October 2005. The Minister for Education in Victoria sent a copy to every Victorian Government School.

# SUBMISSION

## 1. THE NATURE, LEVEL AND IMPACT OF BULLYING AMONG SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF 18, INCLUDING APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES

There is a growing awareness within Australia and other parts of the world of the level and impact of bullying in society. This has generated a rising concern about the prevalence, seriousness and negative effects of bullying, and has encouraged schools and other settings to begin to address it. This awareness has also generated more intense media focus on bullying.

### What is Bullying?

Bullying is a form of aggression, involving the abuse of power in relationships. It is recognised globally as a complex and serious problem. It has many faces, including the use of emerging technologies, and varies by age, gender and culture.

NCAB's definition of bullying is as follows:

*Bullying occurs when a student (or group) with more power repeatedly and intentionally uses negative words and/or actions against another student/s that cause distress and create a risk to wellbeing. [Bullying can be physical, social, verbal, electronic or reputational].*

Bullying behaviour has the following central features:

- it is deliberate and harmful with an intention to distress the recipient or willingness to use the recipient for their own outcomes.
- the harm and distress may be physical, psychological, relational or involve damage to reputation or property
- it causes distress for the recipient who may feel oppressed and/or apprehensive
- it is directed towards a specific person or group
- it is a repeated pattern
- it is unreasonable and unjustifiable

In nearly every case, the following features are also present.

- The individual or group who bullies has a power advantage over the recipient which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for them to effectively deter the bullying
- The recipient usually finds it difficult to leave or avoid the bullying situation(s).

**There is a wide range of bullying behaviours such as:**

- name calling, mocking, sending up, belittling and insulting
- setting out to damage a reputation by spreading rumours, exposing private information, lies etc
- using verbal and non-verbal putdowns in a public context such as in a discussion or meeting
- playing malicious practical jokes or humiliating others
- direct physical attacks
- using covert forms of physical intimidation
- damaging or hiding personal property
- encouraging people to socially exclude another
- perpetrating many of the behaviours outlined above using communications technologies i.e. cyberbullying

## Is Bullying the Same as Harassment or Aggression?

*Harassment* can be defined as unwanted and one-sided words or actions towards another that demean, annoy, alarm or abuse. Harassment may be a single incident or an ongoing pattern of behaviour. It may be deliberate or unintentional. *Aggression* can be defined as words or actions that are intended to harm another. Bullying is a subset of both harassment and of aggression: it is a specific form of harassment that is *repeated and deliberate* and a specific kind of repeated aggression.

## What Bullying Is Not

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying, even though in most cases they require intervention and management.

Three typical socially negative situations are often confused with bullying:

- mutual conflict
- social rejection and isolation
- single or random acts of aggression or intimidation (McGrath, 2006)

## Bullying Using Technologies

Figures are telling: 90% of teens and young adults use the internet, 74% use instant messaging, 62% use chat rooms and 64% have a social network site such as MySpace or Facebook (Youth Poll, 2007). In addition, young people use technology differently to the ways adults use it: mobile phones are status symbols and a key to their social lives, (Belsey, 2008). Use of the internet by young people might not be as widespread as some commentators have suggested - an average of 13 hours online; compared to 19 hours spent by adults (McGrath, H., Unpublished literature review, 2009).

As access to mobile technologies has increased, so has the potential for cyberbullying. The mobile phone is not just a means to an end to contact people via voice telephony. Rather, as technology has developed, so too has the text message culture evolved as a new form of communication, with its own vocabulary (Reid, 2005)

However, there is no commonly agreed usage of the term 'cyberbullying'. Many websites refer to any negative online behaviour in this way, without stressing its repeated nature. A tentative definition of cyberbullying could be that it 'involves repeated threats, attacks, insults or impersonations via email, text and/or attachments' (McGrath, 2009).

We are now conscious of distinct differences between cyber bullying and face-to-face bullying: it can happen at any time, anywhere; and there is no escape behind doors. Audiences can be huge and reached quickly. Power is allocated differently, and bullying can be inter-generational. Perpetrators can have at least an illusion of anonymity and their behaviour can be disinhibited because of this; empathy is also reduced because the victim's reaction is not seen. Hence, the effect of the bullying may also be intensified.

The development of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation mobile phones and Web 2.0 technologies is changing this landscape almost daily, with an increase in risks for young people.

Michael Rich, Harvard University Donna Cross from Edith Cowan University proposes that there are three kinds of online risk to young people:

1. The risk of inappropriate content
2. The risk of inappropriate contact
3. The risk of inappropriate conduct

## Levels of bullying

The Kandersteg Declaration estimates that 200 million children and youth around the world are being abused by their peers.

In Australia, estimates of levels of bullying in schools differ with the ways in which definitions are used by researchers. Rigby (2006) advances a number of reasons for this: age of respondents, socio-economic status (in some studies), racial mix within a school, numbers of boys to girls. Research is also governed by standards of ethical requirements that are more stringent in some places than in others. However, Rigby reports high levels of bullying in Australian schools, with up to 19 per cent of young people between ages 7 – 17 reporting being bullied on a weekly basis. A further 27 per cent of young people were bullied 'less than weekly' (Rigby, in McGrath and Noble, 2006; 7).

Research into cyber bullying is less readily available: however, reports from overseas may give an indication into the likelihood that prevalence of cyber bullying is growing as rapidly in this country as it has been found to be others.

### **Impact of bullying**

Bullying can lead to poor outcomes for many of the young people involved: both those who are victimised and those who take part in bullying others. In some cases, these negative effects have been shown to persist in later life.

Young people who are victimised have a higher likelihood than do other young people of experiencing adverse health outcomes (Rigby, 2005, McGrath, 2006) and social adjustment health problems. Young people who are engaged in repeated bullying are more likely to engage in ongoing anti-social behaviour and criminality, have issues with substance abuse, demonstrate low academic achievement and be involved in future child and spouse abuse. Both victimised young people and those who take part in bullying across time may demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement than expected.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people tend to be disproportionately victimised relative to their heterosexual peers, as a direct result of the ignorance, fear and prejudice that surrounds them. Homophobic bullying tends to be systematically carried out by large groups of young people rather than individuals. Lesbian or bisexual adults who were bullied at school have identified very negative mental health outcomes from those experiences; in the short term, alcohol abuse and drug use self-harm, and in the longer term, high rates of suicide and suicidal thinking, (Mc Grath et al, 2005).

The aspects of cyber bullying that most affect young people are the viciousness of much of the bullying: they often don't know the identity of the person or persons who are bullying them, the public humiliation of having images of themselves posted on the internet and their seeming inability to escape it. No one seems to be available to help them, and they are worried that their parents/teachers will find out, adding to the public humiliation but also because of the possible ramification that their access to technology will be removed.

The relationship of bullying to cyber bullying is integral – we see cyber bullying is a subset of bullying. Cyber bullying is to do with behaviour rather than technology, but it 'mirrors and magnifies' traditional bullying with often severe effects to the mental, social and academic wellbeing of the young people concerned.

## **2. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO BULLYING**

A number of factors contribute to bullying in schools and other locations. Rigby (2006) shows that individual differences, socio-cultural factors and school factors produce some explanations for bullying.

Some young people bully others because they are too young to understand that what they are doing is wrong – their moral development is not yet complete. They may not realise what they are really doing because they have framed it differently and lack awareness of the impact of their bullying behaviour on others. They may be modelling behaviour they have observed at home. In fact, many children try bullying at one time or another as they learn different ways of interacting socially, but stop when they find unpleasant

consequences follow, they lose friends or the results of their behaviour (hurt, distress) are pointed out to them.

Often young people have no particular feelings towards those they bully, but use it as a means to get or keep social position or power within their group, to reinforce group norms, or to prevent the bullying happening to them. Sometimes they may be enforcing conformity to gender stereotypes, endorsing gender norms, or playing out the sadness and hurt of a broken friendship.

Boys tend to bully because of their desire to dominate, and perhaps to enact established notions of masculinity. Boys tend to use more physical forms of bullying than do girls, whose bullying is more likely to be social in nature and to take the form of exclusion or isolation. Girls' bullying is often based in a desire to gain social power and popularity.

Some children who have been bullied go on to bully others. The 'bully/victim cycle' makes it more difficult for teachers and others to see bullying in black-and-white terms. Some young people demonstrate signs of an antisocial personality disorder and 'serial bullies' are often noticeable for their lack of empathy.

Children who are bullied repeatedly by their peers have been found to be introverted, having low self-esteem and lacking in assertiveness (Rigby 2006).

Bullying can also be entrenched within an organisation. Some schools and workplaces tacitly support and condone bullying by failing to use explicit measures to deal with it. Some schools in 'similar socioeconomic areas with the same ethnic mix' report four times as much bullying than others. In some schools where there is a culture of dominance, intimidation and bullying, students who bully are admired for their behaviour and it is rewarded. This culture endorses 'power over' others as a desirable goal and also endorses 'turning a blind eye' to peer persecution as a way of dealing with it. Bullying flourishes where students learn that it is safer and more comfortable to do nothing when they witness unjust treatment by others. The culture of a school (or workplace) where bullying is occurring even in a small way needs to be changed.

It is also interesting to consider why some students do not bully others: McGrath (2003) shows that students who don't bully have more advanced empathic or moral development, are more socially skilled, feel more connected to school, bullying is inconsistent with their self-image and often these students have greater resilience. They may understand the possible negative consequences of bullying or identify with same-age or older students and caring adults such as parents and teachers who accept and value individual differences.

### **3. PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION APPROACHES TO ADDRESS BULLYING, INCLUDING 'CYBER-BULLYING'**

It is best to start the work of preventing and reducing bullying with a clear definition to ensure that everyone shares the same understanding of what bullying means. A strong definition, developed collaboratively by all sectors of the community provides a common language for all to use, and forms a good foundation for shared understanding and action.

We have seen that some organisational cultures support bullying and tacitly condone it by failing to deal with it in an overt fashion, leading to much worse outcomes for all. Some school settings and workplaces prevent and manage bullying more effectively.

How do they do this?

Typical elements in addressing school bullying include educating school staff and parents, developing a school anti-bullying policy, working with children and young people using appropriate curriculum materials that raise awareness, teach skills and teach values such as respect and involving students as collaborators in reducing school bullying. There are a number of non-educational or organisational approaches to preventing bullying, and these include surveillance of playgrounds and corridors, and providing safe places and lunchtime

activities. Ways to respond to and manage bullying should be agreed upon and consistently applied, whether this is a sanction-based or restorative approach.

The following guidelines emerge from the last two decades of research:

- Take a whole school approach
- Use multiple strategies
- Embed social and emotional learning in the curriculum
- Start early in a child's life
- Plan for proper maintenance because long term programs work best
- Involve parents

### **Whole school approach**

Research shows that adopting a whole-school approach is the most effective way to implement any school-based program that aims to address bullying and increase student safety and wellbeing. Whole school approaches are those that, under strong and effective leadership, 'develop and implement policies and programs through processes that engage the whole school community' (NSSF, 2003). Policies give schools specificity as to what they should be doing and how they agree to go about it.

In particular, work undertaken by The Alannah and Madeline Foundation in conjunction with Deakin University has shown that whole school planning is a key feature leading to improved student wellbeing. A study of schools shown to have good student wellbeing outcomes and low levels of bullying (McGrath, Craig & Stanley, 2005) showed that the adoption of a whole-school approach was a key success feature. The same finding was made in a report on the outcomes of the National Safe Schools Framework Best Practice Grants Program (2006). A whole-school approach was also seen by most of the schools in Rigby and Thomas's (2003) Australian study as very important to the success of anti-bullying initiatives.

Whole school approaches ensure that there is a strong focus on partnerships with all members of the school community, that all members share responsibility for preventing and managing bullying incidences, even if they're not directly connected to those involved in the bullying incident(s), and that consistent responses and management strategies are used. Programs and practices teaching students about bullying or social skills are integral to systems and curricula, rather than being added on and are delivered to all students rather than to selected ones only. When approaches are the responsibility of the whole community, and embedded in policy and practice, program sustainability and maintenance are buffered against the loss of key people from the school community.

### **Multiple strategies**

The research shows clearly that no single approach will work and programs with multiple strategies have a greater chance of success.

### **Social and emotional learning should be embedded in the curriculum**

Programs that are embedded in the curriculum and the general life of the school are more effective than add-on programs. A barrier to the sustaining of any new school initiative is the already-crowded curriculum, and teachers' perception that their core business is solely to help students achieve curriculum outcomes. However, if teachers can be brought to see that anti-bullying initiatives can also achieve curriculum outcomes, then the new initiatives are more likely to be maintained over time and hence be more cost effective. A further benefit is that once teachers are trained, they can employ the newly acquired principles with subsequent classes

### **Early intervention is important**

Most reviews of preventative research stress that programs that start when students are very young are more likely to be effective.

### **Program maintenance is integral to the plan**

Longer-term program implementation has significantly greater benefits than short-term preventative measures, and multi-year programs provide 'more opportunities for students to revisit key concepts in developmentally appropriate ways'.

### **Parents and community involvement are important**

Prevention programs that target the multiple domains of school, family and community work best (Dryfoos, 1990; Greenberg et al., 2003, Scheckner et al., 2002)

### **In addition...**

#### **Evidence-informed practices should be the basis of planning and programs**

Schools and organisations are advised to use critical evidence-based approaches when they select particular anti-bullying initiatives, for instance, pedagogy and curricula. They will use multiple components rather than relying on just one or two, and will tailor them to the needs of their communities.

#### **A Risk Management Approach is essential**

For schools this means the collection of reliable and robust information about behaviour and attitudes about bullying and implementing management strategies to address any identified concerns. It also means that students are able to report on bullying incidences securely.

#### **Effective behaviour management is part of the picture**

Discipline that sets out to teach rather than punish and is delivered within a framework of supportive and respectful relationships is apt to keep students more connected with their education. It also, as Noble points out, keeps students 'connected to ...their classmates and builds their sense of responsibility' (2006). More positively focused approaches like restorative practices that focus on repairing relationships and allowing those involved to focus on moving on are showing good results in many schools around Australia. However, any system chosen by the school needs to be adopted and consistently applied by all members of the community.

#### **Kandersteg Declaration recommended actions to be taken**

- Stop bullying now in all the places where children and youth live, work and play.
- Start prevention efforts early and continue these through childhood and adolescence, targeting known risk and protective factors and promoting healthy relationships.
- Educate and empower all adults involved with children and youth to promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying.
- Use policy and prevention programs, based on scientific research, that are appropriate for age, gender and culture, and that involve families, peers, schools and communities.
- Provide ongoing assessment and monitoring necessary to evaluate the success of policy and programs and to guarantee the rights of children and youth.



#### **4. CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION BETWEEN RELEVANT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO ADDRESS BULLYING**

In our view, there is little effective coordination between government authorities at Federal or State/Territory to address bullying.

The Federal Government's National Safe School Framework (NSSF) aimed to provide a structure within which schools across Australia could develop consistent responses to the problem of bullying in schools. The NSSF provides a national approach to safe school practices. It consists of a set of nationally agreed principles for safe and supportive school environments and includes appropriate responses that schools can adopt to address the issues of bullying, harassment, violence and child abuse and neglect. However, there is a wide variation in uptake: "Some schools embrace this and address the issues, and other schools are failing to address the issues of violence in their schools" (Canberra, 2007).

Since the NSSF's inception in 2002, significant developments in technology have widened the scope of bullying activities. To determine the prevalence of covert bullying (including cyber-bullying) in schools, the Australian Government commissioned two research projects to examine the prevalence and human dimension of covert bullying in schools.

Emerging research indicates that covert bullying may have the potential, in some cases, to result in more severe psychological, social and mental health problems than overt bullying, and is more difficult for schools and parents to detect.

Schools report they are unsure of what actions can be implemented to address covert bullying, particularly cyber-bullying effectively, and suggest that clear policy recommendations on how to address this using a whole-school approach, professional learning and other capacity development are urgently needed to address this problem effectively in schools. The National Safe Schools Framework is to be reviewed during 2009, with the intention of addressing these recommendations.

This is an important start. However, this, like any other implementation of its kind, will have to compete with initiatives undertaken within the States, where significant resources have been directed towards answering similar questions.

A coordinated approach by States and Territories in the development of a common National policy in student wellbeing under the leadership of the Federal Government would be another important initiative. We recognise that to recommend the development of Federally led approaches and curricula is contestable; but centralising approaches and personnel could free up much-needed resources to support schools.

Schools use a variety of programs or program elements to address bullying; some have a strong base of evidence to support them, others do not. Presently no tool exists with which schools can audit these, and they are presently searching across 'other jurisdictions and attending national forums' (Canberra, 2007). An auditing tool needs to be developed so that schools can more accurately assess whether a particular program or implementation fits their particular needs, especially since a combination of actions has been shown to produce the most effective results (McGrath and Noble, 2006).

Collaborative cultures need to be built between primary and secondary schools (at least). In the last ten years, primary schools have been proactive in addressing the issue of student wellbeing, and many have built supportive, respectful, cultures (McGrath, Craig and Stanley, 2005). Secondary schools are disparate organisationally and often have significantly larger numbers of staff and students: however, there is much to be gained for schools' developing common approaches to student wellbeing.

The management of student transition from primary to secondary school is important, as there seems to be a noticeable rise in bullying at or around that time (Rigby, 2006). When

students enter primary school, many are supported by an approach called 'peer-support', in this case, a pairing of younger with older children to support the entry of the younger child into its educational life. This is typically not managed nearly so well from primary to secondary school, with the effect that students not only lose academic capability, but also can be subjected to bullying and other negative behaviours.

Teacher training, both pre and in-service is deemed to be important (NCAB meeting, November 2008). Ongoing training would provide teachers, parents and community members with the latest evidence-based research. Conferences are an excellent avenue, but their catchment is relatively small.

A system of accreditation for schools along the lines of the very successful SunSmart cultural change program would encourage schools to address issues of bullying, cyber safety and school culture.

### **The Alannah and Madeline Foundation's Cybersafety and Wellbeing Initiative**

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation is a national charity aimed at keeping children safe from violence, caring for children who experience or witness serious violence and developing and delivering programs that help to prevent violence in the lives of children. It also plays an advocacy role and is a voice against childhood violence.

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation has secured funding and in-kind support from sources including Telstra Foundation, The Victorian State Government, NAB, Microsoft, MySpace, Australia Post, and a range of philanthropic foundations to develop the pilot for their Cybersafety and Wellbeing Campaign.

This initiative is a multi-layered culture/behaviour change campaign, modelled on the SunSmart campaign. Like SunSmart, it will provide a schools accreditation system, a community-wide campaign (like Slip Slop Slap) and an online portal that will connect teachers, parents, young people and the community to a wide range of expert resources. It will access and help to promote the wealth of antibullying information that is already developed, and be advocate for the community to embrace the ideal of being 'cybersmart'.

The content will cover a range of related issues, including the smart use of technology (particularly in teaching and learning), the safe use of technology (with a focus on protection), and dealing with cyber-bullying (within a wellbeing framework).

### **Development of the school's accreditation system**

A priority for the first phase of the campaign is the establishment of a nationwide schools' accreditation system, facilitated through a web portal. This portal will guide schools to involve teachers, parents and students in tackling cybersafety and will link to a range of high quality websites, online resources and programs including those developed by Australian Communications and Media Authority and The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

Consultation is ongoing with the Education jurisdictions and other stakeholders (including ACMA and DBCDE) to ensure this initiative aligns with a national standardised approach to how schools manage cybersafety.

### **Legal approaches to bullying**

Legal remedies that exist are rarely very satisfactory in coping with the problem of bullying as parents and teachers are aware. Cyber bullying adds a new complexity to the problem.

There is beginning to be a view that schools have a continuing responsibility to respond to incidences of bullying, and to control cyber bullying by its students, whenever and wherever they occur.

However, the law should be regarded only as an adjunct, rather than a solution to the problem of bullying. What is needed is a clear setting of legal boundaries as to the rights, obligations and duties of schools, teachers, parents and children and young people themselves to ensure that the problem is properly addressed.

For a full discussion of bullying and the law, see **Appendix 1**.

## **5. THE EVIDENCE-BASE FOR EFFECTIVE ANTI-BULLYING APPROACHES**

The term 'evidence-based practice' means that schools adopt programs and approaches on the basis that there is some evidence support for them. This differs from the term 'best practice', which implies that there is one effective way. The term 'evidence-informed practice' may be preferable in that it acknowledges that what works in one social context or school environment may not be appropriate in a different context (McGrath & Noble, 2006). As Smith (2001) notes, it is vital to adapt approaches to suit the conditions of the particular school.

Evidence-based practice is based on a critical synthesis of relevant, recent and credible research and theory to make decisions about school-level actions and programs. Evidence-based practice considers research that has been carried out in different countries, cultures, school systems and student populations, but recognises that this may need to be evaluated for appropriateness for Australian culture and educational systems, and to particular school contexts.

Evidence-based practice avoids 'faddism', a tendency towards adopting new programs and discarding them for even newer ones. A main cause of 'faddism' is that educators do not wait for, or ask for, a reasonably sound theoretical framework and convincing evidence before adopting these new practices and programs (Slavin, 1989).

It is also important to consider factors that affect implementation such as the appropriateness of the program for the school's needs (especially cultural appropriateness), adequate stakeholder involvement, school readiness, teacher skills and program fidelity (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Evidence is needed about:

- the logical links between theory and a new program or approach
- the content or components of a program or approach
- the method used to deliver the program or approach (many developers of programs or approaches do not state the underlying theory of learning but it is apparent in the design of lessons, their sequence, duration and structure, and in the way in which staff training and support is provided)
- The overall effectiveness of the program, approach, similar programs, or approaches (assuming they are designed to be implemented in a prescriptive way rather than in a flexible way).

Evidence, with differing levels of rigour, can be obtained from many sources such as:

- meta-analyses or reviews of research that summarise large amounts of relevant and not-so-relevant research information concisely and accurately
- individual and replicable scientific studies
- research studies that support the 'big ideas' that a school is trying to work towards
- published case studies and narratives
- teachers' own action research within their school (Davies, 1999; Groundwater-Smith, 2000). Although teacher action research does not claim to be transferable in the accepted ways, it can be transferred into other classrooms (and schools) where the ideas can be tried and adapted to the new context (Evans, Lomax & Morgan, 2000)
- school-based evaluations of the effectiveness of a new initiative.

Hammersley (2005) and others (e.g. Pring, 2000) have identified some limitations that need to be kept in mind when schools adopt an evidence-based approach.

Over the last decade, there has been a research shift from focusing on the short-term effectiveness of innovations and towards focusing on a deeper level of understanding on how to create conditions for success in 'normal' school circumstances (Elias, 2003; National Health and Medical Research Council, 1996). Seligman (1995) has argued that empirically validated effectiveness can also be achieved by putting together the results of a number of less-controlled and less robust studies of real-life innovations.

Evidence that can guide decisions about the principles and practices that relate to prevention and management for Safe Schools can be drawn from a variety of theoretical and evidence-based sources such as:

- directly focused anti-bullying initiatives in schools
- school-based wellbeing programs
- school-based anti-violence prevention programs
- school-based substance-abuse prevention programs
- school-based social and emotional learning programs
- school-based peer support initiatives
- research into school change and school improvement processes.

### **Critical Program Evaluation**

A critical evidence-based approach should be used to evaluate both the content and procedures of a new program, practice or approach as well as its underlying assumptions about pedagogy and student learning. Many program developers do not explicitly state the program's underlying theory of learning but it is embedded in the design of lessons, their sequence, duration and structure, and in the way in which staff training and support is designed.

Given that individual schools and clusters are not in a position to easily access the range of available program options or critically evaluate an innovation, it can be helpful to seek guidance from educational systems and appropriate professionals.

Schools are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of a new initiative through the collection of appropriate and teacher-friendly data. This can include establishing baseline data, using focus groups and conducting structured surveys. Hargreaves & Fullan (1998) have argued that teachers need to become 'assessment literate' because evaluation is essential for examining and improving school situations and practices.

### **Multiple Components**

Most research studies that have evaluated school-wide prevention programs have identified that using multiple components rather than relying on a single approach or program is more effective in producing the desired positive student outcomes (

Smith, Pepler & Rigby (2004) confirm that the more program components and actions are included in a school's anti-bullying initiative, the more readily students perceive that the school is making a difference. Catalano et al. (2003) concluded that effective school-wide prevention programs usually contain at least five different aspects of social and emotional learning.

Schools also need to monitor the implementation of any multi-component programs so that the 'most active ingredients' can be identified. Cross et al., (2004b) have suggested that the prevention and management of bullying is best addressed as part of a systematic whole-of-school approach that comprises the 'sum of many small moves'.

Blum, 1998; Greenberg et al., 2001; Kellerman et al., 1998; Resnick et al., 1997; Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992; Scheckner et al., 2002; Greenberg, Domitrovich & Bumbarger, 2001).

### **Customising Programs for School 'Ownership'**

Although some researchers espouse strict adherence to a published program or curriculum (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004), others are moving towards a more flexible model that acknowledges the need to tailor programs to districts' and students' unique needs (Ringwalt et al., 2004). Published programs can be a sound starting point for a Safe Schools initiative, but they cannot just be 'plugged in' to a school setting and expected to work effectively. Programs and innovative practices also need to be adapted to the school's circumstances in order to meet the needs and priorities of the school (Elias, 2003). This means assessing the needs of the school and ensuring that programs are culturally appropriate for all members of the school community and the needs of a diverse range of students.

However, Briggs and Hawkins (n.d.; 1999a; 1999b) have also sounded a note of caution about teachers using aspects of prescribed materials too selectively and hence inadvertently omitting the most 'active' ingredients in the program. Class discussions about bullying may be an 'active ingredient' that could be omitted, as Limber et al. (2004) reported that many teachers in their study found class discussions about bullying uncomfortable.

It can take schools a considerable amount of time to work out how programs fit together (Elias, 2003), but adapting and integrating compatible programs and resources to form a school 'tapestry' of programs helps to create a sense of school ownership that contributes to sustainability.

## **6. APPROACHES TO ADDRESS BULLYING IN AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS JURISDICTIONS**

Increased awareness of the size, scope and impact of bullying in society has led to the development of a large number of broad-based anti-bullying initiatives and campaigns across the world. Some examples in Australia include the National Safe School Framework the National Centre Against Bullying, The Coalition to Decrease Bullying, Harassment and Violence in South Australian Schools and BullyingNoWay. Campaigns in the United Kingdom have been promoted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, I Power I, Beat Bullying and the Anti-Bullying Network (Scotland). Other examples of campaigns include Stop Bullying Now in the USA, Walk Away and Bully B'ware in Canada and the initiatives of nobully.org in New Zealand.

Large-scale proactive initiatives such as the National Safe Schools Framework reflect a growing global awareness of the rights of all people including children, women, those with a different sexual orientation, people from different ethnic or religious groupings and people with disabilities to be safe from victimisation, violence and abuse.

Every child and young person has the right to be respected and safe. Bullying is a violation of this basic human right. It is the moral responsibility of adults to ensure these rights are honoured and that healthy development and citizenship are promoted. Many adults want more understanding and strategies to address bullying problems effectively.

## **7. ANY OTHER RELEVANT MATTER**

Children, young people and adults involved in bullying suffer. Bullying and victimization problems begin early in life and for some last a lifetime.

Although this response has focused intensively on the situation pertaining in schools, we do not deny that bullying occurs in many other places, including universities/colleges of education, military institutions, sporting organisations, school staffrooms and other workplaces. Bullying in these places has been shown to result in serious effects for the targets of this behaviour. Working to improve school cultures is a step to changing communities and societies, but acknowledgement of the plight of bullied older students and workers of all ages must also be made.

Research (Anda, et al, 2004, Anderson et al, 2004) on violent television and films, video games, and music reveals unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviour in both immediate and long-term situations. 'Frequent exposure to violent products will increase the risks that children will develop a

mental script for the way to deal with conflict...' (Young Media Australia Website). The evidence is clearest within the most extensively researched domain, television and film violence. Certain TV shows encourage bullying behaviour by overtly condoning the idea of a 'loser' and endorsing behaviours that exclude and isolate, or expose individuals to ridicule or shame. The growing body of video-game research yields essentially the same conclusions.

Short-term exposure increases the likelihood of physically and verbally aggressive behaviour, aggressive thoughts and aggressive emotions. Recent large-scale longitudinal studies provide converging evidence linking frequent exposure to violent media in childhood with aggression later in life, including physical assaults and spouse abuse. (Anderson, et al, 2004)

All sectors of society have a responsibility to act against bullying and other negative behaviours.

### **In the words of the Kandersteg Declaration**

"Many risk and protective factors associated with bullying are known and prevention programs are being implemented in several countries with encouraging results. The mental and physical health, social, and academic consequences of bullying have an enormous impact on human and social capital. The costs of bullying burden our education, health care, social services, and criminal justice systems, as well as work force productivity and innovation."

***Bullying concerns and affects us all.***

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