

**Submission
No 21**

INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Organisation: Centre for Educational Research

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The Centre for Educational Research (CER) seeks to address the educational challenges of the twenty-first century. The interconnectedness between individuals, the social world, and education is central to CER's research agenda but rapid social, cultural, and technological changes have placed new demands on individuals and traditional social domains such as the family, health, welfare, and educational institutions.

CER addresses these demands by investigating and analysing the processes that shape the lives of individuals, communities and social worlds, and the implementation and experience of education. CER's goal is to generate new knowledge, theories and innovative educational and policy solutions that will enhance educational quality, generate social opportunities, and build ethical and sustainable knowledge-based societies for the future.

Researchers in CER are social scientists who are experts in psychology, policy, curriculum, pedagogy, sociology, cultural studies, health and Indigenous studies. Cross-disciplinary collaboration is central to CER's agenda. CER researchers also work closely with government and non-government agencies and industry partners, often on highly competitive Australian Research Council grants.

CER is consequently pleased to submit the following response to the Inquiry into bullying of children and young people, by addressing the terms of reference of the Inquiry. The Centre is keen to participate in forums, workshops or other consultations to expand on any of the issues outlined below.

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INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Response by the Centre for Educational Research (CER)

Preliminary statement

The Centre for Educational Research (CER) focuses on the role of education within the larger context of social, economic and policy issues that impact upon individuals, families, communities and institutions, particularly from Greater Western Sydney and similar suburban and rural centres.

The research program of CER focuses on three broad research themes that highlight policy challenges in forming a sustainable, ethical and just society.

1. Politics and policy
2. Individuals, families and communities and their social and cultural contexts
3. Learning, pedagogy and practice.

1. Politics and Policy

Through this theme, we seek to identify policy that impacts on children and families in communities and workplaces, particularly the effects of marketisation on teaching, learning and educational outcomes and personal, social and economic wellbeing.

2. Individuals, Families and Communities and their Social and Cultural Contexts

In this theme, we focus on the roles of formal and non-formal education in building wellbeing for individuals, families, and communities, particularly the social, psychological, historical, economic and cultural factors shaping wellbeing and life opportunities and seek to assist in community capacity building.

3. Learning, Pedagogy and Practice

Through this theme we examine the role of formal education in engaging students to reach their full potential. We explore pedagogical and institutional cultures and practices and their relationship to the other key research themes, as well as elucidating the relations between aspects of teaching and student learning.

The Centre provides submissions to national inquiries and takes a proactive role in generating and considering policies with respect to the recognition, funding, and quality control of education research. The Centre also seeks to enhance public understanding of quality education research, the benefits for the nation of having soundly-based education research, and the need for its continued funding.

Inquiry into bullying of children and young people

This submission follows the Terms of Reference and thus the contents can be listed as follows:

- 1. The nature, level and impact of bullying among school age children and young people under the age of 18, including apprentices and trainees**
- 2. Factors contributing to bullying**
- 3. Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying, including 'cyber –bullying'**
- 4. Co-ordination and co-operation between relevant government agencies to address bullying**
- 5. The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches**
- 6. Approaches to address bullying in Australian and overseas jurisdictions**
- 7. Any other relevant matter**

- 1. The nature, level and impact of bullying among school age children and young people under the age of 18, including apprentices and trainees**

Our research (Marsh, Parada, Craven, & Finger, 2004) has shown that bullying and being bullied are mutually reinforcing over time, not two (or more) distinct categories.

We have found that although those who are bullied fare worst, many similarities exist between bullying others and being the target of bullying. Both bullies and their targets are similar in relation to a variety of psychological constructs such as: attitudes toward bullying, strategies used for coping with problems, inability to control anger, higher levels of depression, and importantly low self-concept (a key driver of human potential). Yet most interventions do not account for this dynamic relation.

We have found clear evidence that bullying is manifested in four ways (Crick et al., 2001; Finger, Craven, Yeung, & Parada, 2007; Lowenstein, 1977): physical, verbal, social, and cyber bullying. All types are characterised by subtle and direct forms. Being a bully or their target has been linked to: diminished school performance, poor mental health (particularly posttraumatic stress and depression), delinquent and

aggressive behaviour, as well as future criminality. A child who is an aggressive bully at age 8 has one in four chance of a criminal conviction by age 30. Compared to one in 20 for those who do not bully (see, Clayton, Ballif-Spanvill, & Hunsaker, 2001; Marsh, et al., 2004; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Nansel, et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; 1997; Pellegrini, 2004; Rigby, 1996; Rigby & Slee, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994; Sullivan, 2000; Eron et al., 1987). Moreover, bullying has ripple effects throughout school communities, leading to: unsafe schools; alienation from the school community; distrust amongst students; formation of formal and informal gangs as a means to instigate bullying or to gain protection from being bullied, low staff morale, higher occupational stress; and a poor educational climate (Parada, 2006).

In its most severe case, bullying can lead to bullycide (bullying related suicide or even homicide). Evidence further suggests that impacts continue to last over time for those who are being bullied, such that once bullied, impacts only worsen for those involved if nothing is done to prevent bullying or the negative effects (Parada, Craven, & Marsh, 2008).

It is not clear what the true incidence of bullying for young people is among Australian students. There is also a lack of large-scale research which examines the incidence of different forms of bullying in Australia. While many researchers state that bullying decreases with age (e.g. Due et al., 2005; Rigby, 2002), according to our longitudinal research in Australia (Marsh et al., 2004) all traditional types of bullying (physical, verbal, and social) increased from Year 7 onwards, and only decreased in the late stages of high school (e.g. Year 12 in NSW).

There is also a gap in Australian research to elucidate the extent and impact of cyber bullying. Our research (e.g., Griezel, 2007) suggests that the impact of cyber bullying is similar to that of traditional bullying (i.e., self-concept detriments, depression). However, it is not clear how cyber bullying is connected to traditional types. That is, whether it is a distinct form of bullying, or whether it is integrated into each of the other types.

2. Factors contributing to bullying

Orpinas and Horne (2006) suggest causes are not causes in themselves, but risk factors to being involved, or protective factors for not being involved. They suggest no single identified cause will lead a student to bully, instead, there may be a higher probability that a student will be involved in the presence of one or more so called 'risk factors'.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) is a model used to explain bullying. This theory can be applied to demonstrate the impact of peers, school life, family influence, and mass media on bullying. This theory, together with Self-Concept Theory (Marsh & Craven, 2006) helps to demonstrate the factors contributing to bullying.

Hinkley, Marsh, Craven, McInerney, and Parada (2002) state that an individual's social identity is an 'integral and important' part of that person's self-concept. We (Craven & Parada, 2002; Parada, 2002) have proposed that peer reinforcement of bullying behaviours effects self-concepts such that bullies may continue bullying in an attempt to gain further reinforcement or non-punishment from their peers. This in turn

may help to improve their position in the social hierarchy, which helps to enhance their sense of popularity within the school group.

A recent debate existing within research on bullying is whether people who use bullying behaviours have positive self-concepts (Hay, 2000). While empirical studies clearly and consistently show that targets have low self-concepts (e.g., Marsh, Parada, Yeung, & Healey, 2001; Olweus, 1993; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001), our research demonstrates that bullying others leads to self-concepts which are both lower and higher in different self-concept domains (e.g., lower general self-esteem, same-sex relations, honesty/ trustworthiness self-concepts and higher emotional stability self-concept) (Marsh et al., 2004). We have also found that overall high self-concept patterns prevented students becoming involved as either a bully or a victim revealing the significant impact and role of self-concept to involvement in bullying. Positive self-perceptions provide a strategic approach to developing psychological tools and resiliency which protect students from becoming targets as well as bullies.

3. Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying, including 'cyber-bullying'

A child may bully because of factors relating to their peer interactions, family background, school climate, the classroom management of behaviours or any combination of these. Taking this into account, a variety of methods to counteract the possible causes of bullying can potentially be used to prevent bullying. Prevention of bullying then, is best managed at the least with all of these risk and protective factors in mind.

The most successful anti-bullying programs internationally are based on whole-school approaches whereby it is possible to prevent bullying within different tiers of the school environment (school, peer, individual, and family levels) (Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005). Despite a plethora of anti-bullying interventions very few of these have been demonstrated by rigorous research to result in the intended outcomes. There are only two intervention programs internationally which we are aware of that have successfully demonstrated a direct decrease in bullying behaviours and other intended goals over time (i.e., reinforcement of bullying). These are: one in Norway (Olweus, 1993; 1997) and the second; our Australian research-based Beyond Bullying intervention (e.g., Parada, Craven, & Marsh, 2008; Parada, 2006).

We (Parada et al., 2008) have identified five key areas to a successful whole-school approach: (1) a school policy on bullying is actively exercised within the school by students and staff; (2) teachers play a number of key roles in preventing and managing bullying behaviours; (3) a common curriculum is implemented at the student level that accounts for multiple roles in the bullying equation (bullies, targets, bystanders, target advocates, bully advocates); (4) students are educated about how to prevent and address bullying and become effective positive reinforcers of prosocial behaviour; and (5) parents are educated about: the nature, consequences, and myths about bullying; how to address and manage bullying; and are encouraged to be involved and support the aims of the program as well as support their children. A whole-school approach is based on an ecological model (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Impact level of a whole-school intervention

We (Parada, Marsh, & Craven, 2003) also suggest five target areas for how teachers can be better equipped to deal with bullying effectively: (1) educating students about the nature, consequences, and myths about bullying and practical strategies for preventing and addressing bullying; (2) formally increase the capacity of teachers to identify and deal with bullying, and improve classroom interrelationships via effective teacher education; (3) encourage students to build relationships (e.g., establishing expectations, modelling, paying attention to positive behaviours, giving students descriptive feedback, enhancing feedback, using corrective feedback and employing structured conversations); (4) revisiting behaviour management skills (e.g., micro-techniques, maintaining focus, expectation discussion, redirection, shared control and referral to deal with bullying and misbehaviour); and (5) exercising personal coping

strategies (e.g., recognising negative teacher self-talk) and cognitive-behavioural skills for emotional arousal.

The whole-school approach has only been robustly tested with traditional types of bullying. It is not clear the extent to which cyber bullying would benefit with a whole-school approach. Although further testing is needed, since cyber bullying is closely related to traditional types, it is expected that a whole-school approach would also be a valuable tool in preventing cyber types.

4. Co-ordination and co-operation between relevant government agencies to address bullying

We would strongly encourage the co-ordination and co-operation between government agencies in the prevention of bullying. The development of co-ordination on a number of key bullying issues would assist researchers nationally to work toward one common goal, and make research more comparable on a national scale. There are a number of areas in which co-ordination would be important: (a) a consistent definition; (b) common assessment methods; (c) common curriculum for primary and secondary students; and (d) a national study.

Consistent Definition

Gaining an insight into bullying is meaningless without a clear indication of what bullying actually is. How bullying is defined in research has implications for: (a) how bullying is understood; (b) how bullying is measured and analysed; and (c) the ways in which bullying is prevented in schools and through government policy. While there are many facets of bullying which researchers agree make up bullying, to date, no clear definition exists on what bullying is.

Common Assessment Methods

There are many methodological issues facing research on bullying.

- *The lack of Use of continuous variables* – it is much simpler to think of bullying from the stance of classifying individuals as bullies, targets, bully-targets, and those not involved. However, bullying is a complex process which cannot simply be classified in such ways. Research identifies that students may engage in bullying, be bystanders and, may be bullied themselves during the same period (Parada, Marsh, & Craven, 2005; Marsh et al., 2004). As such, dividing groups into bullies and victims is highly artificial and may misrepresent the actual estimates of bullying in schools. This results in inaccurate incidence rates, the extent of impacts and sources of bullying, and misguides prevention strategies. Bullying is more accurately analysed using continuous methods (see Parada et al., 2008, and Finger, Marsh, Craven, & Parada, 2005).
- *Use of single-item measures* – Most research to date has relied on single-item questions (e.g. are you bullied? Yes/No). Single-item measures sacrifice accuracy for practicality. Bullying occurs on a continuum from never being bullied, to being bullied repeatedly everyday. Yes/No type questionnaires do not capture this continuum. They force respondents at either extreme. So children who may be bullied once a month are placed together with those bullied everyday. These questionnaires do not allow for the accurate measurement of change, making the evaluation of interventions highly problematic (Parada, 2006). This can only be minimised with the use of

- *Use of multiple-item and multiple-construct scales.* The most accurate behavioural measure of bullying to-date is the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument – APRI (Parada, 2000). This instrument is the only measure of bullying which has adequately documented the specific three-factor structures of physical, verbal, and social types with both secondary and upper primary school students (Marsh et al., 2004; Parada, 2006). In addition a preliminary extension has been successfully tested to measure cyber bullying (Griezel, 2007). As such the use of instruments like the APRI should be the norm in any future Australian intervention research

Common Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Schools

It is possible to use a common curriculum approach to educating students on bullying and how to prevent it. Key areas of knowledge help students to understand what bullying is, identify it more readily, and prevent it using appropriate means. Key topics include:

- What is bullying?
- What is *not* bullying (what are the differences between bullying, teasing, and conflict between peers)?
- What are the different types of bullying?
- What are the myths of bullying?
- What is my schools policy on bullying?
- Who is hurt by bullying?

- How can students prevent bullying?

National Study

There is currently a gap in Australian bullying research in terms of a national bullying study. Without this it is difficult to grasp a true indication of the nature and extent of bullying and its impacts, the means in which to improve prevention programs, as well as the current incidence of traditional and cyber types.

5. **The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches**
and
6. **Approaches to address bullying in Australian and overseas jurisdictions**

The Whole-School Approach

Given the negative short and long-term consequences attributed to bullying, it is not surprising that there have been numerous anti-bullying intervention programs which claim to reduce bullying. The pioneering work carried out by the Norwegian Government in 1983 and reported upon by Olweus in 1991 has been the blue print for most of these interventions and is collectively referred to as the whole-school approach to bullying. This program included strategies at the school-level (better classroom and playground supervision, teachers training by researchers on what is bullying, and establishment of an overall school climate which does not support bullying), class level (class rules against bullying were formulated and displayed, regular class meetings with students were held), and at individual- level (help for bullies and victims). Given the lack of research evidence available at the time, these interventions were largely developed based on strategies which were *presumed* to be successful, rather than on strategies whose success had been demonstrated by a rich

body of research. Since that time numerous studies, including our own research, have examined the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to reduce bullying.

An empirical method to estimate overall program effects is by calculating the 'effect sizes' of the intervention by pooling all available studies using that form of treatment. An effect size (ES) is a measure which indicates the relative strength of the difference in outcome for the average participant who received a treatment from the average participant who did not (or received a different level of treatment). For whole-school interventions in schools these effects can be as high as .29. To place these effects in context, one may consider some other average effects. For example, the average effect of psychotherapy is about .34; the effect of aspirin on reducing heart disease is approximately .03; the effects of homework on academic achievement is approximately .10; condom use on reducing sexually transmitted diseases is .20; and smoking on cancer is .40. To date, a whole-school intervention is still the single best intervention available for bullying. There is no evidence that other forms of intervention are superior to the whole-school approach in dealing with bully-victim problems.

Australian Interventions: The Beyond Bullying Program

The Beyond Bullying Program was designed at the University of Western Sydney to assist schools to manage bullying and associated behaviours. The Beyond Bullying Program structure, resources, and practical strategies are based on a whole-school approach whereby teachers, parents, and students work together to prevent and intervene to reduce bullying. Comprehensive evaluations have shown that it

significantly reduced rates of bullying and being bullied, as well as, having positive effect on other desirable outcomes (Parada, Craven & Marsh, 2008).

Setting the Beyond Bullying Program apart from all other published school anti-bullying programs, is a whole-school teacher-managed intervention. At least three to five teachers are selected to form a 'consulting team'. The consulting team's role is to assist in enhancing their peers' bullying management skills and to help them implement the intervention in their school by serving as a support team. Consulting team teachers, and later – through them – the rest of the teaching staff at each school, are trained to reinforce positive peer interactions; proactively address bullying behaviours; and implement curriculum and whole-school activities that educate students and parents about addressing bullying.

Supporting teachers is of extreme importance. Numerous reports have highlighted that the classroom is only second to the playground in the amount of bullying that takes place, making it an important milieu in which to intervene. It has also been estimated that teachers may only intervene in as little as 4% of bullying incidents observed in the school playground. There may be several explanations for these results. It could be that there is a lack of identification of the behaviours as bullying by the staff member; or it may also be possible that the staff member is not familiar with strategies to intervene and/or may not acknowledge that known behaviour management strategies can also be applied to bullying. By behaviourally anchoring a bullying definition at the school level, transfer of these skills and strategies may become easier. However, there may also be a need to increase the repertoire of behaviour management skills in some staff.

In the Beyond Bullying Program specific strategies were chosen to skill teachers in the early intervention and prevention of school bullying. These strategies were based on available evidence and current best practice. The chosen strategies to enhance pro-social behaviours were: Establishing Clear Expectations, Modelling, Attention to Positive Behaviours, Descriptive Feedback, Enhancing Feedback, Corrective Feedback Techniques, and Structured Educational Conversations. There are six specific strategies for directly intervening and managing bullying situations. These were: Micro-Techniques, Maintaining Focus, Expectation Discussion, Redirection, Shared Control, and Referral. All of these strategies are designed to allow teachers to intervene in a bullying episode with both bullies and their targets. Of note is that staff were all supported in obtaining the training (at least a full day of in-house training) necessary to use these strategies.

It is important to note that consistent with previous successful interventions, the Beyond Bullying Program is also based upon the adoption of a proactive whole-school policy on the management of bullying in schools. This policy includes a behaviourally based definition of bullying which clearly names the behaviours which constitute bullying. The policy also outlines clear step-by-step instructions to each of the stakeholders within the school community as to what to do when bullying arises. Another significant aspect of the Beyond Bullying Program is to educate students and parents in relation to the behaviours which constitute bullying, its consequences, and particularly what the schools expectations are in relation to peer-to-peer behaviours. Furthermore students become thoroughly familiar with the schools procedures

(including disciplinary actions) for managing bullying. These were directly taught in classrooms across curricula and expectations are displayed in every classroom.

7. Any other relevant matter

Need for Australian Research

We cannot emphasise enough that there is a paucity of rigorous Australian studies that allow us to accurately determine national estimates of bullying in Australia. Those few studies available have not taken full advantage of advances in modern psychometric theory and have generally relied on unsophisticated measures that do not capitalize on recent advances in theory, research, and measurement. We recommend that a national study be undertaken in co-operation with State/Territory Departments of Education to identify the nature, level, and impact of school bullying that utilizes theoretically-grounded psychometrically sound measures with demonstrated validity and reliability that account for the multiple forms of bullying (verbal, social, physical, cyber bullying), diverse participant roles (target, bully, bystander), and the reciprocal relation between bullying and being bullied as demonstrated by leading Australian research. Such a study could explicate the nature, level, and impact of school bullying across gender, age, SES, culture, and region to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of bullying in Australia which is fundamental to informing successful intervention and advancing theory and research.

Need for Evidence Based Interventions

The vast majority of Australian and international bullying interventions have been a-theoretical in nature and based on widely presumed assumptions about what works in the absence of tangible research evidence. Most target bullies and as such do not

account for the dynamic nature of participant roles in bullying and the powerful role that these participants can play in changing school bullying dynamics. We recommend that policy and practice in relation to bullying be **streamlined and firmly grounded on interventions that have been demonstrated by rigorous research to effectively reduce bullying**. Currently too many Australian schools are using interventions which are not evidence based. These interventions have not been rigorously tested and rely on a-theoretical approaches that do not account for recent advances in research and the complexity of the different forms of bullying and the diverse participant roles. In some instances they also pose a significant financial burden on the schools. Our Beyond Bullying intervention is the only intervention in Australia and only the second intervention internationally that has been demonstrated by large-scale multi-method research to be effective for multiple participant roles. We recommend that key elements of this approach be adopted for policy and practice including: whole-school approaches; developing school policy to proactively manage and address bullying and educating parents and students on this policy so that all stakeholders are aware of the whole-school approach to address bullying and the rationale thereof; and educating teachers, students, and parents about the nature of bullying and how to effectively address it.

Need for Australian Resources to Combat Bullying

There is a paucity of research-based Australian educational resources to address school bullying. We recommend that a suite of research-based Australian developed educational resources targeting teachers, parents, and children are developed and made freely available to schools to download from the web. A particular focus we recommend is on the development of film and curriculum activities that teaches students of different ages what bullying is, what bullying isn't, the consequences of

bullying, myths about bullying, the roles of different participants, and how each type of participant (bullies, targets, bystanders) can proactively address school bullying utilizing practical developmentally appropriate strategies. Our Beyond Bullying intervention is based on this curriculum content and our research demonstrates that children are powerful agents in changing the bullying equation in Australian schools. We have developed a DVD for young children that proved to be a valuable educational resource for educating young children how to address school bullying by using developmentally appropriate simple strategies (Stop, Help, Tell) but a suite of such resources is needed for different age groups. For example, we had to rely on extracts of DVD materials from the USA to demonstrate practical ways to manage bullying for secondary students, yet we have the capacity in Australia to make DVDs that are more relevant to Australian school students and are grounded on advances in theory and research largely undertaken in Australia.

Need for Effective Evidence Based Teacher Training

Effective teacher education is fundamental to addressing bullying in Australian schools. For intervention to be successful we have found that teachers need to be educated about bullying prior to being expected to teach children how to address bullying and prior to developing a professional commitment to addressing and preventing bullying in their school. We recommend that a suite of multi-media teacher education resources that are grounded on the best available research evidence be developed and made available freely to Australian Universities, education systems, and schools.

Bullying is harmful to bullies, targets, bystanders, and the wider community. Whilst child protection in Australia is legislated, school bullying has not been enshrined in legislation. Given the consequences of bullying for individuals and society we recommend that bullying be considered and incorporated in legislation as a child protection issue.

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