

Bystander behaviour of school children observing bullying

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Summary

Although the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (SASA) is silent about the impact of crime and violence on schools, it does, however, place the responsibility of promoting and maintaining a culture of teaching and learning on the principal, educators and school governing bodies. Section 12 of the *Bill of Rights* as entrenched in the *Constitution*, however, deals with freedom of security of the person and provides that everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person which includes the right to be free from any form of violence, not to be tortured in any way and not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.

According to Maree (in Oosthuizen, 1999:16) violence in South African schools has been escalating since 1994. Bullying, as one form of violence, is such a prevalent problem in our schools that ways should be found to deal with it – whether they are victims, perpetrators or even bystanders. Bullying in all its forms is a threat to the safety and well-being of learners at the school.

Bullying frequently takes place in the presence of learner bystanders. Educators are rarely present and are generally never told about what has happened. Although bystanders sometimes speak out to discourage the bullying, the most common response is to ignore what is going on – and the bullying continues. Usually learners are reluctant to report instances of bullying for fear of being labelled as sell-outs or telltale amongst their peers, or that their telling might anger the bullies and they will probably be subjected to prolonged bullying.

This article proposes strategies on how bullying in primary schools may be reduced through encouraging learner bystanders to engage in social and interceptive behaviour to assist victims of bullying.

Key words: bullying, bystander, victim, verbal bullying, physical bullying, sexual coercion, anti-bullying, violence.

Introduction

According to Squelch (in Oosthuizen, 2005:1) order in the teaching-learning environment is to be regarded as a *sine qua non* (an indispensable condition) for effective learning. Likewise, order cannot prevail in an unsafe school environment. A safe school can be considered not only a place where learners and staff are physically and psychologically safe, but where they believe themselves to be safe.

A safe school is a secure and disciplined environment where school business transpires without disruption or disturbance (Duke, 2002:xvii). Safe schools are free of danger and possible harm; a place in which non-teachers, teachers and learners can work, teach and learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation and violence (Squelch, 2001). Stevens *et al.* (in Oosthuizen, 2005:14) describes a safe

school as a place where learners can learn and teachers can teach in a warm and welcoming environment, free of intimidation and fear of violence. A relatively safe school is one in which every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that learners and staff are not fearful, anxious, or preoccupied with self-protection. Learners and staff must respect each other, personal or school property, and the mission of the school.

Section 12 of the *Bill of Rights* (SA, 1996a) refers to the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right not to be tortured or treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way. Furthermore, Section 24 states that a learner has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their well being.

One form of violence that makes schools unsafe is bullying. There is growing evidence that bullying has a profound and pervasive effect on the learning environment of a school. According to the US Department of Education (in Whitted & Dupper, 2005:169) fear of being ridiculed, harassed and ostracized at school interferes with a learner's ability to learn. Bullying can effect the social environment of a school, creating a climate of fear among learners, inhibiting their ability to learn, and leading to other anti-social behaviour (Garrett, 2003:7).

One of the most serious problems with bullying is that educators and parents often do not spot bullying or brush it aside by turning a blind eye to bullying. According to Joubert and Squelch (2005:60) children who are bullied are afraid to speak out for fear of further bullying.

In this article we will address the issue of bullying and more specifically, the behaviour of the bystander who observe bullying.

Bullying

Andrew Mellor, the manager of the Anti-Bullying Network at the University of Edinburgh (in Hurst, 2005:8) describes bullying as an imbalance of power that exists over an extended period of time between two individuals, two groups, or a group and an individual in which the more powerful intimidate or belittle others. Bullying can be both physical and psychological, but physical bullying is not as common as the more subtle forms, such as social exclusion, name-calling and gossip.

According to Coloroso (2005:49) bullying is a conscious, wilful and deliberately hostile activity that can be verbal, physical, or relational – in which children get pleasure from another child's pain. Bullying is not about anger, or even about conflict. It is about contempt – a powerful feeling of dislike towards someone considered to be worthless or inferior, combined with a lack of empathy, compassion or shame. De Wet (2003:169) refers to bullying as premeditated, continuous, malicious and belittling tyranny and Smith (2003:28), Garrett (2003:10) and Juvonen and Graham (2003:501) assert that bullying takes place when a learner is exposed repeatedly over a period of time, to negative actions on the part of one or more learners. It includes physical aggression, verbal harassment and public humiliation. Bullying occurs across ethnic groups and income brackets and cannot merely be seen as teasing, playful, or a normal part of growing up.

Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan (2004:7) and Garrett (2003:11) suggest that bullying is generally characterised by an intention or desire to hurt the victim repeatedly. In most cases bullying occurs when the victim is vulnerable, displaying physical and psychological qualities making him/her prone to victimisation, particularly a lack of support, leaving the victim feeling isolated, exposed and scared. In these cases the victim experiences anxiety, fear, depression, a decrease in academic achievement, lowered self-esteem, and in severe cases even suicide.

Bullying may manifest in different forms such as verbal bullying like insulting, name calling, ridiculing, gossiping and threatening. Examples of physical bullying includes punching, strangling, kicking, tripping and violent assault whereas rational bullying (non-verbal form) takes the form of excluding or turning away when the victim approaches or not being invited to the class party. Emotional bullying, also referred to as psychological bullying, refers to terrorising, extorting, defaming, humiliating, blackmailing, peer pressure and ostracising. Technological bullying is when victimisation takes place via telecommunication networks such as e-mail, short message system/text messages or picture messaging (Oosthuizen, 2005:20).

Bullying can take the form of one or a combination of the abovementioned. It may involve one-on-one bullying, where one learner bullies another, or where one group bullies an individual or another group. In most bullying incidences three parties are involved: the bully, the victim (target) and the bystanders.

Bystanders in bullying

An important but often overlooked group of children who are affected by bullying are those children who are neither victims nor perpetrators, but who see bullying happening to their peers. There are also children who will not take the initiative themselves to bully, but will follow a bully's lead in helping harass or victimise a particular child in their class or school.

Bystanders, according to Juvonen and Graham (2003:501) rarely intervene with bullying and regard this as one of the biggest challenges for effective anti-bullying intervention. According to Coloroso (2005:49-50), Garrett (2003:76) and Sullivan *et al.*, (2004:19), bystanders are described as the "supporting cast in a play" whose role is to aid and abet the bully through acts of commission or omission. They can stand idly by or look away, afraid to step in for fear of becoming a target themselves, or they can actively encourage or join in the bullying. Whatever the choice, there is a price to pay. Coloroso (2005: 49-50) contends that if they stand by or look away, bystanders' self-confidence and self-respect are eroded as they wrestle with their fears and their guilt. These fears result in apathy, which can lead to contempt. By cheering on the bully, or actively participating in the bullying, bystanders cause even more distress to the child being bullied and increase the chance of other bystanders becoming desensitised to the cruelty, or even creating the image of the bully as a popular, strong, and daring role model, worthy of imitation.

Bystanders play a role in perpetuating the cycle of bullying. Though they play the least active role, bystanders are a critical element in bullying. Tracey (2004:B25) and Coloroso (2005:49-50) assert that a deadly combination of bullying is a bully who gets what he/she wants from his/her target; a bullied child who is afraid to tell; and bystanders who either watch, participate in the bullying, or look away; and adults who discount bullying as teasing, not tormenting. Bystanders tend to have the perception that "victims are at least partially responsible for bringing the bullying on themselves".

With peers looking on and providing at least tacit support, the bully is no longer acting alone. The bystanders have become allies to the point of magnifying the supposed negative attributes of the target: they hinder the development of empathy, compassion, and perspective – three essentials for successful peer relationships.

Atlas and Pepler (1998) report that 85% of bullying incidents occurs in the context of the peer group. Although peers assume many roles in the bullying episode like joining in, cheering, passively watching and occasionally intervening, research indicates that 43% of peers try to help the victim, 33% state that they should help but

do not, while 24% indicated that the bullying was none of their business (Charach, Pepler & Ziegler, 1995). It is nevertheless reported that 83% of peers watching bullying feel uncomfortable.

The question thus arises: Why do learners not take a stand against bullying?" Bystanders and peers of victims may be afraid to associate with the victim for fear of lowering their own status, inviting retribution from the bully, or becoming victims themselves. They may also not report bullying incidents as they do not want to be called a snitch, do not want to make the situation worse or in many cases do not know what to do. Bystanders may even experience feelings of guilt or helplessness for not standing up to the bully on behalf of their classmate, have nightmares about being the next victim or fear certain areas in schools (Garrett, 2003:78).

The effect that bystanders have on one another may be related to the importance of the peer group in the context of behaviour at school (Rigby & Johnson, 2006:428). It is suggested that expectations of friends may have a great influence on their behaviours as bystanders. It is further suggested that as the number of bystanders increases, the likelihood of any one bystander helping decreases and more time passes before help does occur. Bystanders tend to inhibit one another from taking action. Engaging in pro-social behaviour is safe when no-one else is present as no judgment takes place. Scott (2004/2005:online) refers to research that Pepler, a Toronto-based authority on bullying, conducted. Accordingly bullies learn that they can acquire power and status by repeatedly using aggression to control or cause distress to others. But to acquire status in a peer group, you have to have an audience. Bystanders are therefore crucial in what Pepler calls the "theatre of bullying".

Research design and method

Against this background the "Bystander Project" on Bullying in schools was conceptualised. The project was initiated by the University of South Australia, under the management of Dr. Ken Rigby. This research forms part of an International study undertaken in Australia, Bangladesh, England, Israel and Italy and South Africa. The current research reports on the South African study.

Aims of the research

The general research aims for the broader project were:

- to describe the behaviour of student bystanders (intended and observed) of bullying in schools;
- to relate the reported behaviours and intentions to past experiences of respondents as bullies, victims and neither; and
- to examine the reasons learners give for their actions or intentions through an analysis of open-ended questions.

This article aims to:

- investigate and describe the forms of bullying prevalent in selected South African primary and secondary schools;
- elicit responses from grade 6, 7, 8 & 9 learners concerning how often bullying takes place in South African schools in the presence of bystanders in bullying incidents;
- investigate and describe how the learners in question act and react as bystanders in bullying incidents; and
- propose strategies on the role of bystanders in reducing or eliminating bullying in schools.

Research methodology

The current research is descriptive and exploratory in nature. To examine some of these issues, school learners in Gauteng, South Africa viewed an audio and video presentation of drawings depicting physical bullying, verbal bullying and sexual coercion in the presence of student bystanders. These learners anonymously answered questions using a questionnaire based on the video to give their estimates of occurrence of these forms of bullying behaviour at their schools, and on how they believed they personally would respond as bystanders in each situation. In addition, respondents provided information about their expectations of what significant others would expect them to do in such incidences.

To acquire relevant data to answer these questions, four primary schools and three secondary schools in the Greater Johannesburg area in Gauteng, South Africa were purposively selected on the grounds of their representatives in an urban area Johannesburg, Gauteng. Furthermore, the principals at these schools were currently enrolled for post-graduate studies and had also indicated interest in the topic under investigation and had requested the RAU University (now called University of Johannesburg) to facilitate the investigation at their schools. These requests were generally sparked by an acute awareness of the problem due to recent bullying cases at the particular schools.

Learners in Grades six (6) and seven (7) at primary school ($n = 262$) and learners in Grades eight (8) and nine (9) at secondary school ($n = 201$) were purposively selected as the respondents for the investigation. Reasoning for this selection was largely based on the assumption that these learners are at a very critical developmental stage in their lives, namely the onset of puberty and adolescence; and at particularly significant points in their schooling careers, namely the one group at the 'senior' level of the primary school and the other at the 'junior' level of the secondary school, and may be prone to being bullied or to the act of bullying. The group consisted of 47,8% male learners (222), and 52,2% female learners (242). The group further comprised of 33,7% grade six (156); 27,9% grade seven (129); 23,8% grade eight (110); and 14,7% grade nine (68) learners.

Data obtained are presented in table format and are subjected to descriptive analyses using only frequencies and percentages. In some instances, not all questions were answered by the learners, which resulted in percentages for certain responses not tallying 100%.

Discussion of the findings

With reference to the types of bullying, learners in this probe reported a higher frequency of verbal and indirect bullying than physical bullying taking place on a regular basis. Name calling, teasing and spreading untruths are often behaviours less observable by teachers but detrimental to learners in this crucial period of their schooling careers. In an ever changing and integrating South African context, these kinds of behaviours should preferably not be present.

No apparent differences between genders were noticed with reference to the types of bullying they have experienced. Male learners and female learners are of the opinion that 'unpleasant teasing' and 'name-calling' are more prevalent than other forms of bullying, while female learners indicate that they experience more gossip and lies being spread about them. It is gratifying to notice that a high percentage of male learners and female learners are of the opinion that physical hitting or kicking, exclusion and threats do not take place as often as some of the other types of behaviour.

Differences between primary school and secondary school learners were also investigated in respect of weekly bullying in the presence of bystanders. Verbal bullying in the presence of bystanders at least once a week, occurs more often than physical or sexual bullying in both primary and secondary schools. It is also noticeable that verbal bullying in the presence of bystanders occurs more often in primary school than secondary school. Physical bullying in the presence of bystanders appears to be less prevalent at secondary school than at primary school while sexual bullying in the presence of bystanders occurs more at secondary school (refer table 1). Sexual bullying in the presence of bystanders occurs less frequently than both verbal and physical bullying. The frequency of sexual bullying increases distinctively from primary school to secondary school. The increase in sexual bullying at secondary schools may possibly be attributed to the physical and emotional development of learners in grades eight and nine, who are generally speaking at the stage of heightened awareness of and experimentation with sexuality issues.

Table 1 Observed 'weekly' bullying with bystanders present in schools

Type of Bullying	Primary school	Secondary school
Verbal bullying	76.8%	64.2%
Physical bullying	53.0%	43.3%
Sexual coercion	24.0%	47.5%

Table 2 represents the respondents' views on how they would react in certain bullying situations as bystanders. Male learners in primary and secondary schools behave similarly as bystanders with regard to both verbal bullying and physical bullying. 27.5% of primary school male learners indicated that when observing bullying in both instances, they call for teachers' attention, while 24.8% of secondary school male learners in both instances called for teachers when observing bullying. The tendency of secondary school male learners not to call on a teacher where sexual bullying takes place (23%) in comparison to primary school male learners (50%) should be viewed similarly as the frequency of such bullying as reported in the previous table. Male learners in secondary school are dealing with particular developmental tasks of early adolescence such as developing personal morality and conscience, as well as becoming more responsible for the other gender and less egocentric in their relationships which may account for this tendency.

Secondary school female learners tend to ignore verbal, physical bullying and sexual coercion more and to call on a teacher less often than their primary school counterparts.

It is also gratifying that support for bullies is behaviour not many learners in this investigation associate with. A more detailed discussion follows.

Table 2 Gender and Bystander behaviour

Table 2.1		Verbal bullying			
GENDER		Ignore	Support victim	Support bully	Call a teacher
Primary					
○	Male	21.3%	48.7%	2.5%	27.5%
○	Female	4.0%	44.0%	2.0%	50.0%
Secondary					
○	Male	27.7%	42.6%	5.0%	24.8%
○	Female	20.0%	41.4%	2.9%	35.7%

Verbal bullying (Table 2.1)

In all cases the learners' tendency to support the victim or to call a teacher is commendable. Male learners do, however, tend to call on a teacher less than female learners do in both primary and secondary schools. The percentage of learners in primary and secondary school who choose to ignore the bullying incident is a concern, the exception being female primary school learners where only 4% indicated that they would ignore the bullying.

Table 2.2		Physical bullying			
GENDER		Ignore	Support victim	Support bully	Call a teacher
Primary					
○	Male	20.0%	45.0%	7.5%	27.5%
○	Female	7.0%	49.0%	2.0%	42.0%
Secondary					
○	Male	28.4%	45.4%	5.0%	24.8%
○	Female	20.0%	41.4%	2.9%	21.3%

Physical bullying (Table 2.2)

A similar pattern to verbal bullying is observed for physical bullying. From an Education Law perspective, one would appreciate a shift towards more positive behaviour than ignoring the issue and attempting to support the victim to calling on a teacher more often. Female primary school learners again show their compassionate nature with only 7% ignoring the incident and only 2% supporting the bully. Female secondary school learners indicate that they call on teachers less than their counterparts in primary school. More positive bystander behaviour should be presented by all learners in the opinion of the researchers given the current social-political situation in South Africa as well as the renewed focus on human rights and inclusion outlined in the Education White Paper no. 6 (DoE, 2001), the Policy on Inclusive Education. Learners should in fact not condone any form of physical bullying and should behave accordingly as bystanders.

Table 2.3		Sexual coercion			
GENDER		Ignore	Support victim	Support bully	Call a teacher
Primary					
○	Male	3.8%	46.3%	0.0%	50.0%
○	Female	1.0%	51.0%	0.0%	48.0%
Secondary					
○	Male	20.6%	54.6%	2.8%	23.0%
○	Female	13.9%	47.9%	1.4%	37.1%

Sexual coercion (Table 2.3)

Primary school learners of both genders show very positive bystander behaviours concerning sexual coercion. According to the respondents the bully will receive little or no support in incidents of this nature. Strong support is given to the victim and a high percentage will also call on the teacher to support the victim. In contrast secondary school learners, due to the development and sensitivity of the sexual roles and identity associated with

this stage of development, tend to ignore the incident more. Although the male learners ignore the incident more than female learners do, male learners do support the victim slightly more than the female learners, but call on teachers less than female learners. A small percentage of male learners indicate that they support the bully in incidences of sexual coercion.

Bystander behaviour in all three types of bullying presented here should be much more positive with more learners choosing to support the victim but especially calling on a teacher to intervene than learners choosing to ignore the incident or even to support the bully. Much education can be done on being a responsible citizen of the country by educating the learners on how to behave more positively as bystanders in bullying incidences.

Very similar patterns of bystander behaviour are expressed by both primary and secondary school male and female learners when considering the expectations of their peers (refer table 3). Primary and secondary school male learners' bystander behaviour is influenced by peer group influences and expectations to the extent that they do support the bully to a limited extent. This is consistent with the importance of peer relations and sexual identity associated with puberty and early adolescence. A more detailed analysis follows.

Expectations of friends (Table 3)

A shift in bystander behaviour is noticed in the case of what friends expect of learners and how these expectations influence bystander behaviour. Learners of both genders in both types of schools indicate that their friends would expect them to support the victim to a great extent, which indicates a tendency for positive bystander behaviour.

A stronger tendency to not do anything is found for both genders at both types of school with a slight increase in the possibility of being passive at the secondary school level. Friends therefore seem to expect learners rather not to get involved in any way according to the respondents. Identification with a particular group during the development of an own identity during puberty and adolescence results in greater peer pressure for acceptance and may account for this finding. Bystander behaviour, which supports the victim, also decreases from primary to secondary school for both genders. In keeping with the stereotyped gender roles and expectations of friends, male learners lean towards being passive bystanders or supporting the bully to a greater extent than female learners. Those learners of both genders in primary and secondary schools who choose not to do anything, may also be wary of secondary involvement in the bullying incident and of becoming victims of bullying themselves.

Table 3 Expectations of friends and bystander behaviour

GENDER		Strongly Support Victim	Support victim	Do nothing	Support bully	Strongly support bully
Primary						
○	Male	21.0%	44.4%	23.5%	7.4%	3.7%
○	Female	20.0%	61.0%	19.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Secondary						
○	Male	16.4%	34.3%	32.1%	10.7%	6.4%
○	Female	18.6%	52.9%	25.7%	2.9%	0.0%

It is clear from the findings of this research that most forms of bullying take place on a regular basis at primary and secondary schools. It is also clear that similar types of bullying are experienced by both male and female learners with different forms of bullying being more prominent in primary school, whereas others are more prominent in secondary school. Furthermore, the learners participating in this probe tended to support the victim or to call a teacher in cases of verbal and physical bullying and sexual coercion. Awareness of the power of peer group relations becomes apparent in the decrease of positive bystander behaviour at secondary school. In accordance with this finding, bullying behaviour can no longer only be seen as the outcome of individual differences, such as physical strength or personality, but should be considered in relation to the social or group context in which it occurs (Rigby, 2004: online). Suggested strategies therefore need to bear this shift in mind.

An important question to address with regard to bystander behaviour in bullying is:
How can student bystanders be encouraged to engage in pro-social and interceptive behaviour to assist victims of peer victimization?

Possible strategies for social and interceptive bystander behaviour

Schools and communities need to become involved in addressing the issue of bullying, particularly in assisting bystanders to develop more social and interceptive behaviours to support victims of bullying. From the current research findings it can be gleaned that the respondents in this probe generally behaved more positively as bystanders in primary school than in secondary school. This tendency prompted the researchers to reflect on what may be influential in this change and on ways to address these influences.

The role of the Department of Education

The Department of Education should identify programmes and resources which provide information and training on bullying prevention and provide schools access to these resources. These programmes and resources should focus on providing teachers and learners with the necessary knowledge and skills about bullying and how to assist victims of bullying. School districts may also initiate a whole-school campaign focusing on bullying and violence. The department should also provide assistance to schools in developing discipline policies consistent with violence prevention guidelines issued by the Department of Safety and Security.

Initiatives such as these may come to naught, unless a strong commitment and a willingness to collaborate by all involved including staff at district level, all school personnel, other professionals as needed, learners, parents, community leaders and members is visible. The lack of participation and collaboration by stakeholders in education is a perennial problem. Given the educational and socio-economic constraints of many communities, it may even require an intervention by central government to achieve these goals.

A Safe Schools Week could be set aside wherein learners, parents, educators, the department and the broader community participate in an initiative to promoting anti-bullying and positive bystander behaviour. Using art, drama, puppet shows, workshops and guest speakers, learners could learn about conflict management, problem solving, respect and inclusion. This message of anti-bullying and positive social behaviour is reinforced by inclusion of themes derived during this week in their classroom activities and interactions. A week such as this may even include a school conference day where the principal, school psychologist, parents and learners can

participate in emphasising the importance of anti-bullying and positive social behaviour.

Needs assessment

To further facilitate the prevention of bullying and increasing pro-social bystander behaviour, an awareness of bullying, the role of the bystander, the school, teachers and the community should first of all be created in schools. A possible way to achieve this is by doing a needs-assessment. Whitted and Dupper (2005) assert that carrying out a needs assessment raises everyone's awareness about the nature, prevalence and consequence of bullying (Rigby, 1995), and supplies the school and more particularly the management team with information to plan strategies to address the needs, specifically those concerning bullying.

This needs assessment should take cognizance of the 'bullying' and violence prevalent in the community. It is generally accepted that patterns of behaviour in the community encroach into the school. Being knowledgeable about the community as well as collaborating with community leaders is essential in establishing 'a map of bullying and related violent behaviour'.

Bullying prevention policy

The school should send a strong message to every member involved in the school and the community that bullying is taken seriously and will not be tolerated. This entails drafting a 'Bullying prevention policy' for the school. This policy should be a 'working anti-bullying policy', which advertises a 'zero-tolerance' attitude towards bullying. The bullying prevention policy should be a negotiated and collaborative policy written by all involved in the school, stating clear indicators and guidelines for victims, offenders and bystanders. If bystanders know that they can intervene and that there are policy guidelines to support them, more positive bystander behaviours can be forthcoming. This bullying prevention policy should be distributed to everyone in the school community as well to ensure ownership and consensus. In this way, a clear message can be sent that bullying incidents are taken seriously and that serious action will be taken in response to these incidents (Lumsden, 2002).

The bullying prevention policy should include a clear definition of bullying with examples and specifically a reporting procedure (Rigby, 1995). A confidential reporting system will encourage learners to report if they are victimised or have witnessed bullying. School staff should also encourage parents to report bullying if they suspect that their child is involved in bullying, either as a victim, bystander or bully. The policy should clearly describe the process of addressing incidents of bullying in the school as well as the consequences. Consequences particularly for bystanders should be considered. A stronger focus on peer mediation can significantly reduce aggressive incidents in the schoolyard.

This suggestion is in accordance with the primary role of school governing bodies, which is to develop school policies dealing with safety and school discipline. S 20(1)(d) and s 8(1) of the Schools Act require school governing bodies to adopt a code of conduct for learners after consultation with learners, parents and teachers of the school. A bullying prevention policy based on human rights principles, containing school rules, regulations, sanctions and disciplinary procedures, should form part of the code of conduct. This should also include rules dealing with school safety and security and the consequences for breaching safety and security.

However, in order to develop a school's code of conduct and meaningful policies on matters such as sexual harassment, bullying and drugs, school governing

bodies need to have the knowledge and skills on how to write policy as well as a fairly extensive knowledge of the law.

Educating Values

Empowering victims and bystanders implies changing certain underlying values and norms in social relationships. Issues concerning acceptance, prejudice, respect and trust are of concern in bullying incidences. A big challenge is teaching both the bully and the bystander about respect, sympathy and empathy. Learners need to respect their fellow learners, to feel for their fellow learners being bullied, and need to understand how it feels to be bullied while others look on. Whitted and Dupper (2005:169) contend that school-level interventions should aim at clarifying and communicating behavioural norms – that is, developing classroom and school-wide rules that prohibit bullying and promote adult modelling of respectful and non-violent behaviour. Intervention efforts are unlikely to be successful unless school staff recognise bullying as a problem (Rigby, 1995) and that they have a significant role to play in this regard.

Considering the values of unconditional respect and trust which underpin healthy social relationships at school, bystanders should be encouraged to take certain actions ranging from those that involve the least amount of personal risk to those that require the greatest courage in order to entrench these values. Bystanders could:

- refuse to be party to bullying,
- support the target of bullying privately,
- talk to the bully privately or publicly,
- intervene on behalf of the target of bullying (Coloroso, 2005:50).

Accordingly, more positive and preventive bystander behaviour may be presented.

Classroom interventions

Research on the contribution of perceived expectations of teachers indicate that it is unlikely that teachers may be able to influence their learners' bystander behaviour by simply communicating their expectations that learners should intervene (Rigby & Johnson, 2006:438). Classroom-level interventions, which are more indirect and focused on developing more sympathetic attitudes towards victims is one approach teachers can make use of. These interventions may include encouraging educators to integrate bullying prevention material into their curriculum. This can be done by holding regular classroom meetings to discuss bullying which will help increase learners' knowledge of how to intervene, build empathy, establishing and enforcing class rules against bullying. Teachers can consider the following:

- Opening a discussion of bystander behaviour with their class. Show pictures or a graphic illustration of bystanders watching someone being bullied. Also acquire their opinions on how often they observe such situations in their school, and what bystanders do.
- Asking learners what they would personally do in such situations and why. Focus on the answers of learners who believe that they would act to discourage the bullying. Focus on these positive statements as they may be powerful role models for other learners.
- Also attending to those learners who feel that they would not do anything. Acknowledgement of fears, apprehension and caution is important for learners to understand their own behaviour.

- Identifying and discussing situations in which learners agree that intervening may be dangerous. Consider options to support the victim in these situations such as calling a teacher.
- Encouraging learners to state their dislike and disapproval of bullying situations. This may also encourage other bystanders to voice their opinions.
- Making use of role-play to simulate bystander situations and create opportunities for learners to rehearse what they might say and do in such situations.
- Encouraging learners to report back on their experiences in bullying situations where they responded positively. Discuss the outcomes, reinforce positive behaviours and explore possibilities with learners (Rigby & Johnson, 2006: 438; Rigby, 2004:online).

Bystanders need to be taught how their behaviours can either support or discourage bullies. Formal programmes that teach bystanders to recognise and report bullying have the greatest impact on reducing bullying (Rigby, 1995; Atlas & Pepler, 1998). In these programs bystanders can be taught to stand up for the victims, include victims in group activities and to report bullying to adults. Victims of bullying can be helped to recognise attributes that place them at risk of becoming targets, to understand the consequences of their choices, and to modify their behaviours to minimise their chances of becoming victims. Learners can also be taught conflict management, crisis intervention strategies and the value of non-verbal communication to decrease the likelihood of verbal or physical aggression (Purkey & Novak, 1996:101). Learner-level interventions in these programs are designed to develop social competence by changing learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours by using interactive teaching techniques (role play). The Life Orientation learning is the ideal platform to achieve these initiatives.

Intervention may also take on the form of supervision during recess and lunch time at schools. In research conducted by Olweus (1993:25) it was found that the greater the number of teachers supervising during recess periods, the lower the level of bully/victim problems in the school. This indicates the great importance to have a sufficient number of teachers among learners during recess times.

Designing a strategy to combat bullying in the school, requires a whole-school approach particular to that specific school and its community. Involving the community, especially the parents, is a central aspect of this strategy. Research into the social normative influence about parental expectations indicates a positive contribution towards more pro-social and bullying-preventative behaviours in children (Rigby & Johnson, 2006:437). Parents can be mobilised through parent-teacher meetings and newsletters to parents that focus on bystander behaviour as a discouragement to bullying. Parents can encourage their children to be 'good' bystanders, to recognise the potential risks involved and can take steps to minimise them. Increasing the number of learners who express their disapproval of bullying when they see it happening can be the best deterrent for bullying and will benefit not only their own children but the entire school population (Rigby, 2004: online).

As stated earlier, beliefs about the expectations of peers adds significantly to the type of behaviour bystanders exhibit in bullying situations (Rigby & Johnson, 2006:437). Thus, designing activities to encourage an awareness and appreciation of the substantial numbers of peers in each class who do not condone bullying and who support positive bystander behaviour, may be influential in creating normative pressure to intervene in such situations.

Finally, Rigby and Johnson (2006:438) argue that secondary schools constitute less of a community in which learners feel obligated to support and assist each other when needed, than do primary schools generally. Creating an ethos of caring and positive bystander behaviour should be encouraged in secondary schools to develop a more mutually supportive ethos, an ethos of caring, to contribute towards more positive bystander behaviour.

Conclusion

Bullying in schools is a serious problem and frequently takes place in the presence of learner bystanders. Although bystanders sometimes speak out to discourage the bullying, the most common response is to ignore what is going on – and the bullying continues. It is further evident from this study that most learners have positive attitudes and intentions when observing bullying. The intended behaviour of many victims in informing a teacher rather than directly opposing the bullying is understandable in view of their possible vulnerability to become victims of bullying. As stated earlier, informing teachers may be putting themselves at greater risk and some protection by teachers may be necessary.

As in the case of Israeli learners, only learner attitudes or intentions were reported on in this study. The question arises as to how these positive intentions may become actual behaviour? (Pepler & Craig, 1995; as cited in Rolider & Maytall, 2005:37). As postulated in some of the strategies suggested, the role of parents, teachers and school management in designing and implementing a schoolwide intervention that is aimed at shaping, increasing and maintaining peer control over bullying incidents, is imperative (Rolider & Maytall, 2005:37). Greater emphasis should therefore be placed on the crucial role that all adults and the community should be playing in monitoring and supporting positive and interceptive behaviour of all bystanders witnessing bullying at school.

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