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Evaluation of the effectiveness of an anti-bullying programme in primary schools

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Aggressive Behavior

Wiley

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primary schools. The survey revealed that the problem of bullying is widespread throughout Irish primary and post-primary schools. Indeed, 31.3 per cent of primary school pupils and 15.6 per cent of post-primary pupils reported having been victimised within the last term; 26.5 per cent of primary school pupils and 14.9 per cent of post-primary pupils reported that they had bullied others within the last term [O'Moore et al., 1997].

In the light of these and similar findings in earlier, smaller-scale Irish studies [Byrne, 1987; O'Moore and Hillery, 1989], the publication of the Guidelines on Preventing and Countering Bullying in Primary and Post-Primary Schools [Department of Education and Science, 1993], and research undertaken elsewhere in Europe (in particular, Norway [Olweus, 1983; Roland, 1989; Roland and Munthe, 1997] and the United Kingdom [Smith and Sharp, 1994]), it was felt that Irish schools could benefit from a nationwide anti-bullying programme that incorporates the training of school management, teaching staff, parents and pupils alike [O'Moore and Minton, 2003a]. This article deals with pilot work conducted on a sample of primary schools within a single county of Ireland towards these ends.

To date, Norway is the only European country to have implemented nationwide campaigns against school bullying. The nationwide campaign of 1983 comprised materials for parents, and a video film and booklet for teachers. Its innovator, Dan Olweus, identified an "awareness and involvement on the part of adults" as a *general prerequisite*. Core measures at the *school level* were the implementation of a questionnaire survey, a school conference day, and of better supervision during break periods. Similarly, core measures at the *class level* included having class rules against bullying, regular class meetings with students, and parents' meetings; and at the *individual level*, having serious talks with bullies, victims, and parents of involved students [Olweus, 1999].

Olweus' own evaluation of the effects of the 1983 national intervention programme was based on data from 2,500 students (modal ages 11–14 years at the outset) from 42 schools. They were followed for a period of 2.5 years (from 1983 to 1985 inclusively) [Olweus, 1999]. Olweus [1999] reported that being victim to direct (physical bullying, threats, extortion) and indirect (name calling, exclusion, rumours) bullying fell by 50 per cent or more, and reports of bullying others fell by similar levels; the students also reported an "increased satisfaction" with school life. It was concluded that the 1983 nationwide programme had been considerably successful in the reduction of bullying behaviour [Olweus, 1983, 1999].

However, a second evaluation of the 1983 Norwegian nationwide programme, conducted by Roland in 1986 in the neighbouring county of Rogaland, reported that there had been considerably less success than Olweus had indicated [Roland, 1989]. Indeed, some schools in Roland's survey showed *increased* levels of bullying. Olweus [1999] asserted that the studies in Bergen and Rogaland were "two completely different projects in terms of planning, data, quality, times of measurement, and contact with the schools, and accordingly, also in terms of expected results" [Olweus, 1999, p 39]. In contrast, Roland argued that the two studies could be compared because the "number of schools were about 40 in both studies, and the definition of bullying as well as the key questions about prevalence were almost identical" [Roland and Munthe, 1997, p 235]. How then may we account for the difference between the results?

Methodologically, there were, as both Olweus and Roland acknowledge, differences in the times of measurement between the two studies. Roland's study was carried out one and three years after the implementation of the nationwide programme, as opposed to Olweus' one and two. Additionally, as Eslea and Smith [1998] note, Olweus' research team provided ongoing support for the schools involved in his Bergen evaluation study, whereas Roland provided no extra support for the Rogaland schools.

Roland suggested that the differences between the two studies highlight the possibility that, nationally, a very good short-term effect (as evidenced in Olweus' Bergen study) disappeared during the following two years (as evidenced in his own Rogaland study) [Roland and Munthe, 1997]. A key factor seemed to be "the degree to which the schools had seriously adopted the campaign", the successful implementation of the programme in turn depending on the "degree of support from the [school's] principal" [Roland and Munthe, 1997, p 236]. Roland found that "at most schools, the principles of the programme had not been integrated into the day to day management of the school and classes... most schools went back to a 'normal' condition which did not focus on the principles of the campaign" [Roland and Munthe, 1997, p 236].

In conclusion, it seems that the implementation of the first nationwide programme in Norway met with a significant, at least short-term success. Roland's findings indicate that mid- to long-term success is dependent on the support of senior school staff and the proper integration of the programme's principles into day-to-day policy and practice of the school.

A second nationwide programme for Norwegian schools was launched in 1996 [Roland and Munthe, 1997]. This programme was somewhat broader in focus than the first; whereas the 1983 programme directed methods of intervening in existent bully/victim problems, the 1996 programme was more preventative and comprehensive in focus, considering organisational aspects of the school and general classroom management. Additionally, the 1996 programme utilised a support network of 350 professionals, including researchers, educational psychologists, and head teachers [Roland and Munthe, 1997]. In terms of evaluation, "... the main conclusion so far is that the broad profile of the programme and the material were well received by the schools, but the system of local assistance has to be improved" [Roland et al., 2001, p 7].

Also, as school bullying is undoubtedly caused by a variety of factors, ranging from the individual to social, cultural and organisational aspects, it is essential to try and address as many of these factors as possible. By simply concentrating on the students in the absence of, for example, the school ethos or leadership style, one cannot realistically hope to achieve optimal input in regard to prevention and intervention.

Whilst countries elsewhere in Europe, such as Ireland, await the further development and implementation of nationwide programmes to counter bullying behaviour, smaller-scale, regionally applied programmes and projects with similar aims abound. These include the development of anti-bullying "packs" for schools—notably by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, whose packs have been used throughout the United Kingdom [see Mellor, 1999]. Other successful innovations have ranged from awareness programmes (notably Menesini et al. [1996] in Italy [Fonzi et al., 1999]) to Timo Nuutinen's slide shows of bullying-related injuries in Finland [Björkqvist and Österman, 1999]. In the United Kingdom, peer support networks involving young people in schools and community settings have been developed, and the role of such networks has been evaluated as being successful in both anti-bullying work and in the wider context of conflict resolution [Cowie, 2000; Cowie and Wallace, 2000].

Such innovations, whilst often yielding very positive results, are labour intensive, and would be most unlikely to be cost effective if an attempt were made to implement them on a nationwide basis. Hence, in planning and evaluating the present study, approaches that are more multi-faceted or "whole-school" based have been of most interest to the authors. The whole-school programmes that have been evaluated have often shown promising results: the "Bullying in School" programme in Flemish schools [Stevens et al.,

2000], the “Seville Anti-Bullying in School Project” in Andalucia, Spain [Ortega and Lera, 2000], and the highly influential “DFE Anti-Bullying Project” in Sheffield, England [Eslea and Smith, 1998; Smith and Sharp, 1994].

The aim of the present study was to evaluate an intervention that incorporated a whole-school approach, whilst at the same time paying attention to intervention strategies that were theoretically sound and not too labour intensive. The potential advantages of whole-school programmes are, as we see it, two-fold. Firstly, in terms of *cost effectiveness*, the methodology of such programmes is essentially one of training teachers who in turn train others (an added value here being that the trained teachers have a *direct impact* upon their own schools). Secondly, such an approach is *inclusive* of the teaching profession, thus enhancing the co-operation of everyone, and avoiding the setting up of an “us and them”, or “elite group” scenario.

METHODOLOGY

One hundred national schools, comprising all the primary schools within district 1 of a single county of Ireland, were invited to participate in the study. The county had a population of 129,994 [Central Statistics Office, 1997] and is, for administrative purposes, divided into district 1 and district 2. In total, 42 schools consented to participate.

Programme Methodology

The structural framework of the proposed Irish nationwide anti-bullying programme is based on the second nationwide programme to prevent and manage bullying in Norwegian schools [Roland and Munthe, 1997]. Four key elements appear in the 1996 Norwegian programme, which were included in the present pilot programme. These are as follows:

(i) Training a Network of Professionals: In all, 11 teachers were trained, through a programme of workshops and seminars, to provide training and support for boards of management, staff, pupils, and parents in the prevention and countering of bullying in their school communities. The training was for 12 full days, and was undertaken on weekends at the local Centre of Education. Training input was provided upon definitions of bullying; profiles of children who bully and children who are bullied; “tell-tale signs” of victimisation and bullying; adverse effects of bullying; whole-school approaches to bullying; classroom and individual intervention strategies; dealing with parents of children who bully and those of children who are bullied; and presentation skills.

Each member of the professional network was responsible for three to five schools, and held an in-service day for teachers, an after-school meeting for parents, as well as acting as an advisor/support to schools in relation to bullying problems thereafter. These awareness days organised by members of the professional network included advice and assistance to the schools in developing an anti-bullying policy within the overall framework of the school code of behaviour and discipline.

(ii) Teachers’ Resource Pack: A pack containing information about bullying behaviour (drawing on the Department of Education Guidelines and the nationwide survey [O’Moore et al., 1997]) was given to each member of the trained network, for use in the provision of training and support for the network member’s allocated schools. The material in the pack contained information provided to the network member during her/his own training,

and had an overall emphasis on classroom management, the development of a positive atmosphere in class and school, staff leadership and parent–teacher co-operation.

(iii) Parents' Resource Pack: An information leaflet entitled "Bullying: What Parents Need to Know" was produced by the Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Trinity College Dublin, especially for this project. This leaflet was distributed to the parents of each pupil in the schools involved in this project; it provided information on the prevalence, types, causes, effects and indicators of bullying behaviour, and how to deal with alleged or actual incidents of bullying.

(iv) Work With Pupils: Schools were assisted, through the intervention of trained teachers who formed the professional network, in creating a climate that does not accept bullying. As part of a general awareness-raising campaign, pupils had access to age-related handbooks, which included ideas for the prevention and countering of bullying in their class and school. Pupils were encouraged, through peer leadership, to support children whom they witnessed being bullied.

Evaluation Procedures: Pupils

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme was made via the pupils' completion of pre-programme/post-programme modified Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaires [Olweus, 1989; Whitney and Smith, 1993]. The sampling was so designed that those pupils who had answered as third-class pupils in the pre-test questionnaire should answer the post-programme questionnaire as fourth-class pupils the following year and those who appeared as fourth-class pupils in the pre-test sample should answer the post-programme questionnaire as fifth-class pupils. However, although all 42 schools were invited to participate in both the pre- and post-programme phases of the evaluation, due to differential responses to the pre- and post-programme questionnaires by the schools and anomalies in the administration of the questionnaires by the schools to the correct class groupings, it was possible to match data from only 22 schools, in terms of pupils who had responded to both the pre- and post-programme questionnaire according to this design.

The number of pupils in the 22 schools participating in both phases of the evaluation process ranged from 21 to 280 (mean = 92). Most of these schools could be considered as small in size, because only one had more than 200 pupils; 15 schools had less than 100 pupils enrolled, with nine of these schools having less than 50 pupils. In most of the schools, each school grade from one to six was represented by a single class, with three of the smallest schools combining grades within a single teaching class. The average teaching class size ranged between three and 28 (mean = 13.9) pupils per class. Just one of the schools served a small town (1,000–5,000 inhabitants), the rest being situated in villages (<1,000 inhabitants) or open countryside.

The class teachers administered these questionnaires in normal school time; steps were taken by the schools' principals to ensure, as far as possible, that the different classes within the school filled in the questionnaires simultaneously. Class tutors were instructed to ascertain that the pupils understood that their questionnaire responses would be treated anonymously and in confidence. Pupils were seated separately, so that no conferring, talking, or copying could take place, and were asked to respond truthfully; pupils were instructed to "treat it like you would a test". After giving these instructions to the pupils, the class teachers asked the pupils to fill in the name of their school, class, and date, and the teacher worked through how they might answer the first few questions with them. The questionnaire

provided the following definition of bullying:

- 'We say a pupil is being bullied, or picked on, when another pupil, or group of pupils, say nasty or unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a pupil is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one ever talks to them, or things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the person being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a pupil is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two pupils of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.'

Overall, the evaluation process ran as follows:

(i) Before implementation of the programme, in the first two terms of the school year 1998–1999 (when training of the professional network was taking place), the extent of pupils' involvement in bullying behaviour was determined: 527 third- and fourth-class pupils in 22 schools completed a modified version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire.

(ii) One year after implementation of the programme, in summer 2000, the extent of pupils' involvement in bullying behaviour was determined: 520 fourth- and fifth-class pupils in the same 22 schools completed a modified version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire.

(iii) The overall effectiveness of the programme was ascertained, as in the Bergen, Rogaland, and Sheffield studies discussed above, by a comparison of the pre-programme and post-programme questionnaire responses from the aforementioned 22 schools; in the present case, this was undertaken via χ^2 analysis.

It should also be noted that a methodological difference exists between the present pilot programme and the Rogaland and Sheffield studies. The Rogaland and Sheffield studies used age-equivalent groups for pre-test and post-test comparisons, thus avoiding the age confounds that are believed to be likely given the natural age-related decrease in reports of being victimised found consistently in large-scale surveys [O'Moore et al., 1997; Smith et al., 1999]. Hence, a series of post hoc χ^2 analyses were implemented in order to assess whether the observed changes in reporting rates were due to the impact of the programme or were merely age-related decreases. The analyses showed that differences between third- and fourth-class pupils' reports in the pre-programme sample of having been bullied within the last school term, having been frequently bullied within the last school term, having been bullied within the last five school days, having taken part in bullying others within the last school term, having frequently taken part in bullying others within the last school term, and having taken part in bullying others within the last five school days did not reach significance ($\chi^2 = 1.47, 0.05, 3.07, 0.27, 1.37, \text{ and } 2.99$, respectively (1 df), failing in each case to equal or exceed the critical value of $\chi^2 = 3.84$ ($P < 0.05$, 1 df)). Similarly, in the post-programme sample, differences between fourth- and fifth-class pupils' reports of having been bullied within the last school term, having been frequently bullied within the last school term, having been bullied within the last five school days, having taken part in bullying others within the last school term, and having taken part in bullying others within the last five school days did not reach significance ($\chi^2 = 0.81, 0.08, 0.04, 0.38, \text{ and } 0.06$, respectively (1 df), again failing in each case to equal or exceed the critical value of $\chi^2 = 3.84$ ($P < 0.05$, 1 df)).

Teachers' Awareness of and Perspectives on Bullying

A total of 126 teachers completed a questionnaire [Rigby, 1997] before implementation of the anti-bullying programme, which was designed to ascertain the teachers' awareness of bullying and its typology, and their perspectives on anti-bullying policy, training, and action.

Sample items from this questionnaire are included in the results section below. When this questionnaire was administered after the implementation of the programme, a total of 83 teachers responded. The pre- and post-programme teacher samples were closely matched in terms of gender, age, teaching experience, and employment positions held. In this questionnaire, bullying was defined as:

‘... when a more powerful person or group of persons acts so as to hurt a weaker person in some way. (This does not include fighting or quarrelling between people of roughly equal power or strength.) The hurtful actions of bullying may be physical, as in striking someone, or non-physical, as in verbal abuse, cruel teasing, or name calling. Bullying may also be indirect, as when a group of people sets out to exclude and isolate someone.’

RESULTS

In the tables that follow, data are presented from, firstly, the *pupils' responses* to the Olweus Questionnaire, and then the *teachers' responses* to the Rigby Questionnaire, administered (i) prior to (autumn/winter 1998) and (ii) following (summer 2000) the completion of the anti-bullying programme. These data sets are labelled “before” and “after”, respectively.

Pupils' Responses

The Extent of Having Been Victimised: In terms of lowering the incidence of pupils' involvement in bullying behaviour, as evidenced by their own responses to the pre- and post-programme Olweus Questionnaires, the programme would appear to have been fairly successful (see Tables I and II).

TABLE I. Percentage of pupils who reported being bullied during the last school term

How often:	Before	After
Not at all	63.3	70.5
Occasionally (once or twice)	18.6	17.4
Moderately (sometimes)	10.7	8.5
Frequently (once a week or more)	7.3	3.6

TABLE II. Percentage of pupils who reported being bullied in the last five school days before the survey

How often:	Before	After
Not at all	77.9	87.4
Once	9.3	6.2
Twice	6.8	2.9
Three or four times	3.0	2.2
Five or more times	2.9	1.3

From Table I it can be seen that before the implementation of the programme, 36.7 per cent of the students reported that they had been victimised. After the programme, 29.5 per cent of the students reported that they had been victimised. Thus, overall, this constituted a general reduction of 19.6 per cent in reports of being victimised in the last school term, a finding that reached significance ($\chi^2 = 5.77$, 1 df, $P < 0.02$). There was also a significant reduction in reports of having been frequently bullied within the last school term—that is to say, once a week or more often. Before implementation of the programme, 7.2 per cent of the students reported that they had been bullied frequently. After the programme, only 3.6 per cent of the students reported that they had been frequently victimised—a significant reduction of 50 per cent ($\chi^2 = 6.43$, 1 df, $P < 0.02$). From Table II it can be seen that there was also a decrease in the number of pupils reporting that they had been bullied within the last five school days. The decrease, from 22.1 per cent before the programme to 12.6 per cent thereafter, amounts to a reduction in reduction rates of some 43.0 per cent, which was, again, significant ($\chi^2 = 16.99$, 1 df, $P < 0.001$).

The Extent of Bullying Others: From Table III it can be seen that a greater number of pupils reported not bullying at all after implementation of the programme than had done before. Before implementation of the programme, 27.1 per cent of the students reported having bullied others within the last school term; after the programme, this fell to 22.4 per cent. However, this 17.3 per cent reduction found marginal significance only ($\chi^2 = 2.88$, 1 df, $P < 0.10$), failing to reach significance at the α ($P < 0.05$) probability level. There was, however, a statistically significant reduction in reports of having been frequently involved in bullying others in the last school term—that is to say, once a week or more often. Before the programme, 2.6 per cent stated that they had bullied others frequently; afterwards, only 0.8 per cent reported that they had bullied others frequently. This decrease was significant ($\chi^2 = 7.93$, 1 df, $P < 0.01$).

There was also a strongly significant ($\chi^2 = 14.13$, 1 df, $P < 0.001$) reduction of reports of having taken part in the bullying of others within the last five school days (from 13.7 per cent of all pupils prior to the implementation of the programme, to 6.6 per cent thereafter (see Table IV).

Who is Told About Bullying? The implementation of the anti-bullying programme had no positive effect on the reporting of bullying behaviour by victims of it; in fact, a slight decrease in reporting was observed in the responses of pupils to the second questionnaire. The reluctance to report to teachers (“no, I haven’t told them”) increased from 48.7 per cent before the programme to 52.0 per cent thereafter, and for “people at home”, it increased from 31.2 per cent to 34.8 per cent.

Who Tries to Prevent Bullying? Pupils’ estimations of the frequencies of their teachers’ attempts to put a stop to bullying (see Table V) improved slightly with the implementation of

TABLE III. Percentage of pupils who reported taking part in bullying other pupils during the last school term

How often:	Before	After
Not at all	72.9	77.6
Occasionally (once or twice)	17.7	18.2
Moderately (sometimes)	6.7	3.3
Frequently (once a week or more)	2.7	0.8

TABLE IV. Percentage of pupils who reported taking part in bullying other pupils during the last five school days before the survey

How often:	Before	After
Not at all	86.3	93.4
Once	7.2	4.3
Twice	4.0	1.4
Three or four times	1.9	0.4
Five or more times	0.6	0.6

TABLE V. Percentages of pupils' perceptions as to how often teachers try to put a stop to it when a pupil is being bullied at school

How often:	Before	After
I don't know	39.4	34.6
Almost never	8.0	7.0
Sometimes	17.2	12.8
Almost always	35.4	45.6

TABLE VI. Percentages of pupils' perceptions as to how often other pupils try to put a stop to it when a pupil is being bullied at school

How often:	Before	After
I don't know	40.3	40.3
Almost never	13.7	14.5
Sometimes	32.0	32.3
Almost always	13.9	12.8

the programme. Whereas 52.6 per cent of pupils responded that their teachers "sometimes" or "almost always" did so before the programme, 58.4 per cent responded in such a way thereafter. However, this finding reached marginal significance only ($\chi^2 = 3.70$, 1 df, $P < 0.10$), failing to reach significance at the α ($P < 0.05$) probability level.

Pupils' estimations of the likelihood of their peers attempting to put a stop to bullying (see Table VI) were largely unaffected: 55.9 per cent responded that other pupils "sometimes" or "almost always" tried to put a stop to bullying before the programme; 55.1 per cent did so thereafter.

Conversely (see Table VII), pupils were significantly more likely to report that if they saw a pupil their own age being bullied, they would "try and help her or him in some way" after the programme (71.4 per cent) than before (61.8 per cent) the implementation of the anti-bullying programme ($\chi^2 = 10.72$, 1 df, $P < 0.01$). Just 9.2 per cent of pupils reported that in such a situation they would do "nothing, it's none of my business" after the programme, whereas before it, this figure had been 15.9 per cent; this finding, too, was significant ($\chi^2 = 10.58$, 1 df, $P < 0.01$).

TABLE VII. Percentages for what pupils responded that they usually do when they see a pupil of their own age being bullied at school

Response:	Before	After
Nothing, it's none of my business	15.9	9.2
Nothing, but I think I ought to help	22.2	19.3
I try to help her or him in some way	61.8	71.4

TABLE VIII. In your view, is your school a safe place for young people who find it hard to defend themselves from attacks by other students? Percentage of teachers' responses

Response	Before	After
Yes, it is a safe place for them	60.3	62.7
It is usually a safe place for them	34.9	36.1
It is hardly ever safe for them	0	0
It is never safe for them	0	0
No response	4.8	1.2

Teachers' Responses

Items from the teachers' questionnaire [Rigby, 1997] to be presented were selected on the basis of comparability with the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire items responded to by the pupils presented in the section above. These items were:

- In your view, is your school a safe place for young people who find it hard to defend themselves from attacks by other students?
- Do you think that teachers at your school are interested in trying to stop bullying?
- Do you personally try to stop bullying when you see it happening?
- Do you agree that stopping bullying is a matter for all staff?
- Do you agree that more rigorous monitoring by staff of school bullying is needed?

Perceptions of School as a Safe Place for Young People who Find it Hard to Defend Themselves: From Table VIII, it can be seen that no teachers felt their school was an unsafe place for pupils who find it hard to defend themselves against attacks from fellow pupils, in either the pre-programme or post-programme sample. However, the implementation of the programme had a slight impact on this perception.

Perceptions of Teachers' Interest in Stopping Bullying: Before the programme, 8.7 per cent of the teachers responded that teachers are "usually" interested in trying to stop bullying, and 91.3 per cent responded that "they always are". After the programme, these figures were 10.8 per cent and 89.2 per cent, respectively.

Own Attempts to Stop Bullying: Before the programme, 96.0 per cent of the teachers responded that they "always" try to stop bullying when they see it, and 4.0 per cent responded that they 'usually' do so. After the programme, these figures were 97.6 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively.

Stopping Bullying is a Matter for all Staff: Just 1.6 per cent, or two teachers, of the pre-programme respondents disagreed with this statement, with 98.4 per cent agreeing to it; in the post-programme sample, concordance was 100 per cent.

More Rigorous Monitoring of School Bullying by Staff is Needed: Agreement to this statement was 67.5 per cent before the programme, falling to 51.8 per cent after the programme.

DISCUSSION

The chief evaluation findings of the present pilot project—a significant reduction of 19.6 per cent in reports of being victimised in the last term and a reduction of 17.3 per cent in reports of bullying others in the last term—must be, we believe, indicative of some level of success. As we have seen, in the admittedly rather less robust “last five days” category, reduction rates indicate still greater success—there was a significant reduction of 43.9 per cent in reports of being victimised and of 51.8 per cent in reports of bullying others. Finally, particular and significant improvements were seen in the reduction of frequent involvement in bullying behaviour in the last school term (being victimised, or victimising others, once a week or more often) of 50.0 per cent in reports of having been bullied and 69.2 per cent in reports of having taken part in the bullying of others.

Similar studies that have preceded this, conducted elsewhere in Europe, have found disparate levels of programme success. It should be noted that Roland, amongst others [notably Eslea and Smith, 1998], has suggested that a heightened awareness of bullying and bullying behaviour amongst pupils might have led to an elevation in levels of reporting. In other words, the implementation of a programme may produce an over-vigilance concerning episodes which, rightly or wrongly, might not have been categorised as incidents of bullying beforehand. Smith and Sharp [1994] found wide variations in success between schools: generally, and as Roland had suggested (see above), “those who did most, achieved most”. The inter-school variation was explained by, and indicated, the importance of having all the school staff involved in policy development, with one senior member of staff acting as co-ordinator, and that missing stages in the policy development process are counterproductive. The curriculum-based work was found to be very important for introducing new policy to pupils. Finally, where attempted, assertiveness training for victims, playground improvements, and the use of quality circles all yielded positive results [Eslea and Smith, 1998; Smith and Sharp, 1994].

An area in which the present pilot programme, as with the Sheffield project [again, see Eslea and Smith, 1998, Smith et al., 1999; Smith and Sharp, 1994], has met with rather less success is in the attempt to increase levels of reporting of bullying behaviour to teachers and parents by primary school victims. Eslea and Smith have suggested that the issue of anti-bullying programmes failing to increase the reporting rate of bullying “is not the indictment it at first seems” [Eslea and Smith, 1998, p 217]. They argue that anti-bullying programmes foster both increased teacher vigilance (pupils have less need to report incidents) and increased pupil assertion (as bullying is taken seriously in a school running an anti-bullying programme, the mere threat of “telling” works).

However, whilst 91.3 per cent of teachers in our pre-programme survey and 89.2 per cent of teachers in our post-programme survey responded that “teachers at [their] school are interested in trying to stop bullying”, and 96.0 per cent of teachers in our pre-programme

survey and 97.6 per cent of teachers in our post-programme survey responded that they “personally try to stop bullying when [they] see it happening”, pupils’ own assessments of teachers’ efforts in the present pilot study were rather less positive. Indeed, just 35.4 per cent of pupils in our pre-programme survey and 45.6 per cent of pupils in our post-programme survey reported that teachers “almost always” try to put a stop to it when a pupil is being bullied at school.

In interpreting such a finding, one must consider the likelihood of differences existing between how students and teachers define bullying. Although the definitions supplied to teachers in the Rigby Questionnaire and to pupils in the Olweus Questionnaire were similar (both stressing that bullying can be manifested in various ways, that repetition, and a power imbalance between disputants, should exist for an aggressive behaviour to be considered bullying), they were not identical (see above). Additionally, it should be noted that whilst definitions were supplied, the respondents might have answered from their own conceptions of what constitutes bullying. How students conceptualise and define bullying for themselves has been the subject of some investigation [O’Moore, 2000; O’Moore and Minton, 2003b]. A study that focused on the differences in how teachers and students conceptualise what bullying behaviour is, in the absence of pre-prepared definitions, would undoubtedly be instructive.

It is also possible that teachers do put a stop to all the bullying that they know about, and that a lack of awareness of incidents of bullying might hold the key to this discrepancy in the results. After all, one cannot expect teachers to intervene in situations that they do not know exist; and a teacher might respond that if pupils and parents do not come forward, how can teachers become aware of such situations? However—and here the problem becomes somewhat circular—it may well be the case that bullied pupils do not report bullying because they do not share their teachers’ confidence in the school’s ability to adequately deal with bullying. Pupils know that they should report bullying; they also need to believe that it will be safe for them to do so. It is, of course, eminently possible that where core programmes of peer support [Cowie, 2000; Cowie and Wallace, 2000] exist, reporting may be made somewhat easier. It is also arguable that if the school has a clear anti-bullying policy, with provisions made for detecting (critically, supplying means by which teachers’ potential awareness of bullying situations can be improved), reporting, and dealing with bullying, upon which all staff are agreed and act, then pupils can feel confident in reporting the bullying behaviour they witness and experience. For as long as this is not always the case, reporting may always seem to carry a risk.

To conclude, it is felt that the positive results achieved in this study reflect that when schools take a whole-school approach to tackling bullying, which is inclusive of parents and the wider community, they will be rewarded with a significant reduction in victimisation and bullying. In the interpretation of the programme results, it should, however, be borne in mind that due to factors beyond the control of the study most of the schools were small in size. Indeed, it may have been the small size of schools and, for a minority of schools, the combining of grades within a single teaching class that accounted for the absence, in the present study, of the age-related decreases of being bullied and of bullying others that have been reported elsewhere [Smith et al., 1999].

Whilst this is an area that merits further study, it is hoped that in implementing the current programme on a wider scale throughout Ireland, the role of school size and level of education can be explored. In view of our present findings, which suggest a reluctance on the part of victims to report their victimisation to teachers or members of their families, there is a need

for further research to better understand the reasons for non-reporting. Also, the differences that were found between the pupils and teachers in their perception of the level of intervention against bullying are worthy of further study. It is hoped, in particular, to attend to the further development of these aspects as they become part of the nationwide programme.

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