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Bullying prevention and mediation: the role of Values Education

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Abstract

The growing incidence of bullying in schools calls for alternative prevention and mediation approaches in which values are integrated into current practices. This study explores educators' and parents' beliefs about the explicit application of a values-based approach to bullying intervention and mediation in Catholic schools. Individual and focus group interview among teachers, principals and parents were held in three Catholic primary schools in the Sydney Metropolitan area. The study also served to identify current anti-bullying practices employed as well as to examine specific values perceived to be relevant by parents and educator in preventing and solving bullying conflicts. Respondents showed a preference for mediation interventions between bully and victim, drawing simultaneously on element of restorative practice, notions of accountability and imposition of consequences. Likewise, they supported a value-centred approach in dealing with the bully in order to achieve a positive behaviour. Specific professional development in dealing with bullying prevention in the practice of medication and consistency of practice were recommended. The paper also presents implication for professional development and creating an organic anti-bullying culture by incorporating values into the curriculum and examining the roles of students, parents, carers and the school.

Introduction

Historically, bullying had not been seen as a problem that needed much attention, but rather was accepted as a fundamental and normal part of childhood (Limber & Small, 2003). In the last two decades, however, this view has changed and bullying in schools is seen as a serious problem that warrants attention (McCarthy et al., 2001). Smith (2004) suggested the systematic examination of the nature and prevalence of school bullying began with the work of Olweus in the 1970s in Scandinavia who developed an anatomy of bullying through a large-scale research project with 800 boys in Stockholm. The volume of research since then has clarified much about the nature of bullying and the suffering it can cause. Schools are currently struggling with the increasing incidence of bullying and its vast and troubling ramifications for victims and bullies. In acknowledging the immense amount of research that has already been carried out on bullying, it is worth noting that regardless of this, bullying is on the increase.

Bullying is not normal behaviour or just a part of growing up as a child (Salin, 2003). It certainly is inappropriate behaviour. The working definition of bullying used in this study is broad based but relevant to the school setting. It includes actions within a relationship between a dominant and a less dominant person or group where an imbalance of power (real or perceived) is manifested through aggressive actions, physical or psychological (including verbal or social).

Negative interactions occur that are direct (face-to-face) or indirect (gossip, exclusion) and negative actions are taken with an intention to harm. As DiGuilio (2001) noted, these can include some or all of the following physical actions (punching, kicking, biting); verbal actions (threats, name calling, insults, ethno culturally-based or sexual comments); and social exclusion (spreading rumours, ignoring, gossiping, excluding). These negative actions are repeated towards the victim over a period of time (Ma et al., 2001). DiGuilio (2001) also noted the harmful intent repeated over time without provocation. In this research, bullying is examined in the context of student-to-student relationships rather than student-to-teacher contexts.

Bullying is an umbrella term for a variety of types of bullying, such as cyber bullying being defined as a form of bullying that involves the use of information and communication technologies like e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging (IM), defamatory personal websites, and defamatory online personal polling web sites, to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others (Belsey, 2004). Cyber bullying is different from face-to-face bullying in a number of ways. While face-to-face bullying is something that is often under the radar screen of adults, cyber bullying is even more difficult to manage because of the opportunity for communicating in ways that are often unknown by adults and away from their supervision (Belsey, 2004).

Children bully for a number of reasons including feeling insecure, having watched another person act like a bully, having been bullied, or believing that bullying can get them what they want, including social acceptance or dominance over others (Cross, 2009). Understanding why children bully can help in changing bullying behaviours. Bullies tend to be more impulsive, aggressive and experience difficulty in complying with rules or authority figures than their peers and they tend to lack empathy for others. Gaining an insight into the characteristics of bullies can assist in planning ways to resolve these conflicts. It is important to get help for a child who is acting like a bully because the bullying can have widespread, long term negative ramifications for the well-being of victims, bullies and the whole school community (Cross, 2009). The most tragic outcome of bullying

victimisation is suicide. Reijntjes et al. (2010) suggest victims of bullying are also at an increased risk of adverse outcomes in childhood, including physical health problems and emotional and psychological problems. A negative implication for the bully is the high percentage of those identified as bullies who are likely to follow a life of crime if their behaviour persists (Coie et al., 1991).

The Role of Catholic Education

Catholic schools have distinctive goals and features which derive from a core of philosophical and theological foundations central to their character and mission. The teaching of scripture and morals has been part of the Catholic school curriculum since the 17th century (Gellel, 2017). Catholic schools emphasise personal and social development as fundamental enduring values and requirements in an ever-changing world. This holistic approach provides an educational foundation for life to the full, meaning the full development of the person – intellectually, spiritually, socially, emotionally and physically. The “integral formation of the whole person” (Miller, 2007, p. 449) was consolidated in the 19th century as the Popes formulated strategies for educating young people. Educators and parents have a paramount role in the development of young people, and should do this in “cooperation with Christ and to work in the name of the church” (O’Shea, 2018, p. 3). Catholic schools aim to be safe, supportive learning communities where every child matters and the unique dignity of each child is respected, nurtured and valued. The core values, such as respect, inclusion, care, compassion and tolerance, identified in this study, are also paramount in the teachings of the Catholic faith in Catholic schools.

The purpose of this study was to explore the incidence and implications of bullying in Catholic primary schools and the beliefs that parents, teachers and principals share about the explicit application of a values-based approach to bullying interventions and mediations.

Literature Review

The incidence of bullying

The results of a 2012 survey of 21,000 school children show bullying to be the number one social concern for Australian school children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In these annual ABSS questionnaires school students provide their personal opinion about a variety of school, social and environmental matters. Students submit real data about everyday interests and opinions on various environmental and social issues. The issue has grown in the last four years to such an extent that one in five children are experiencing bullying (Kids HelpLine, 2020) as opposed to one in six children in the period 1997 to 2000 (Edwards, 2000). Approximately 56 percent of all Australian students have witnessed a bullying incident at school and about 71 percent of students report bullying as an on-going problem. A reported 15 percent of all students explain absence from school as motivated by fear of being bullied while at school. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2017), suicide, as a result of bullying, continues to be one of the leading causes of death among children under the age of 14 and the incidence is so high that *bullycide* is a term now used to describe suicide as the result of bullying.

With advances in technology, communication engines such as email, texting, chat rooms, mobile phones, mobile phone cameras and websites can and are being used by young people to bully peers. As a result, cyber bullying is now a global problem with many incidents reported in the United States, Canada, Japan, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Technology provides the opportunity for perpetrators to hide behind their devices and continue bullying behaviours towards other school peers long after the bell has rung (Campbell, 2005). For example, 43 percent of teens aged 13-17 report that they have experienced some sort of cyber bullying in the preceding year and one million children were harassed, threatened or subjected to other forms of cyber bullying on Face Book during the preceding year (Internet Safety 101, 2011). According to Campbell (2005), this growing problem has not as yet received the attention it deserves and remains virtually absent from the research literature.

Current anti-bullying strategies and their success

The case for improving the effectiveness of school interventions, in cases of bullying, is compelling (Gorsek & Cunningham, 2014). In general, efforts to reduce bullying in schools, have involved two complementary approaches. One is to improve the attitudes and interpersonal behaviour of all children at the whole school level. The second approach is to focus predominantly on the students who have become involved in bully/victim problems at school. Those two approaches are not mutually exclusive (Handal, 2005).

The whole school approach aims to prevent bullying from ever occurring as opposed to the second approach, which addresses the problem of bullying once it is apparent and targets the parties involved. In the second approach the aim is to stop the bullying from continuing and to assist people who bully or are being victimised to lead more constructive or less troubled lives. Rigby (2010) identified two clearly different responses to bullying, once these conflicts are evident in the schools. One response emphasises a traditional punitive approach with the enforcement of rules and sanctions upon bullies, whereas the other emphasises problem-solving approaches focussing on mediation, shared concern, restorative justice and a no-blame approach.

As with many kinds of anti-social behaviour, the traditional way of dealing with school bullying has been to discipline the offenders by imposing sanctions. It is estimated that 75% of teachers in Australia believe that cases of bullying should be dealt with by punishing the perpetrator (Rigby, 2007; 2010). Further, Sairanen and Pfeffer (2011) noted that employing this intervention has shown little success with regard to achieving positive outcomes in bullying conflicts. In fact, this punitive approach can sometimes have damaging effects. But regardless of the opinions of educators and the negative statistics of its success, the rules-and-sanctions traditional approach is still the most widely used approach to dealing with bullying conflict resolution.

There are six non-punitive problem-solving interventions used in schools to stem the increase in bullying behaviours. These are: restorative justice, the support group method, the shared concern method, strengthening the victim, check in – check out and mediation (Hawken & Horner

2003; Morrison, 2007; Rigby, 2007; Smith et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2007). In general, Pepler et al. (2001) referred to research findings that indicate a non-punitive approach is worth pursuing in bullying situations, as there is an urgent need for interventions that are both extensive and aimed at changing the behaviour patterns of bullies. Likewise, Todd et al. (2008) agreed that such interventions have demonstrated their effectiveness in decreasing the frequency of problem behaviours in primary school aged children.

Role of the teacher and student age as factors in achieving behaviour changes

In attempting to achieve positive behaviour changes in bullying situations the literature reveals two factors worth considering. The first is the potential influence teachers have on their students. For example, Colvin et al. (1998) argued that educators play a strong role in the control of behaviours in the school environment and have the power to influence, teach and nurture pro-social behaviours. Rymarz (2018) supported this approach, saying that Catholic school teachers “have a key role in maintaining the religious identity of the school” (p. 197). The second factor is the greater likelihood that teachers will succeed in achieving behavioural modification when children are younger (Crone et al., 2010; Olweus, 1997). Smith et al. (2003) also acknowledged the stronger positive effect teachers have on primary school aged children, compared with secondary aged school pupils and the fact that younger children are more willing to accept teacher authority.

Teacher confidence, training and ability to deal with bullying conflicts

Teachers need specific training to identify and respond to these behaviours as well as to model and reinforce positive problem solving in these situations. It is worth noting the high percentage of teachers who feel they need more training in dealing with bullying in schools (Cunningham, 2014; Gorsek & Pas et al., 2015). This suggests, as Espelage and Swearer (2005) argued, that educating teachers about how to address bullying peer victimisation is essential. However, as Feinberg (2003) indicated new teachers arrive at school with minimal training in the

kinds of conflicts, such as bullying, that take place in classrooms every day. Rigby (2010) agreed that the average teacher's knowledge and understanding of what can be done to address cases of bullying is often severely limited. Nicolaides et al., (2002) add that even teachers who have sound knowledge of some aspects of bullying often do not feel fully equipped to tackle it.

Values education

In an attempt to find a solution to this growing problem, a values-based strategy is considered as a possible approach to achieving positive behaviour changes. Values include the core moral and social principles that all generations should learn and apply as the basis of how individuals should treat one another (Alomari et al., 2011); and clearly, all generations learn and apply values and virtues in an endeavour to change unacceptable behaviours towards others (Arsenio & Lemise, 2001). Therefore, teaching these values and instilling a moral code in the hearts and minds of the young may make an effective contribution in helping teachers deal with behavioural difficulties (Alomari et al., 2011). Certainly, values education is an integral part of teaching in all schools (National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, 2005). Its ethical content and instructional strategies aim at developing personal qualities and achieving positive behaviours towards self and towards others. Hence, values education may have a positive impact on reducing the abusive treatment of another person that occurs in bullying victimisation. Campbell (2005) and the literature on bullying, in various degrees, clearly shows such a relationship. Moral education could encourage perpetrators to become reflective and self-aware by treating others well in a manner consistent with the millenary Golden Rule: "One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself".

Research Objectives

The study intended to address the following questions:

1. What understandings do teachers, in Catholic primary schools, have of bullying prevention and mediation strategies?
2. What are teachers' professional development needs in regard to bullying prevention and strategies?
3. How do teachers, principals and parents perceive the role of values-based approaches to bullying intervention and mediation?
4. What are the implications of the above perceptions in the design and implementation of bullying intervention programs in Catholic primary schools?

Research Design

Conceptual framework

An interpretivist paradigm was applied to this research study as the interest was in understanding the meaning behind bullying behaviours and possible approaches to finding a solution. It relied on the participants' view of a situation and it emphasised social interaction as the basis for knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This interpretivist paradigm was suited to this small-scale research as it sought to gain an understanding of individual perspectives in order to provide explanations of the relationship between bullying and values education. This study also sought to investigate the perspectives of the participants regarding their beliefs on an explicit values-based education approach.

Procedure

A series of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were carried out to explore the beliefs and opinions of three principals, 22 teachers and 13 parents from three Catholic primary systemic schools in Sydney, Australia. These interviews and focus group discussions were audio

recorded and transcribed for further analysis. This research focused on the participants' individual beliefs about current bullying interventions and about values that might be relevant to challenging bullying behaviour. Attention was paid to the positive role values play in human existence and to the relationship between the development of an individual's values and the development of appropriate behaviour towards others. During these interviews and focus group discussions, descriptive and detailed accounts were gathered from participants to establish beliefs and practices.

The interviews also gathered information on attitudes, values and opinions about current approaches to bullying, assumptions about conflict resolution and about the place of a values-based approach to conflict resolution. The collective rather than individual view provided a useful comparison of information. The participants for the parent groups were drawn from various age groups, and had children of a variety of ages, from preschool to teenagers.

The data for this study were collected in three phases. The first phase of the study involved semi-structured interviews with principals. Phase Two of the data collection employed focus group discussions, also referred to as group interviews, with teachers. The informants were drawn from various age groups, degrees of teaching experience and both genders. In Phase Three, the data collection process with parent participants involved the same procedure as that undertaken with the teachers' focus group discussions.

Thematic Framework

Drawing on the literature review the following five working themes were initially adopted to achieve the research objectives and determine the beliefs of research participants. These themes guided the review and analysis of the data. During the data review these themes experienced a process of transformation as new concepts emerged through the analysis of the responses as explained in the next section.

Theme 1.

Inconsistency of knowledge, understanding and practice of current intervention and approaches towards bullying. Rigby (2010) cited the difficulty in determining which of the six interventions noted above is the best approach and considers the possibility of mixing methods.

Theme 2.

Lack of professional development and confidence in dealing with bullying conflicts. Feinberg (2003) and Rigby (2010) agreed that teachers lack training and confidence in dealing with bullying conflicts.

Theme 3.

Schools adopt various methods of values education, some implicit in their whole school approach and others explicit in key learning areas. As Etherington (2013) suggested, values education is an essential part of schooling and there has been a growing demand from educators, governments, and the community for the teaching of values in schools.

Theme 4.

It is expected that schools comply with teaching a set of core values outlined in the national values framework. It is expected that schools should comply with the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools and teach the identified core values (Jones, 2008).

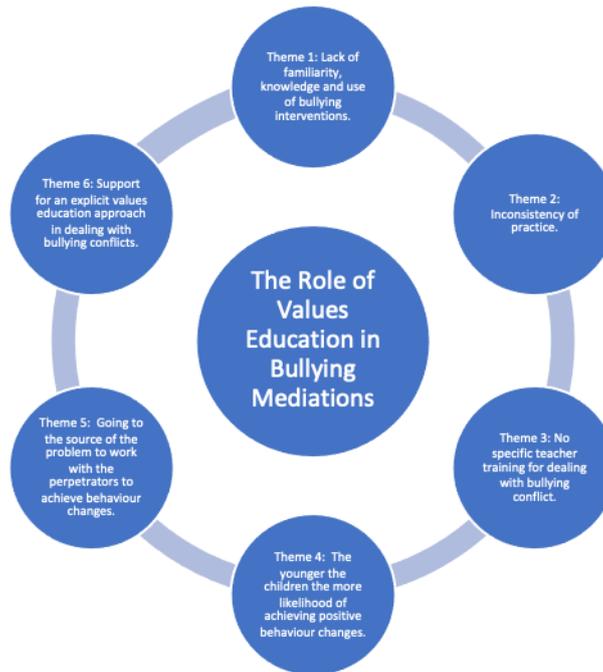
Theme 5.

Values are seen as directly related to the treatment of others. Alomari et al. (2011) cited values as directly related to the treatment of others and Morrison (2002) reinforced the importance of these core principles in productively assisting with conflict resolution.

Consolidated themes.

Six themes emerged from the data collected in the three schools. As explained earlier these final themes were deducted from the thematic framework after a process of responses and final saturation. These findings are graphically represented below.

Figure 1: Emerging research themes



The first theme to emerge was a lack of familiarity, knowledge and use of a broad range of formal bullying interventions. Across the three schools, interventions were centred on mediation strategies and little evidence was found of the other problem-solving approaches discussed in the literature review. However, each school was engaged in Problem Based Learning (PBL) and Kids Matter behaviour models, which demonstrated an attempt to take a consistent approach to achieving acceptable behaviours in the schools. Given that the three schools were not familiar with a variety of interventions, it is envisioned that familiarising staff with those interventions would be useful in achieving positive results in bullying conflicts. Some components of a few of the non-punitive interventions, such as restorative practice and shared concern, were evident in only two of the three schools.

Inconsistency of practice, specific to bullying, was the second theme emerging from the data. Not only was inconsistency of practice apparent from school to school, but also within a school, from teacher to teacher and incident to incident, despite principals' advocacy for greater uniformity. Such dissonance could be an indication that teachers have insufficient education, training and therefore knowledge and understanding to be able to deal well with bullying conflicts. However, this finding might also mean that some teachers modify prescriptive strategies to suit their classroom contexts.

There was the recognition that there is no specific teacher training for dealing with bullying conflict either at college, university or in-service professional development in the school setting. This lack of training was consistent with Cremin's research (2002) who suggested that very few teachers receive relevant training in mediation and conflict resolution. This view is likewise reiterated by Feinberg (2003) and Rigby (2010) whose research acknowledged the need for specific training to respond to these behaviours, as the average teacher's knowledge and understanding of what can be done to address cases of bullying is often severely limited.

Another common theme that emerged from the data was the likelihood of greater success in addressing and arresting bullying behaviours and achieving positive behaviour changes if an intervention takes place at a young age and addresses the source of the problem. O'Shea (2018) added to this saying that if we desire success regarding religious education, where we are teaching values, that we "cannot neglect or omit essential starting points at any stage of development" (p. 9). This suggests that bullying behaviours need to be arrested in primary school before they escalate and continue on into high school. This conclusion is also supported by Crone et al. (2010) who agreed there is greater success with behaviour modification in elementary aged students, supporting the claim that the younger the age of intervention, the greater the chance of success.

Going to the source of the problem and assisting the perpetrators with achieving positive changes was a strong common theme in the data corroborated by Crone et al. (2010). Participants acknowledged the value of interventions targeting the source of the problem, that is, the

perpetrator. Many focus group participants mentioned that the majority of current interventions are aimed at assisting the victims and bystanders in these conflicts, even though it is often the bully who needs assistance to achieve necessary positive behaviour changes towards others. The acknowledgement of the need to address the source of the problem and work with the perpetrators to achieve positive behaviour changes was an approach endorsed by all participants in the study. Rather than accepting the negativity of bullying as something toward which victims must respond by developing resilience, participants saw dealing with the issue as requiring a two-pronged approach. Teachers not only need to develop resilience in the victim, but must also go to the source of the problem and teach the values to the perpetrator that relate directly to the positive treatment of others.

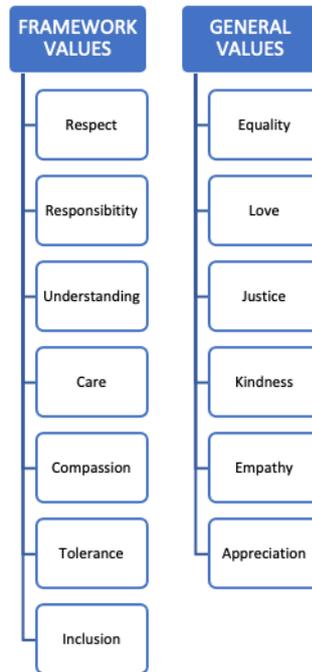
Belsey (2004) reinforced this approach with the bully as he suggests bullying to be about human relationships, power and control. Thus, according to Belsey (2004), those who bully others are trying to establish power and control over victims they perceive to be weaker. The importance of looking at why the bully treats others this way and assisting the bully to make positive behaviour changes came through strongly in the data.

The final theme reflected in the data, was the support for explicit values education to be taught in order to achieve positive behaviour changes in perpetrators. This theme related well with the belief of going to the source of the problem and explicitly teaching these values to the perpetrators. The recommendation of a values-based component involving values instruction for the perpetrators was embraced by all groups with some specific core values emerging from the data collected from all participating groups.

The common values identified to teach explicitly in a social skills program capacity were respect, inclusion, care, compassion, tolerance and inclusion. All participants also identified these common values as important to teach children in regard to ensuring the positive treatment of others. When discussing relevant values, responses revealed there were no major differences

between the three groups as shown in Figure 2 and the values identified were also very similar to the core values in the Framework.

Figure 2: The values identified in preference order.



Differences and similarities among stakeholders' views

This section presents differences across the three stakeholders in Catholic primary schools (i.e. principals, teachers and parents). Based on the responses at the in-depth and focus group discussions a qualitative analysis was carried out based on the aforementioned thematic categories at two stages. In the first stage, responses were analysed within each school per each of the three groups, namely, for principals, teachers and parents. The second stage involved a between-schools comparison. In this paper, for the sake of brevity, only the latter are reported using the following format:

- Principals' shared beliefs and perceptions across the three schools;
- Teachers' shared beliefs and perceptions across the three schools;
- Parents' shared beliefs and perceptions across the three schools.

Participants' responses were contrasted to each other and grouped in similar themes and sub-themes until further reduction due to data saturation was not possible.

Principals' shared beliefs and perceptions across the three schools

Interviews revealed the three principals shared some common views. Principals acted on bullying prevention and mediation cases through a combination of the best strategies taken from a variety of non-punitive approaches such as restorative justice, support group method and mediation because "a hard and fast punitive approach does not work". One of the principals asserted that non-punitive approaches might conflict with parents' attitudes:

My concern with this approach [mediation] is that the parents of the victims want to go straight down the punishment road. They don't understand the perpetrators need for support to achieve positive behaviour changes.

All principals were interested in learning more about the mediation approach and engaging their staff in becoming more aware of that practice. All would like to see their staff having the opportunity to engage in training or in-servicing so the school can have consistency of practice in dealing with bullying conflict. In this regard, a principal commented:

Teachers need to learn the process to ensure consistency of practice. There is a need for specific training and knowledge of the process. My concern is the time constraint on teachers, but regardless of this I still see a need for further in servicing and the benefits of following a consistent process.

The three principals who had formalised positive behaviour management models in their schools, were strongly committed to ensure uniformity of procedures and expectations. One of the principals expressed her firm belief "in the need for consistency of practice by the staff for this behaviour model to be successful". There is also the opinion that: "Parents need to not only be involved in the process but have to be on board with supporting the school and reinforcing positive behaviours with follow up at home".

About the importance of character development, a principal stated:

I would like to see a clear link between values that are identified as important to the fabric of the school, already implicit in policies and behaviour models, coupled with similar values to explicitly teach in resolving bullying conflicts, to assist positive behaviours towards others.

There was also a shared view that explicit values education for the perpetrator would be a useful strategy in solving bullying conflicts. The common values that were identified by the principals as important to teach to achieve positive behaviours were respect, understanding, tolerance, inclusion, responsibility, care and compassion. According to a principal: "Values are more evident in the new curriculum, not only in Religion and Personal Development and Health, but also in English and Maths." Another principal commented that "values education is embedded in our school policies and forms the basis of school awards and behaviour expectations".

Teachers' shared beliefs and perceptions across the three schools

The majority of teacher participants were unaware of many of the widely used specific approaches to bullying conflicts. More specifically they did not know about all six of the current bullying interventions as discussed by Rigby (2010). A teacher said in that regard:

How best to tackle bullying is a grey area. We tend to jump around and try this and that and even though we may have a belief in restorative practice, we often resort to a punitive approach, out of frustration, thus creating inconsistency in our approach.

The responses from teachers regarding the lack of knowledge, training and confidence, corroborates previous findings (Boulton, 1997; Gorsek & Cunningham, 2014; Pas et al., 2015) that generally teachers need to be explicitly taught the strategies to deal with these bullying conflicts. Analysis of teachers' responses confirms this lack of knowledge of current approaches particularly for those new to the teaching workforce. It is paramount that teachers understand child development and "adjust their approach accordingly" (O'Shea, 2018, p.25). One of the younger teachers stated:

Every child and incident is different and cannot all be solved with the same approach. The university training does not really prepare us for dealing specifically with bullying and I learnt

learning more through experience on the job and the support of experienced teachers around me.

Most teacher interviewees expressed the view that it was necessary to be consistent across the school in approaches to bullying. Teachers all agreed that practice with regard to managing situations of conflict was inconsistent. A teacher suggested:

It would be a good idea to train all teachers in the mediation process as often children feel more comfortable talking to their own classroom teacher. This would also put everyone on the same page so the school could be consistent in their approach.

Another strong emerging theme was that teachers' approaches to dealing with the majority of bullying conflicts were unique and demonstrated little consistency across the school. In fact, some admitted to resorting to a punitive approach, out of frustration, even though they did not necessarily agree with it and despite accepting that such a method is not very effective in the long term. Similarly, most participants agreed that there is a zero tolerance to bullying, but also suggested "there is a reason why a bully does bully another child and while there is a clear need to support the victim, the bully also clearly needs help too".

An interesting comment made by one teacher was that "victims can become bullies as a form of defence, so an avenue of exploration may be to look at the reasons why a person becomes a bully". Finding out what led to these negative behaviours is a strategy that correlates with the belief of dealing with the source of the problem as necessary. There was full support to assist the perpetrator as the negative behaviour can be "a cry for help". Likewise, there was a shared view of the merit of teaching explicit values to children displaying bullying behaviours. Common values identified by all teacher participants were respect, understanding, tolerance, inclusion and giving everyone a fair go. A teacher said:

This values education is currently being taught implicitly in religious education and personal development programs in this school and the nine core values in The National Framework have been embedded in the religion programs.

Parents' shared beliefs and perceptions across the three schools

There was an expectation from parents that "as children are at school for more waking hours than what they are at home parents expect they should feel safe and happy when at school". For this reason, parents expressed a zero tolerance to bullying. Parents agreed on wanting immediate action to bullying conflict. There was a shared view that even though there was a zero tolerance to bullying, there needed to be a supportive, and non-punitive approach. Parents collectively expressed the need for parents of bullies to be informed and involved in the resolution of bullying conflicts because parents they "need to reinforce any follow up discussion with their child to ensure the parent supports the school with a consistent approach". Hence, communication between schools and parents when these situations occur is much appreciated by parents. There was a shared view that we need to teach children resilience and there is also a need to explicitly teach children how to treat others. In general, parents endorsed a non-punitive approach such as mediation with consequences for their poor choices in the treatment of others, such as community service. According to one parent, "Mediation makes perpetrators acknowledge how their choices affect others".

Strengthening the victim was an approach that parents endorsed as also being very important. One parent in particular had personal experience with bullying as she stated, "I felt helpless to control the behaviours of the bully". She felt the need to empower my own son to deal with the conflict as parents cannot be there to protect their children on these occasions. When discussing this approach there was acknowledgement that while it was necessary to assist victims not to remain victims, this did not deal with the source of the problem, that being the bully and the bullying. In general, a values-based approach targeting the unacceptable behaviours was endorsed by all parent groups and the values identified by all parent participants were respect, understanding, tolerance, inclusion, responsibility, care, compassion, empathy, kindness, justice and love.

Summary of themes across the schools

One commonality across the three schools was a belief in the efficacy of a non-punitive approach to addressing bullying. There were few significant differences between the beliefs of participants regarding the preferred intervention. Most were in favour of a mediation approach. Teachers were inclined to create their own strategies such as withdrawing bullies and engaging them in mediation and restorative practices. They seem to use a mixture of strategies from current interventions without labelling them from a research perspective.

All participants shared a positive view of the worth of an explicit values education approach at the source of the conflict. During data collection with all discussion groups, the value 'responsibility', was consistent in the dialogue from all participants. Common values identified by principals, teachers and parents from all three schools were respect, understanding, tolerance, inclusion, responsibility, care, compassion and empathy.

Regardless of the amount of bullying experienced by discussion participants, all agreed that only a small number of perpetrators were ever involved. This shared view is supported in the literature by Rigby (2010), who suggested that even though a very high proportion of bullying cases occur in a school, only a relatively small proportion of students are perpetrators. This research gives strength to the suggestion that addressing the source and trying to achieve positive behaviour changes with the bully may have merit in arresting the increase in bullying incidence. Thus, the value of targeted interventions at the source of the problem has been recognised, as educators search for highly efficient strategies for preventing and addressing problem behaviours (Crone et al., 2010).

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

A number of pedagogical implications for the role of values education in primary school bullying prevention and mediation strategies are drawn from the results of the interview study. These implications relate to new perspectives on bullying interventions, conceptual obstacles in the teaching of values, values and the curriculum and the question of the type of professional

development to be recommended. In addition, implications for the students, parents and carers, and the school administration are discussed.

Professional development

One of the main implications is the need to provide professional learning opportunities to assist teachers in developing bullying intervention skills according to their own classroom contexts. In general, the interviews in the study reflected the sentiment that an educational rather than an exclusively punitive approach is preferred in dealing with bullying behaviours. Teachers reported using mostly mediation while combining that approach with others and/or creating new ones, such as the meditation groups. The latter confirms the concept that teachers adapt rather than adopt innovations (Handal & Herrington, 2003). Principals reported promoting specific approaches, but teachers seemed to interpret them within their own context and this suggested some inconsistency. However, what was actually happening was that teachers were meaningfully engineering more effective approaches on the basis of already prescribed bullying intervention programs. It therefore, can be argued that absolute consistency is not an essential aim of a professional learning approach. However, Wilkinson et al. (2019) calls for the fostering of “communication spaces places [in our Catholic schools] that promote explicit dialogue between teachers and leaders” (p.501).

Creating an organic anti-bullying culture

Principals should be able to celebrate individual innovation and recognise sharing and personal initiative, rather than requiring uniformity and the imposition of sanctions in order to create a rich anti-bullying culture in their schools (Rigby, 2010). For example, workshops can be led by classroom teachers rather than outside experts; policy-making can include teachers; and sharing and discussion can be directed to facilitate organic growth rather than vertical imposition of methods. Teacher education for beginning teachers must be also introduced to establish these grass root cultures. They should be given opportunities to voice their views and contribute to existing

interventions using their own understanding and experiences gained from both the school and the tertiary level. In addition, consultation with other schools where teachers can share their ideas, experiences and talents would help develop strategies and policies that are consistent across schools.

Values in the curriculum

Several obstacles appear to interfere in the process of teaching values associated to bullying interventions. While there was a commonality of core values drawn from the National Framework that teachers were ready to espouse, religious education was considered as the most obvious relevant school subject within which to teach values. The fragmentation of the school curriculum in areas such as maths, science, English, religious education, among others, does not allow for the cross disciplinary delivery of values education. Also, the curriculum does not give space to establish substantially, the link between “being” and “doing” because the treatment of such human dynamics is not acknowledged at the lesson plan level (Arbab, 2000). In secular curriculums, reason and logic tend to be over celebrated and pragmatism is one of the main drivers; basic numeracy and literacy skills can be overemphasised, and standardized assessment often provides a judgement of students’ worth through cold metrics. In this context, the teaching of values can become a rhetorical exercise, rather than a meaningful student learning experience. To create a more meaningful experience O’Shea (2018) expressed the view that children need to develop a sense of wonder before the intellectual mind can be engaged. He believes that this sense of wonder “sets up a desire to explore further” (p. 9). A living, rather than a didactical approach to values, where these are internalised through positive example, experience and reflection, is therefore recommended.

The students’ role

It should not be assumed that students come to school displaying an acceptable code of values that determines the positive treatment of others. How to teach values and translate values

into practice is an area needing further development. For instance, the explicit teaching of these in a social skills program is recommended (Rigby, 2010) since values must be taught in a particular context. Such programs must make use of modern approaches such as role-play, group reflection and should include gaming digital environments, which students regularly use. Students can also be encouraged to engage in discussion about bullying issues with their peers, to be members of an anti-bullying school committee, to be trained as mediators; or to be involved in mentoring groups (student-to-student), in order to make them active rather than passive recipients in any intervention.

Parents and carers

Likewise, families could reinforce the message that values cannot be taught in isolation, since values are living ideas. Moog (2019) believed that the role of Christian parents is “to promote growth, kindness and wonder” (p. 31). Parents and carers could help model specific values at home and reflect on them with their children, as recommended by Feinberg (2003). Parents not only need to be informed of policies and procedures but as school-stakeholders could work towards being involved in their construction. They should be able to voice their opinions on the implementation of anti-bullying programs and, furthermore, participate and deliver them hand-in-hand with teachers. Therefore, the values will not simply be cognitive entities, but become affective concepts to be displayed in action and supported by the whole community. For example, along with their children, parents and carers can be involved in developing the school code of conduct to illustrate the way in which personal responsibility comes with a sense of ownership. Schools can also assist parents by conducting parenting programs where parents/carers are taught the skills necessary to educating their children in bullying issues. Similarly, forums can be held where parents/carers, students and teachers can be helped to create more awareness about the dangers of bullying in schools. Time and funding may be better spent on supporting and assisting families of perpetrators to achieve behaviour changes, rather than allowing this cycle of repetitive behaviour towards others reach the

stage where the victims need funding for psychological help or financial payouts for psychological damage (Davies & Malkin, 2012).

The school role

Inter-collaboration among neighbouring Catholic schools is a dimension of this topic that is rarely exploited. Given that participating schools in this study have in common significant socio-economic variables and demographics, they could share the expertise, experiences and resources gained during their journeys. Strategic partnerships, opportunities for professional development, curriculum development, anti-bullying campaigns, parents and student-initiated activities and other cluster events can emerge given a sense of community and universal participation (Snyder & Bardi, 1995). Another important strategy schools might consider, given the number of deaths associated with bullying, is the instigation of programs that teach help-seeking behaviours. Such programs assist both children at risk as well as the whole cohort and provide information about public helplines for children. While helping the bully to achieve behavioural changes (Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, 2012), to acknowledge that he/she also requires counselling assistance for the sake of his/her own welfare is crucial, more importantly the wellbeing of the victim must be a focal point.

Limitations of the Study and Further Research

To increase the transferability of the data, it would be beneficial to extend the study to state and independent private schools encompassing a variety of districts and zones. It may also be useful to compare city regions as opposed to country areas. As the study only used data from primary schools, ideas and experiences were limited to parents and educators of students aged from 5 to 12 years. It would be useful to collect data in high schools to extract their beliefs and practices about the nature of bullying interventions, practices and values education, as it applies to bullying behaviours.

Given that values are to be manifested inside and outside the school building, some questions remain. How can educators assess them to measure the efficacy of a program? Shall values be taught in a spiral or a modular format? How can educators reach a consensus among parents/carers, teachers and students about which values to target? Should educators deal with values in isolation or combine them with others? How are we going to relate the *know-what* (content) with the *know-how* (skills) and the *know-why* (values and dispositions)? Should values be taught separately in bullying prevention programs, and if not, what weight should be allocated among these three elements? The need to respond to the issues was perceived in the interview and warrants further discussion to integrate more effectively values into the curriculum. Developing a curriculum to embed the identified Framework values into non-punitive bullying strategies and policies is certainly an area of exploration that will enhance the student experience.

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