

'Threats to staff from pupils and other adults sometimes left them vulnerable and in need of support . . . As external, neutral facilitators we could provide a safe environment in which to share.'

Jessica Johnson

Promoting a whole-school approach to bullying

We say a child or young person is being bullied, or picked on, when another child or young person, or a group of children or young people, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child or young person is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one ever talks to them, and things like that. These things can happen frequently, and it is difficult for the child or young person being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a child or young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. — *Whitney & Smith, 1993.*

The Kingston Friends Workshop Group recently mounted a 30-month project to examine ways of lessening the bullying problem in schools. It produced a wide range of responses from pupils, staff, and parents.

Twelve schools in Richmond and Kingston, from infant to secondary and including one for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), were each offered 20 hours of structured programme time during a one-year period. This

was aimed at all sections of the school community, including the non-teaching staff.

This report concentrates on the project's experience with four secondary schools and the MLD school.

The programme

Staff representatives were invited to a two-day INSET course organised by KFWG, lasting half a day or a whole day. The schools were also introduced to the range of modules available, from which they could choose or adapt for their purposes. These included:

Staff meetings (2 hours). Sharing experiences and providing skills and strategies that could be appropriate to the individual school.

Staff INSET (6 hours). This involved active participation in a workshop setting to examine conflict resolution strategies, including mediation.

Ancillary staff workshops (6 x 2 hours). These aimed at identifying and meeting the specific needs of each group of staff in developing daily conflict resolution skills.

Peer mediation can work only within a 'whole-school' ethos that believes in pupils' willingness and enthusiasm for this kind of support.

Parent/governor evenings (2 hours). Introducing the 'whole-school' approach to parents and governors, enabling them to feel informed and involved.

Parenting courses (8 x 2 hours). Offering parents an opportunity to explore and develop their skills, particularly in conflict management.

Family workshops (6 x 2 hours). Bringing adults and children together to develop joint skills.

Assemblies (½ hour). Providing an opportunity for 'awareness raising' with the whole school and potentially act as a trigger for further work.

Pupil workshops (6 x 1 hour). Providing opportunities to share together, value each other, increase communication skills, and introduce specific conflict resolution strategies.

Support visits (1 hour). Visits from project staff to help with constructing a programme, or with a specific issue.

Only two of the secondary schools contributed the full 20 hours of programme time to the project, but one of these added an extra 7½ hours on top. Their interest was in conflict management generally, focussing particularly on bullying and mediation. One of the other schools had a particular concern with racism, while the fourth was developing an anti-bullying component within the PSE programme.

The school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties concentrated on counselling and conflict resolution skills with the staff and on the meaning of bullying with specific groups of pupils.

What happened?

After the initial INSET course, all five schools held assemblies for specific year groups or school sections to share, through drama work, the problem of *What can we do about bullying?* The mediation framework was also introduced in some sessions. All classes within a year group (usually Years 7 or 8) also had sessions on *What is bullying for you?* and *What can we do about it?* These were often designed with the staff to fit into the existing PSE programme, and Fig. 1 shows an example of the material produced by one of the groups.

Peer mediation was introduced, and one of the schools carried on with training a self-selected group of pupil mediators in a series of eight sessions. This raised the practical issues of time-

tabling and ensuring the availability of staff and pupils for a long-term commitment. It also could work only within a 'whole-school' ethos that believes in pupils' willingness and enthusiasm for this kind of support.

The skills needed by pupils in mediation work were also shared in parents' evenings by three of the schools. We helped them to develop an 8-week 'parenting' course, combining our work with material from the Family Caring Trust. Family workshops were also offered, and one family worked through a long-term bullying problem involving their 13-year-old child.

A mediation programme

We introduced two 2-day external training courses on mediation in education, and nine of the 12 schools in the whole project sent representatives to one or other of them. Readers may be interested to know how one secondary school built on this course with a programme for their Year 7 pupils and parents.

It began with two staff members being sent to our first External Training weekend, and they proceeded to set up a Mediation Project, funded by TVEI internally, to deliver the programme set out in the box opposite.

The initial enthusiasm of a few staff carried the input along to begin with, but practical problems interfered with the momentum . . .

- The 45-minute PSE sessions were interrupted by other events.
- Staff sickness and changes upset plans.
- Other activities for pupils coincided with mediation training.
- There were problems with room availability both during and after school.
- One senior member of staff was opposed to the project.

At the end of the year's programme . . .

A small group of six pupils and six parents shared an evening in order to demonstrate their mediation skills.

The member of staff that instigated and inspired the project left.

At the beginning of the following year . . .

The same six pupils shared a 'mediation' role-play in what was now a Year 8 assembly.

However, there has been no further development because of heavy staff commitments.

A SCHOOL'S MEDIATION PROGRAMME

1. Whole-day staff INSET:

Morning: all staff (100)

What is bullying?

Development of a policy.

Conflict management strategies.

Mediation.

Afternoon: Year 7 tutors

Introducing mediation.

2. Year 7 Assembly: Drama presentation on *Introduction to mediation.*

3. Four-week programme for all classes, sharing staff and KFWG input in 45-minute PSHE slots:

What is bullying?

Ways to cope (assertiveness skills, self-esteem, working together)

Mediation approach

What can we do in school to help?

4. Year 7 parents' evening to share this programme.

5. Specific mediation training for a group of 12 pupils who volunteered to take part. The sessions were held after school, once a week for six weeks. The aim of this training was to allow peer-group mediation to develop.

6. Parents were invited to share mediation training, along with parenting skills, during six fortnightly evening sessions. The aim of this was to allow parents and children to share the same skills and support each other.

The way forward now seems to be through a Deputy Head (pastoral) who is devising a 6th-form programme with us for the 1996-97 academic year. So all is not lost, but it is going to be different! Will the input from Years 7 and 13 eventually meet in the middle?

This new 6th-form project has identified all the areas highlighted in the original Year 7 programme. The present time-scale is two years, extending into the third — and we are planning to use action research evaluation: so as long as the school continues to budget for the project we hope to have something to report in due course.

Evaluating the whole project: results and recommendations

1. Mediation, as a solution to bullying, has not been proven by this research. All anti-bullying initiatives concentrate on increasing understanding, care, and respect; but the method of addressing racial bullying, for example,

may be different from that needed to tackle physical bullying, or theft of belongings.

2. Similarly, tackling the fairly common occasional or sporadic bullying may be a different problem to addressing intensive bullying involving a minority of victims and bullies.

3. The perceptions of most aspects of bullying differed between groups of respondents. There was agreement only that the playground was the most common venue. There was little consensus between the management, staff, governor and pupil perspectives on the level and seriousness of bullying, the types of bullying activities, and the main perpetrators and victims.

4. However, despite the problems, one of the biggest strengths of the project was the awareness raised during policy development. Neither should individual benefits be ignored. In one school, external mediators intervened when a 15-year-old girl took herself out of school because of bullying. Initial interviews were held with four girls, who then came to a formal mediation session held on the school premises by KFWG mediators. Relationships were sufficiently restored for the pupil to return to school. A year later she is still there and socialising with her former antagonists.

We have produced individual school reports based on our pre- and post-intervention questionnaire evaluation, and these are summarised in the overall report presented by Ruth Hayes and Lesley Saunders and available from KFWG.

How did we feel?

Personal feelings often come to the fore within this work, and an extremely wide range of emotions has been expressed and experienced throughout. The basic foundation of our group philosophy is *affirmation*, yet negative feelings abound within issues surrounding bullying. Comments from staff and children already reflect this.

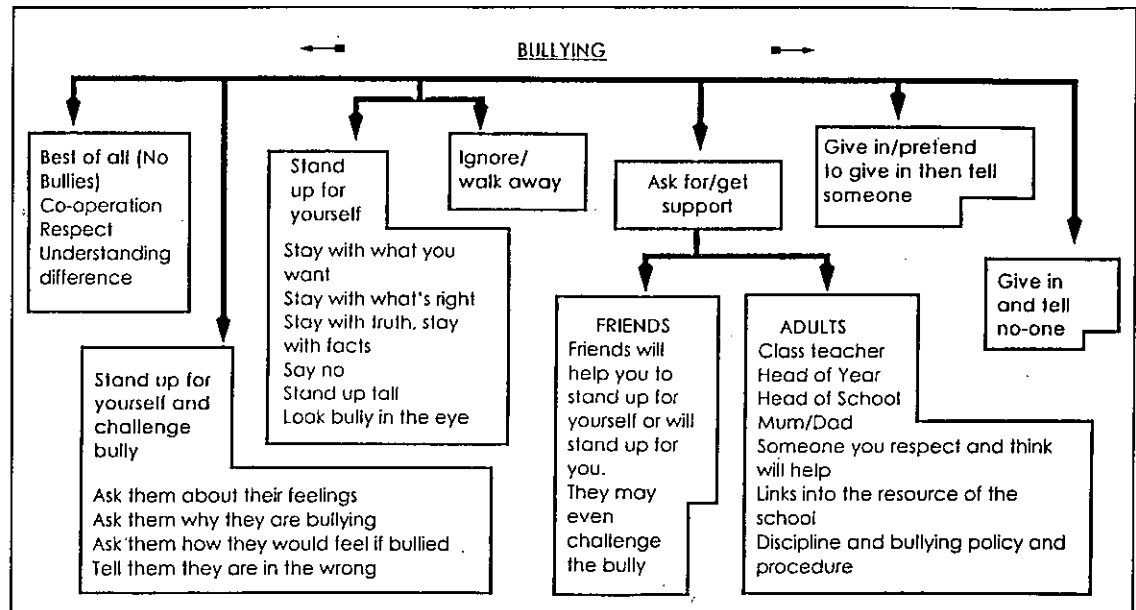
For *pupils*, the majority of workshops have stimulated curiosity, interest, enjoyment, and a willingness to share and help each other, although frustration, anger, pain, fear, shyness, and a sense of isolation can also be present.

Staff emotions ranged from enthusiasm to anger, frustration, reluctance, and anxiety. Threats to them from pupils and other adults

Initial enthusiasm carried the input along, but practical problems interfered with the momentum.

The external mediators intervened when a 15-year-old girl took herself out of school because of bullying.

Fig. 1. A 'response to bullying' developed by a group of Year 7 pupils in the course of project work.



sometimes left them vulnerable and in need of support.

The *parents*, being a self-selected group, were mainly interested and concerned, although not always.

As external, neutral facilitators we could provide a safe environment in which to share, but agreement about boundaries and ground rules are crucial. There are limits beyond which our involvement cannot go, and those in need of more (or different) support have to be directed elsewhere.

We hope that the momentum reached in many of the schools can be maintained. So often we wish to see instant, positive results, but as another researcher commented, (Olweus, 1993), the effects of the intervention programme were more marked after two years than after one. Typically, the work produces a small but immediate impact. When this fades people are discouraged, although things may still be happening at a deeper level. Whatever the impact on bullying, practising and highlighting co-operation as a constructive, creative way forward is of great potential benefit in many areas of human relationships.

We hope that those who wish to develop these valuable skills for life will find plenty of opportunities for doing so.

References

- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whitney, I. & Smith, P. K. (1993). A survey of the nature and extent of bullying in junior/middle and secondary schools. *Educational Research*, 35, 3-9.

Resources

Resources available through the Kingston Friends Workshop Group include a video (*Step by Step Towards Resolving Bullying*), an illustrated handbook (*Ways & Means Today, Conflict Resolution, Training, Resources*), and material on the following topics: *Bullying, Classroom management, Conflict resolution, Counselling and support skills, Games and activities, Mediation & conflict resolution, Parenting & family support, School management, and School mediation services*.

LIFESTYLES 2 (Mainly Money)

A datafile about pupils for pupils

The success of *Lifestyles 1 (Mainly Social)* encouraged us to develop a second datafile, aimed particularly at investigating how spending power may affect people and the things they do. *Lifestyles 2 (Mainly Money)* contains 200 Year 10 pupils (100 boys, 100 girls, surveyed in 1994), with 25 variables in the database. The price is £16.31 including VAT and postage.

When ordering, please let us know the size of disc required, and the machine and software (one type only per set) into which you will be loading the datafile.

Jessica Johnson, a trained facilitator and mediator with the Kingston Friends Workshop Group, led this project. Using her background of paediatric nursing and health visiting, she is also an Associate Lecturer in Health Education at Kingston University. She is currently extending the project work in one junior school.

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