



SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOR COUNTERING THE MENACE OF BULLYING

Dr. Piku Chowdhury

Assistant Professor , Satyapriya Roy College of Education , Kolkata.

ABSTRACT :

While a whole-school policy is vital for creating a framework in which incidents of bullying can be dealt with effectively over the long term, it is also important to consider preventative work of a positive kind, so that incidents are less likely to occur in the first place. A curriculum which is rooted in co-operative values can create the kind of context where bullying is unlikely to flourish and fostering such a climate might be part of a whole-school policy. In addition, such curriculum work can help raise awareness and empathy, important aspects of the first stage of policy development. This paper remains a humble attempt at exploring the curricular modifications in schools to counter the menace of bullying.



KEYWORDS : *Bullying, culture, wholeschool, cooperation, literature, narration, values.*

INTRODUCTION:

While a whole-school policy is vital for creating a framework in which incidents of bullying can be dealt with effectively over the long term, it is also important to consider preventative work of a positive kind, so that incidents are less likely to occur in the first place. A curriculum which is rooted in co-operative values can create the kind of context where bullying is unlikely to flourish and fostering such a climate might be part of a whole-school policy. In addition, such curriculum work can help raise awareness and empathy, important aspects of the first stage of policy development. Classes that are working co-operatively will be characterized by a predisposition to examine and be responsive to different contributions from fellow group members. The teacher will ensure that many tasks are designed in such a way that they can only be done by collective effort; furthermore, that all members of the class or the working group consider it worthwhile to engage in these tasks together. Effective co-operation relies on a shared understanding of various social rules and procedures, and should reflect values such as: reasonableness, orderliness, openness, freedom to take risks with ideas, equality and a respect for others (Cowie&Rudduck, 1990).

VALUES IN A CURRICULUM:

Fundamental to the co-operative curriculum is a commitment to values of trust and respect, which enable children to develop in their understanding of self and others. Why are these values essential? If children's experiences of social interaction involve caring relationships, they are more likely to be emotionally strong and self-confident. Supportive relationships in a peer group are important for healthy emotional development. Positive social relationships create a sense of self-worth and acceptance which the isolated child is unlikely to experience. This sense of self-worth is likely to extend into adult life. Co-operative

activity can promote the flow of communication by encouraging participants to share ideas and experiences in an atmosphere which is friendly and accepting. Where care has been taken to build up trust in the group, pupils can learn to give and receive honest feedback about one another, and can discover how they are perceived by their peers. And although the role of the adult facilitator is crucial, a large part of the work comes from the power of the peer group to promote personal awareness and to enable individuals to develop a sense of identity. The emotional security of members of the group can be enhanced in a number of ways and the methods are well known in lessons specifically concerned with personal and social development (PSE). The emphasis on change might enable, the victim of bullying in the playground to share feelings of distress and experience the support of peers. This co-operative approach emphasizes the teacher's need to promote, both in herself and in the pupils, qualities of empathic understanding, acceptance and genuineness, in order to create a climate which values personal growth.

The direct experience of learning and working in a co-operative classroom can give pupils a chance to become responsible thinkers with not only a positive sense of self but also a concern for their own community since, through genuine conversation and dialogue, children can be led beyond their initial positions, based on their own experience, to recognise that the world view of others may be radically different. The dialogue extends beyond the classroom walls to broader issues such as world peace, conflict resolution, gender and race. Proponents of the co-operative curriculum aim to create a positive climate of goodwill in the classroom which will give pupils a secure base for solving problems, for confronting controversial issues, for facing difficulties in their social relationships and for developing a sense of ownership of their class and school community. In the cooperative classroom there are structures which create opportunities for pupils to challenge anti-social behaviour at all levels, whether it occurs in a small group where one member is overbearing and domineering, or whether it concerns concerted action to combat bullying in the school at large. From this perspective the pupils are learning that they have power to challenge accepted ways of doing things which nevertheless seem unjust. Change here goes beyond individual personal growth and begins to address the possibility of being an active and responsible member of one's community, through heightening awareness of issues around community action and social change. In a co-operative classroom, where the ground rules of equality of opportunity have been established, there is scope for the negotiation of change (Cowie, 1994; Salmon & Claire, 1984; Salmon, 1992; Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994). This is confirmed by evidence from the USA (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) that a sense of self-efficacy is more likely to be promoted by working in groups than by either competitive or individualistic methods. Children in co-operative groups come to believe that they will be effective in taking action to solve problems and develop a sense of personal control and empowerment.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

The co-operative classroom can also be the setting for pupils to learn to tolerate different perspectives on the same issue. This does not mean that they never disagree—they often will in the course of debate—but rather that they learn to listen and reflect as they hear the very differing views of other members of their class. Collaborating pupils, through the process of working together, can help one another to increase understanding. There is strong evidence (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Bruner, 1986; Donaldson, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978) about the links between learning and social processes. Talk plays a central part in the learning process and it has been claimed that there are some cognitive processes which can only take place when the pupil is actively engaged in meaningful communication with peers and adults in his or her social environment. Bennett & Dunne (1992) and Dunne & Bennett (1990) have made systematic investigations of the ways in which social processes influence children's performance on specific types of task. They stress the need for educators to understand the social context where learning takes place and, with communication as a central feature of their approach, point to the role of task-related talk in enhancing pupils' capacity to learn. They argue that children become much more proficient at developing their own ideas and at reaching informed conclusions when they are involved in well-structured group work of a co-operative kind. For most children it is important to feel accepted by their peer group. The making and breaking of friendships can

figure largely in their daily experiences of school, and the feeling of group membership can underpin their happiness there. When talking to pupils involved in bullying gangs it is often fear of what the rest of the group would say that hinders pupils in changing their behaviour. In the survey carried out by Whitney and Smith (1993), 18 per cent of pupils said that if their friends were bullying someone they would join in. Research into bystander behaviour (Latane and Darley, 1970; Latane & Nida, 1981) shows that as the number of bystanders present at an incident increases, so the likelihood of somebody doing something to help the situation decreases. They call this trend the 'diffusion of responsibility'. The only exceptions are children under 9 years of age. Above this age, the decision to take action is often inhibited by social concern about 'what other people will think'. If intervention in a bullying situation is encouraged and valued by the school community, pupils are more likely to challenge bullying behaviour than remain inactive.

The school profiles which were developed through the bullying survey (Whitney and Smith, 1993) showed clearly that within a single year group there can be classes with disproportionately high levels of bullying whereas in other classes there is scarcely any bullying at all. What is the difference between these classes that leads to such a marked contrast in the levels of bullying behaviour? Peter K. Smith (1994) suggests that a major contributing factor would be the class 'ethos', that is, the atmosphere generated collectively by the pupils in that class which supports or opposes bullying and other forms of aggressive behaviour. There are two powerful ways in which pupils can indicate support for bullying behaviour. First, pupils can passively support the bullying behaviour by ignoring it or by remaining silent. These pupils can maintain the victim's role by avoiding the bullied pupil(s) or by not inviting them to join their social group. They can socially reinforce the pupils who are doing the bullying by co-operating with them, being friendly towards them or by not saying anything to them about the bullying behaviour. They can even help to enhance the reputation of the bullying pupil by gossiping about bullying incidents.

Second, pupils can support bullying behaviour in a much more active way. They can do this by: verbally encouraging the behaviour; preventing the pupil being bullied from escaping the situation, or shielding the situation from adult view or warning the pupils who are bullying that an adult is approaching, and generally assisting the pupil to bully by holding the pupil being bullied, or holding coats or bags. They can further assist by laughing or smiling at the bullying behavior and refusing to give information about the situation even when asked. This ethos can most effectively be changed in classes where the values of co-operation are promoted through the curriculum. Each of these two types of support for bullying can be challenged where pupils are working in a cooperative classroom. If it is not challenged, then gradually, over time, the pupils begin to believe that 'every class is like this'. They begin to believe that the behaviour of the bullies is impossible to change and out of their control. This feeling of helplessness spreads and can include teachers and thus the downward spiral of bullying behaviour is perpetuated and consolidated.

It is possible for an anti-bullying climate to exist within a class group where the group norms are oriented towards co-operation and tolerance. It is not necessary that everyone in the group needs to be close friends but rather that the individual and friendship groups do not gain status through aggressive or dominant behaviour. Peer approval will be given for non-aggressive behavior, while unacceptable behaviour such as bullying will meet with rejection or challenge. The pupils who spend much of their time in this kind of atmosphere are likely to feel confident that they can control bullying behaviour. Pupils who do indulge in bullying behaviour are likely to feel uncomfortable because they are breaking the group norms; they are also unlikely to receive a fearful or satisfactory response from their chosen victim. Pupils being bullied are more likely to seek support from their other classmates because they will expect to be supported. Research on implementing co-operative group work in junior school classrooms has shown that it can reduce the extent of victimization of vulnerable children, even in difficult classroom conditions (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994). However, Children who enjoy bullying others may dislike co-operative activities and make the creation of a co-operative classroom more difficult (Smith, Cowie & Berdondini, 1994).

CURRICULAR MODIFICATIONS:

The co-operative curriculum includes in its aims a commitment to encourage pupils to be more active in challenging and preventing bullying behaviour themselves. Some common strategies and modifications pointed out by scholars are briefly delineated below:

a. The Quality Circle (QC) idea comes from industry but its methods and techniques can easily be adapted to school settings (Schofield, 1986; Cowie and Sharp, 1992). Essentially the QC consists of groups of around five or six pupils each, who meet together regularly, usually weekly, and who are trained by someone with experience of QCs to identify common problems, analyse them, evolve solutions and present these solutions to 'management'—in this case a panel of adults, such as the headteacher, school governors, parents. The members of the QC are introduced to appropriate skills and strategies for problem-solving and effecting change: skills for generating ideas, observation and data collection, developing strategies for solutions, and communication, both within the circle and when presenting to management. The QC follows a particular cycle:

- forming the group;
- brainstorming the problem;
- prioritising the problem;
- investigating the problem/doing research;
- identifying causes;
- suggesting solutions;
- presenting the problem and solutions to management;
- monitoring and evaluating the outcome.

The QC is distinctive because it gives participants the opportunity to acquire a range of skills which facilitate a problem-solving approach to social life. The ground rules of the QC, which are explored during the group-forming phase of the cycle, actively discourage behaviour which is domineering or destructive or which discriminates against group members. The members of the QC are taught specific skills which will facilitate this approach to an issue like bullying.

b. **Using drama, role-play:** There is research evidence of the great potential of drama and role-play for helping pupils to gain an understanding of their own lives, to increase their capacity to explore the hypothetical, to learn about how other people think and feel, and to come to terms with disturbing emotions like anger, fear and hate. Not only does this learning take place within the safety of a role-play situation, but also there are other people involved in the process, whether as participants or as onlookers. There are a number of outcomes. Participants in a dramatic enactment become more integrated as a group; there is a heightened sense of group consciousness; participants have shared in a response to an emotive issue such as bullying; participants are able to work through the consequences of different lines of action in the safety of a role-play. Thus drama creates a context in which the teacher can enable pupils to face up to difficult or disturbing emotions and, because they are in role, they are likely to feel safer in exploring them.

c. **Video:** Video of bullying of children of the age of the audience is shown and paused at places for reflective notes, discussion and enquiry, supported by the teacher. The episode shown in the video is unresolved so that the children are faced with the task of finding their own solutions. The collective experience of watching the short video is the basis for cooperative curriculum. The students are given an opportunity to come to an understanding of how the situation may be challenged and altered. This also gives the opportunity for identification with the characters and creates an opportunity to enter into the context through sympathetic reliving. At critical points the teacher should stop the action in order to focus the pupils' attention on issues which have arisen in the course of the video, demonstrating sensitivity to the feelings of the participants, such as shyness and embarrassment. When the topic is bullying, it is quite possible that a number of the participants will be experiencing painful emotions and it is essential

for facilitators to be proactive in showing concern and awareness. They must also leave time for individual reflection and for collective response-sharing in order that the full impact of the experience can be internalized by the pupils. As Egan & Nadaner (1988, p. 253) put it: 'The exercise of re-enactive imagination enriches moral development. Moral development involves understanding both people and values.'

- d. Literature:** Literature can be a useful way of raising awareness of bullying, and increasing empathy for those who experience it. The children listen to the selected story, write down some immediate responses to it and then form into groups to discuss what it meant to them. The responses, as shown by research evidence, spans a wide variety of emotions including physical sensations, emotional reactions of fear, anger and hatred, expressions of empathy with the characters and reminiscences of similar experiences of their own. Protherough (1983) points out that reading of itself does not make people better. However, he argues, the stories which we shape around our own lives arise out of our accumulated responses to real events and to those which we experience in imaginative fiction. 'The actual and the fictional are inseparably interlocked within us' (Protherough, 1983, p. 15). So, the teacher invites children to respond to literature less as a way of telling moral tales than to help the children to develop a sense of self and to offer some new perspectives on how it might be possible to relate to other people. Educators have not always viewed stories in this way. In the nineteenth century it was actually considered by some to be harmful to read imaginative stories to young children. Tucker (1982) describes how one Victorian educator, Mrs Trimmer, criticised the use of fairy stories because 'they fill the heads of children with confused notions of wonderful and supernatural events'. A similar viewpoint appears in the Board of Education (1927) Handbook of suggestions for teachers in which the authors are cautious about the value of exercises in invention such as fairy tales which illustrate 'merely the unrestrained play of the fancy and the love of make-believe'. In the present day there are still educators who deliberately exclude imaginative activities from their curriculum on the grounds that the school's domain is the real rather than the imaginary. Others might admit that stories are enjoyable but they are not to be taken seriously in the education of the child. From an opposite stance, some educators have argued that the symbolic images of fantasy can help children to work through emotional conflicts (Guggenbuhl, 1991). Themes of the imagination deal with real emotional issues in the child's life and give children the opportunity to resolve inner conflicts and establish a direct link between the world of the imagination and the social reality of the child's life (Britton & Pellegrini, 1990). Hardy (1977, p. 14) argued that narrative is the 'continuation of the remembering, dreaming and planning that is in life imposed on the uncertain, attenuated, interrupted and unpredictable or meaningless flow of happenings'.

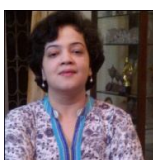
CONCLUSION:

By tackling bullying through the curriculum, schools can open a discourse with their pupils about the nature of the problem. This raises awareness about what bullying is and can enable teachers to gain insight into the types of bullying behaviour which pupils in their school experience. The extent to which these approaches change pupil behaviour seems to depend on the level of interaction the approach requires and the thoroughness with which the materials are explored.

REFERENCES:

1. Arora, T. (1989) Bullying—action and intervention. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 7, 44-47.
2. Besag, V. (1989) *Bullies and victims in schools*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
3. Boulton, M.J. and Underwood, K. (1992) Bully/victim problems among middle school children. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 62, 73-87.
4. Britton, B.K. and Pellegrini, A.D. (1990) *Narrative thought and narrative language*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

5. ritton, J. (1977) The role of fantasy. In M. Meek, G. Barton and A. Warlow (eds), The cool web. London: Bodley Head.
6. Brown R. (1988) Group processes. London: Blackwell.
7. Brown, A. and Palinscar, A. (1989) Guided, cooperative learning and individual knowledge acquisition. In L. Resnick (ed.), Knowing, learning and instruction. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
8. Cowie, H. (1994) Ways of involving children in decision-making. In P. Blatchford and S. Sharp (eds), Breaktime and the school: Understanding and changing playgroundbehaviour. London: Routledge.
9. Cowie, H. and Rudduck, J. (1988) Learning together, working together. BP Education, PO Box 30, Blacknest Road, Blacknest, Alton, Hants GU34 4BR.
10. Cowie, H. and Sharp, S. (1992) Students themselves tackle the problem of bullying. Pastoral Care in Education, 10, 31-37
11. Cowie, H. and Sharp, S. (1994) Tackling bullying in your school. London: Routledge.
12. Egan, K. and Nadaner, D. (1988) Imagination and education. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
13. Elliott, M. (1991) Bully 'courts'. In M. Elliott (ed.), Bullying: A practical guide to coping for schools. Harlow: Longman.
14. Foster, P. and Thompson, D. (1991) Bullying: Towards a non-violent sanctions policy. In P.K. Smith and D. Thompson (eds), Practical approaches to bullying. London: David Fulton.
15. Foster, P., Arora, C.M.J. and Thompson, D. (1990) A whole-school approach to bullying.
16. Gobey, F. (1991) A practical approach through drama and workshops. In P.K. Smith and D.A. Thompson (eds), Practical approaches to bullying. London: David Fulton.
17. Hardy, B. (1977) Narrative as a primary act of mind. In M. Meek, G. Barton and A. Warlow (eds), The cool web. London: Bodley Head.
18. Jennings, S. (1986) Creative drama in groupwork. Bicester: Winslow Press.
19. Lange, A. and Jakubowski, P. (1976) Responsible assertive behaviour. Illinois: Research Press.
20. Latane, B. and Darley, J.M. (1970) The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help? Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
21. Ledford, G.E. Jr., Lawler, E.E. III and Mohrman, S.A. (1988) The quality circle and its variations. In J.P. Campbell and R.J. Campbell (eds), Productivity in organisations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



Dr. Piku Chowdhury

Assistant Professor , Satyapriya Roy College of Education , Kolkata.