



Choosing to Become the Change: Research Exploring Student Action to Stop Bullying

Bullying: What's in a name?

- Many different definitions of bullying out there
- Common understanding: intentional, repeated aggression towards a vulnerable student by a student or group.
- Verbal, physical, relational bullying
- Bullying as an umbrella term. Is this dangerous?
- Where does bullying happen? (more than just a schoolyard phenomenon).

What's the big fuss about?

- Incidences
- Silence
- Health problems
- Cultural messages

Shelagh Dunn

Presented at the Safe and Caring Schools and Communities 2006
Conference: *Becoming the Change we Want to See*



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A 'Culture of Bullying?' A 'Culture of Peace?'

- UN declared this decade the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World.
- *Stat:* Before junior high: 10,000 acts of violence on TV.
- *Food for thought:* History books: war vs. peace.

Ecological Perspectives on Bullying

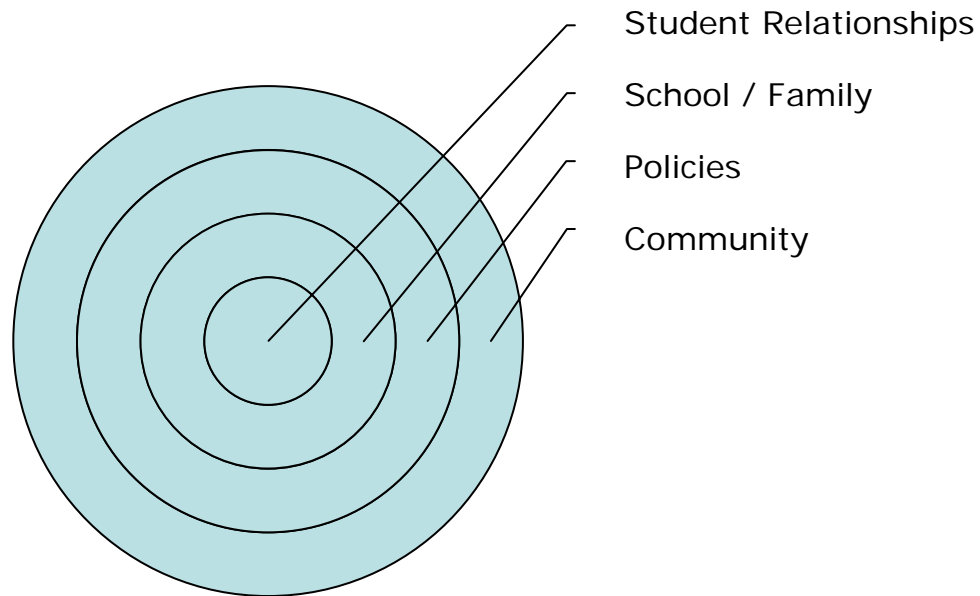
- Emphasize the role that school climate, community, and larger society play in the phenomenon of bullying.
- Like an ecology, assumes reciprocal interactions between systems and each system influences the other.

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- Changes can go both ways.
- School climate → bullying.
- Anti-bullying and positive action programs → climate.
- Peer groups influence attitudes and bullying.
- Action of peers can impact school and community attitudes.

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Peer Groups: What happens when bullying happens?

- Salmivalli (2001) and Participant Roles:
 - Bully
 - Reinforcer
 - Target
 - Outsider
 - Assistant to bully
 - Defender of target
- Most students are reinforcers, outsiders or defenders.
- Students can change roles.

The Role of the Witness

- Present ~ 85% of time, intervene ~ 15% of the time.
(O'Connell, Pepler & Craig, 1999).
- Peers look to peers to figure out how to act.
- Inaction of witnesses sends a message.
- Reinforcers/outsideers give power to bullying.

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Taking a Stand

- Conformity studies... group pressure & the power of power.
- The bystander effect.
- *The power of one.*

Action

- Peace is active, and requires effort and energy.
- Students don't like bullying. But this attitude is not reflected in action:
 - 95% say witnesses *should* intervene.
 - 45% say they think witnesses *would* intervene.
 - 15% actually *do* intervene.

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Why don't witnesses act?

- Risk to self/reputation.
- Blaming the target.
- Hard to tell if its bullying.
- Desensitized to bullying.
- 'Mind my own business.'
- Feeling helpless.

So what does it take to be an active witness?

What we Know about Active Witnesses

- Junior high students are less active witnesses than elementary, but more able to be directly involved.
- Direct involvement, least risky for the target of bullying.
- What might allow witnesses to act:
 - Self-efficacy
 - Decide independently
 - Confidence
 - Knowing what to do
 - Social standing

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My Study

- *"What meaning do students give to their experiences of acting in response to witnessing bullying?"*
- Qualitative study: Interviews with students who have acted to stop bullying or signal that it is not ok.
- Focus group with student participants to discuss common themes and their ideas for promoting student action.
- Final product as a resource for students or others concerned about active peacemaking.
- What do you see as important issues? What is happening in your schools?

Check out www.ualberta.ca/~bullying

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