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Bullying and Victimization in Schools: A Restorative Justice Approach

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Bullying at school causes enormous stress for many children and their families, and has long-term effects. School bullying has been identified as a risk factor associated with antisocial and criminal behaviour. Bullies are more likely to drop out of school and to engage in delinquent and criminal behaviour. The victims are more likely to have higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression and illness, and an increased tendency to suicide.

This paper reports on a restorative justice program that was run in a primary school in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), but whose lessons have wider application.

Early intervention has been advocated as the most appropriate way to prevent bullying. This paper outlines a framework based on restorative justice principles aimed at bringing about behavioural change for the individual while keeping schools and communities safe. The aim of restorative programs is to reintegrate those affected by wrongdoing back into the community as resilient and responsible members. Restorative justice is a form of conflict resolution and seeks to make it clear to the offender that the behaviour is not condoned, at the same time as being supportive and respectful of the individual.

The paper highlights the importance of schools as institutions that can foster care and respect and provide opportunities to participate in processes that allow for differences to be worked through constructively. It recommends that schools be resourced and supported to address bullying because of the debilitating effect of this problem.

Adam Graycar
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In the last decade or so there has been increasing awareness that bullying is a serious, and insidious, form of violence that plagues the school system (Rigby 1996). Internationally, there are countless tragic stories to be told. There is also building empirical evidence of the consequences of bullying's ill effects. Those who bully are more likely to drop out of school, use drugs and alcohol, as well as engage in subsequent delinquent and criminal behaviour (Farrington 1993). Children who are bullied have higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, illness and suicidal ideation (Rigby 1998). For both, this cycle becomes an obstacle to learning, self-development and effective citizenship. The consequences affect not only the individuals themselves, and their families, but also society at large, for it is society that supports those in the justice and health care systems.

In Australia, research has identified school bullying as a risk factor associated with antisocial and criminal behaviour (National Crime Prevention 1999). Early intervention has been advocated as the most appropriate way to break this cycle (Tremblay & Craig 1995). Schools may be the most appropriate institutions to focus on reducing antisocial and criminal behaviour patterns in children, while promoting health, resilience and social responsibility. Schools bring together many people who influence and support children,

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including parents, grandparents, teachers, instructors and coaches, as well as children’s peers. As a microcosm of society, schools have the potential to nurture and integrate individuals within society. However, they also have the potential to stigmatise and exclude (Morrison 2001).

Finding solutions to the problem of bullying, and other forms of school violence, is not easy. In the past, various methods have been tried, swinging from communitarian approaches of rehabilitation to conservative approaches of punishment. Broadly, the former values compassion, while the latter values accountability. Both approaches aim to achieve behavioural change for the individual while keeping schools and communities safe. However, evidence is mixed as to which approach works best. Tensions between the advocates of each approach are not uncommon. Is it possible to incorporate both compassion and accountability in the sanctions we impose when dealing with school violence? Advocates of restorative justice answer a tentative “yes” to this question. Restorative justice is about building communities of care around individuals while not condoning harmful behaviour; in other words, holding individuals accountable for their actions within systems of support. This paper presents a framework—one based on restorative justice—to better understand and address school violence. The focus is on school bullying, and the intervention presented and evaluated is the Responsible Citizenship Program, which can be tailored to the needs of different schools and communities.

A Framework to Understand and Address Bullying and Victimisation

There is no single path that leads a child to bullying others or to being bullied, however poor social adjustment is a common element. A number of risk factors have

been identified which generally fall into the categories of individual differences, family and school. These have been well documented in a number of studies (Farrington 1993; Rigby 1996). What is lacking is a solid framework for understanding the relationship between these different risk factors, to help focus the development of effective interventions. A recent study has found that many of the known risk factors in predicting bullying are mediated by one central factor: how individuals manage shame over a wrongdoing (Ahmed et al. 2001).

Shame management can be adaptive or maladaptive (Ahmed et al. 2001). Poorly managed shame can interfere with the development and functioning of an individual’s internal sanctioning system, which regulates the consistency and appropriateness of social behaviour. Briefly, shame comes to the fore when we behave inappropriately in relation to a community of support, such as our family or school. Through taking responsibility for the wrongdoing and making amends, the shame can be acknowledged and discharged. Through this process, our feeling of connectedness to the community affected by our wrongdoing remains intact. Shame management can be maladaptive when the functioning of an individual’s internal sanctioning system begins to break down and shame is not effectively discharged. Shame that has not been discharged remains internalised, and can be expressed as anger. The reason why a child’s internal sanctioning system may not be operating optimally, promoting mutual respect between individuals, is multifaceted. Simply, self-regulation of relationships has become ineffective. The community that has evoked the shame can contribute further to its negative manifestation if the individual is subjected to further feelings of rejection from that

community. Individuals can lapse into a mode of self-protection that can lead to further breakdown of social relationships, risking harmful backlash.

Shame management has been found to vary with four different categories that characterise bullying and victimisation (Ahmed et al. 2001):

- non-bullies/non-victims—acknowledge shame and discharge it;
- victims—acknowledge shame but are caught up in cycles of self-critical thinking, through ongoing feelings of rejection from others, so their shame becomes persistent, despite acknowledgment of the wrongdoing;
- bullies—are less likely to acknowledge shame, with the shame over wrongdoing being displaced onto others, often manifest as anger and other forms of antisocial behaviour; and
- bully/victims—feel the shame but, like bullies, fail to acknowledge it and further, like victims, they are caught up in cycles of self-critical thought.

In summary, shame can be conceptualised as an individual’s social thermostat, mediating the state of social relationships. Adaptive shame management strengthens social relationships; maladaptive shame management weakens social relationships.

Restorative Justice: Theory and Practice

Social relationships are important for regulating social life. This is a central tenet of the practice of restorative justice. Reintegrative shaming theory supports this practice. Braithwaite (1989) has argued that there are two main features inherent to restorative processes. First, to achieve successful reintegration the process must involve the presence and participation of a community of support for the offender and the victim. This community would be made up of the people who respect and care most about these two (or more) people.

Second, the process of shaming requires a confrontation over the wrongdoing between the victim and offender within this community of support. The process is restorative in that the intervention:

- makes it clear to the offender that the behaviour is not condoned within the community; and
- is supportive and respectful of the individual while not condoning the behaviour.

The first point constitutes the shaming aspect of the intervention while the second point provides the basis by which the shaming process is of a reintegrative (rather than a stigmatising) nature.

The aim of restorative programs is to reintegrate those affected by wrongdoing back into the community so that they may become resilient and responsible members of the community, upholding its laws and values. A restorative justice conference, which brings together victims, offenders and their respective communities of care, is one such intervention program. As Braithwaite states (1999, p. 47):

Restorative justice conferences may prevent crime by facilitating a drift back to law-supportive identities from law-neutralising ones.

This process has been found to be effective in schools, particularly in addressing bullying (Cameron & Thorseborne 2001). Despite this, the use of restorative justice conferencing in schools has received mixed reviews and the uptake of the practice has been slow (Morrison 2001). The current evidence suggests that what is needed is broader institutional support, in the form of a culture shift that supports the process (Ritchie & O'Connell 2001).

Culture shifts require proactive interventions. The Responsible Citizenship Program is designed to meet this need. The aim is to provide participants with skills to work through wrongdoing and incidents of harm. While programs aimed at creating culture shift need to

target all members of the school community, the Responsible Citizenship Program was developed for students in primary school as part of an early intervention strategy. Ideally, the program should complement a range of restorative practices in schools. Through engagement with the program, teachers, parents and other members of the school community can also develop their skills. It is hoped this approach will address some of the broader institutional barriers that currently limit the use of restorative justice in schools.

The Responsible Citizenship Program: An Introduction

In practice, restorative justice is a form of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution programs have been found to give students important skills in reducing harmful behaviour in schools (Johnson & Johnson 1995). The Responsible Citizenship Program aims to incorporate a range of related processes for maintaining healthy relationships, including community building, conflict resolution and shame management, under one conceptual umbrella. Each component is introduced successively, beginning with a community-building process that rests on principles of restorative justice.

Throughout the program students are given space to voice and express their views. Initial emphasis is placed on creating a safe place where concerns and stories of harm at school can be voiced. At the same time the program aims to be fun and engaging for students. As relationships within the community strengthen, students are given an opportunity to learn productive conflict resolution skills through a focus on the feelings associated with conflict and how to resolve those feelings. In this way the shame management aspect is integrated into the conflict resolution component. Another important

aspect of the program is the peer-to-peer learning focus, which aids in the development of a culture shift within the school.

Goleman, in his research on emotional intelligence (1995), argues that children need lessons in coping with a repertoire of emotions, particularly the emotions involved in conflict, as these are the ones that are often masked. Becoming aware of emotions, acknowledging them, speaking about and acting on them, are healthy skills to develop. Through building this awareness, escalations of conflict and associated violence can often be prevented.

Program Principles

The Responsible Citizenship Program is grounded in a number of principles of restorative justice, including community building and conflict resolution. In his conceptualisation of restorative justice, Braithwaite (1989) argues that restorative justice is a *participatory* process that addresses wrongdoing while offering *respect* to the parties involved, through *consideration* of the story each person tells of how they were affected by the harmful incident. Playing on the program's acronym (RCP), respect (R), consideration (C) and participation (P) become the core program agreements. They are developed through the learning opportunities that the program provides.

While these core principles remain relevant throughout the program, a second set of principles is used to develop students' strategies on how to resolve conflicts productively. These principles can be applied to a range of harmful behaviours in schools. In the context of school bullying, they are:

1. bullying and being bullied are ways of behaving that can be changed (Rigby 1996);
2. addressing wrongdoing, such as bullying, concerns actions and should not involve the denigration of the whole person (Moore & O'Connell 1994);

3. the harm done by bullying to self and others must be acknowledged (Retzinger & Scheff 1996);
4. reparation for the harm done is essential (Retzinger & Scheff 1996); and
5. both bullies and victims are valued members of the school community whose supportive ties with others should be strengthened through participation in communities of care (Bazemore & Umbreit 1994).

These five principles underpin the conflict resolution process developed for the Responsible Citizenship Program. They are introduced as the REACT keys, to emphasize that resolving conflict requires active participation. Building on each letter from the word REACT, the five principles are presented to the students as follows:

- Repair the harm done (Principle 4: Reparation);
- Expect the best from others (Principle 1: Change is possible);
- Acknowledge feelings/harm done (Principle 3: Acknowledgment);
- Care for others (Principle 5: Building communities of care); and
- Take responsibility for behaviour/feelings (Principle 2: Responsibility for act without denigration).

In essence, restorative programs are about nurturing positive feelings (interest and excitement) and providing avenues to discharge negative feelings (shame). Restorative practices should lead to further engagement with the community, as evidenced by enhanced or re-established community participation. In order for this to be sustained, for shame to be effectively managed, individuals need to develop skills for working through differences. Through these processes individuals can build and renew productive relationships, forging a resilient and responsible community.

Program Workshops

The curriculum for the program was developed for Year 5 students. The students spent one hour with the facilitators twice a week over five weeks (10 hours in total). The ideas and concepts were introduced through the use of poster-making and role-playing, working towards the development and production of a short video that told the story of a conflict within the school and how the students used the REACT keys to resolve the harm. Table 1 shows how the 10 workshops came together.

It is important to note that for the workshops to be effective, the facilitators must have knowledge and experience of principles and practices of restorative justice. Further, for the learning outcomes of the program to be sustained the ideals must be integrated into the wider school culture.

Program Evaluation

All Year 5 students in an ACT government primary school (aged 10–11 years; n=30) participated in the program. Two different sessions were held so each group was a manageable size (n=15). These sessions ran in two different terms. The program was evaluated using a number of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were collected using the Life at School Survey (Ahmed et al. 2001), which was administered at the beginning and the end of the school year (pre- and post-

intervention). Further quantitative measures were taken at the end of each session through questionnaires completed by students and facilitators. Qualitative data were also collected through post-program responses from the students, teacher, principal and facilitators.

Two particular measures within the survey are noteworthy here:

- students’ feelings of safety within the school community; and
- students’ use of adaptive and maladaptive shame management strategies.

Students’ feelings of safety within the school were measured on a four-point scale and increased significantly over the course of the year (from 2.9 to 3.8). This is an encouraging shift but, with only pre- and post-measures, it is hard to know what accounts for the change. The shame management data offer clearer insights.

Shame management was measured using Ahmed’s (2001) scale, which measures students’ use of adaptive and maladaptive shame management strategies. Students are presented with four hypothetical scenarios, in which they perpetrate an incident of harm. The strategies are then presented and students indicate what they would do, answering “yes” or “no”. The results showed a small overall increase in students’ reported use of adaptive shame management skills: a shift from 83 per cent to 87 per cent of students reporting using these strategies. The more interesting

Table 1: *Responsible Citizenship Program workshop curriculum*

	Activity
1. Introduction of the Responsible Citizenship Program	Posters
2. Developing RCP agreements: respect, consideration, participation	Role play
3. Creating responsible citizenship at our school	Posters
4. Working with our feelings—OOPS & OUCH	Role play
5. Introduce REACT keys	Posters
6. Video—school-based example of OOPS & OUCH & REACT keys	Video
7. Planning a RCP video	Video
8. Rehearsing a RCP video	Video
9. Making a RCP video	Video
10. RCP wrap-up and Responsible Citizenship Charter	Posters

finding was that the use of maladaptive shame management skills decreased significantly, in terms of both feelings of rejection by others and displacement of wrongdoing onto others. While initially 33 per cent of students reported they would feel rejected from others following wrongdoing, following the program only 20 per cent reported they would feel this way. Further, while 27 per cent of students reported using shame displacement strategies before the program, only 13 per cent of students reported using these strategies following the program. In other words, students' use of strategies became less characteristic of victims (who typically feel they would be rejected by others following wrongdoing) and less characteristic of bullies (who typically displace their shame and anger onto others). Overall, the results are encouraging, as students' shame-management skills became less maladaptive. While developing shame management skills was a central aim of the program, without a control group it is hard to make a strong claim. However, the other measures, both quantitative and qualitative, are encouraging and support the positive effects of the Responsible Citizenship Program.

Measures of respect, consideration and participation, the core principles of the program, were taken at the end of each session. Students were asked three questions, answering on a seven-point scale. How many people in the group:

- showed you respect during today's activities?
- considered your feelings during today's activities?
- gave you an opportunity to participate in today's activities?

The two facilitators also independently rated each student's behaviour in terms of respect, consideration and participation. A number of patterns emerged from these data. Although the students' ratings were generally higher than those

of the facilitators, the overall pattern is consistent. The average ratings for all three measures increased from the start to the finish of the program. The greatest change was for consideration (3.4 to 5.2 for students; 3.0 to 4.7 for facilitators) and participation (4.3 to 5.7 for students; 4.2 to 5.8 for facilitators), and least for respect (5.0 to 5.2 for students; 3.7 to 4.9 for facilitators), although the measures of respect were already quite high, particularly for students.

Interestingly, there was a systematic drop in measures of respect and consideration a few workshops into the program. The measures then increased again until the completion of the videos. This is not surprising, given that the program aims to challenge the way students interact in terms of upholding the respect/consideration/participation principles. In summary, the results are positive, indicating the students put into practice the program's emphasis on building respect, consideration and participation.

The post-program qualitative data mirror this positive result. All parties involved in the development of the program found it to be of benefit to the students. This included the teacher, the principal, the facilitators and the students themselves. The teacher wrote:

I began noticing the use of particular jargon associated with the program in everyday situations...The program was a great success.

The principal offered:

The practical approach allowed students to develop strategies to cope with real-life situations. The class climate created...was one of support and respect for other students...The most important aspect of the program was giving students appropriate strategies for coping with conflict.

One student summed up what it means to be a responsible citizen at school:

It means that if you do something wrong, or if others do something wrong, you know how to fix things.

Six months after completing the program, the students clearly remembered important aspects of the program. One student said:

The leaders...were all positive and helped us understand how other people felt. We learnt what to do if we did hurt someone or someone hurt you.

The responses received suggested the benefits of the program. In particular these data indicate that the program was able to create a shift in the way students interact with one another in terms of the core components of respect, consideration and participation. Further, students' reported shame management strategies became less maladaptive. While tentative, the results of this initial pilot program are encouraging.

The adaptability of this program needs to be stressed. The principles upon which the Responsible Citizenship Program is based are more important than the program per se. It can be customised to meet the needs and resources of different schools. As the teacher put it:

I could see this program operating very effectively in school and could be modified simply to start at an earlier age.

The program thus provides a base from which other programs can grow and adapt. This is important to the long-term research and development that now needs to be done. A more rigorous evaluation is needed across a range of programs and populations. It is hoped this initial step is sufficient to encourage others to embark on the development of their own program that fosters responsible citizenship in their school through engagement with principles grounded in restorative justice.

Implementing Restorative Justice in Schools

Restorative justice, through valuing relationships, challenges everyone involved. This is important. To sustain any shift in the way schools operate lies in each party questioning, in the most fundamental way, their own

beliefs and practices. The central, dominant theme to be addressed is the use of punishment and control in achieving behavioural compliance. These practices value domination. In contrast, restorative justice values relationships of non-domination. As Cameron and Thorsborne (2001, p. 183) have noted:

School behaviour management plans have focused largely on what should happen (penalties and tariffs) to offenders when (school) rules are broken, with only limited understanding of the impact on those in the school community of the offending behaviour. Restorative justice in the school setting views misconduct not as school-rule-breaking, and therefore a violation of the institution, but as a violation against people and relationships in the school and wider school community.

Emphasis on behavioural education rather than control goes a long way to achieving behavioural compliance. The aim should be to take a student, and their community of support, through a process by which they can understand the consequences of their behaviour for themselves and others, to develop relational thinking and to bring understanding to a collective level. Punishment instils a narrow, selfish way of thinking; the focus is on oneself rather than others. Shame can only be managed in healthy ways when individuals are part of healthy communities—communities which foster care and respect, consideration of different possibilities and ideas, and opportunities to participate in processes that allow people to work through their differences constructively. Schools, as society's primary developmental institution, have an important agenda to take up here. It is vital that they are resourced and supported to address this debilitating social problem because, in the end, bullying and victimisation is a problem that affects everyone.

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