

Pedagogy for the primary prevention of bullying and violence



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Over the past thirty years, in many Western countries, there has been a proliferation of school-based initiatives and programs to address bullying and violence. Despite this, the problem of violence is prevalent, pervasive, and poorly understood.

The primary prevention of bullying and violence, in schools as in wider society, is contingent upon better understanding of the causes of harmful attitudes and the means for attitudinal change. Primary prevention engages with concerns beyond discipline and environmental controls, individual psychological well-being, and self-management and interpersonal relationship skills, to critically consider the larger social context and the way behaviours are variously implicated in the maintenance of constructions of privilege and power.

As Dally and Lindstrom (2001:3) observe: 'In a culture where there is a focus on individual behaviours, our capacity to review the impact of social forces on groups is limited. Greater possibilities for analysis and action occur when individual behaviours are viewed as shaped by diverse social constructions such as gender, socio-economic status and school culture enacted in the relations between student, educator and school'. Without dismissing the value of behavioural and psychological approaches, a greater focus on cultural studies and critical pedagogy is warranted, within a larger, cohesive framework. This takes time and the active engagement of the whole school community.

The significance of the social

Bullying and violence must be understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon because behaviour is influenced, in large measure, by the drive to conform to social norms. As such, bullying and violent behaviour must also be understood as expressions of the larger problem of unequal power relations between diverse individuals and groups in all social contexts – for example, the school, home, sporting field, and work place. Prejudice and discrimination occur in relation to multiple and overlapping dimensions of difference, however the primary indicator for anti-social behaviour is gender. Generally, it has been found that boys bully

more than girls do (Natvig et al. 2001; Olweus 1997; Rigby, 2006, in the National Safe Schools Framework Resource Manual), and that students who do not conform to heterosexual norms are the most targeted (Meyer, 2008; ACER, 2013). A focus on bullying and violence in relation to gender and sexuality is warranted by evidence pointing to the considerable harassment, by boys, of girls, other boys and female teachers (Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000), alongside related issues of boys' domination of statistics for school suspensions and expulsions, suicide, road deaths, delinquent and criminal behaviour (Lingard, 1998). Bullying and violence as broadly gendered phenomena are further demonstrated through rising internet based sexual harassment and the consumption of pornography, increasing levels of domestic violence, political mis/under-representation of women and girls in areas of public life, and their economic marginalization through prevailing gendered divisions of labour.

Despite these understandings from the field of sociology, most popular anti-bullying programs and resources materials fail to adequately address the social and cultural dimensions of bullying. A more individualised psychological perspective has been favoured. For example, they might provide tools for building self esteem, resilience, or social 'skills', but do not support a critique of the construction of dominant masculinity and homophobic attitudes. Many schools are therefore implementing policies and programs that do little to address the significant underlying issues of gender and culture.

Research reveals that many teachers do not possess the requisite knowledge or skills. Holt and Keyes (2004) report that 'a greater proportion of studies have found that teachers report lower prevalence rates of bullying than students do' (p. 122). Craig, Henderson, and Murphy (2000) found that 'interactions involving physical aggression was labelled as bullying more often, viewed as more serious and considered more worthy of intervention than verbal aggression' (p. 14). Bauman and Del Rio (2006) discovered that 'pre-service teachers considered relational bullying to be less serious than other forms of bullying' (p. 225). In the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) 2001 School Climate Survey, 83% of GLBTI youth said that their teachers rarely or never intervene when hearing homophobic remarks (Meyer 2008).

Inaction on the part of educators sends the message that the institution of the school and society as a whole condones this activity and supports the discriminatory attitudes that cause bullying and violence in the first place.

Teachers as leaders for social change

Teachers are the key to integrated, embedded and sustainable school reform and wider social change. A focus on true primary prevention means cultural change through engagement with citizens from an early age in development of understandings about identity and relations of gender and power, as the foundation for respectful and equitable attitudes towards self and others, throughout the whole community. Findings from local and international evidence-based research points to the primary importance of the teacher and teaching, supported by strategic teacher professional development (McRae, 2001; Rowe, 2003; Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010) focussed on critical understandings and attitudes to power dynamics (Twemlow et al., 2006).

There are countless opportunities within the everyday curriculum, as well as in designated programs, for reflection on concepts which expose prejudice, and to examine and overturn the negative attitudes which underlie many bullying and violent behaviours. Equally there are many opportunities to reflect on and foster positive, inclusive and proactive attitudes and practices.

Critical pedagogy as the means for change

An anti-oppressive approach to education informed by critical pedagogy is one that is central to confronting and transforming these power dynamics in schools, and the best way to help schools embrace such an approach is to start with teacher education and leadership programs. We must better prepare educators to critically examine the power structures of the school and the community so that they may act as role models and provide their students with the language and the tools to confront the inequalities (re)produced within that system. (Meyer 2008, p. 42)

Teachers are keys to developing respect and compassion with regard to difference and disadvantage, and encouraging positive participation in family, community and civic life – including the active pursuit of justice for self and others. Critical pedagogy is concerned with student voice, representation, activism, democracy and justice, and employs approaches variously described in terms such as community of inquiry, inquiry learning, ‘Philosophy in schools’, critical inquiry, critical literacy and critical social literacy. Through critical pedagogy, teachers provide a ‘discursive framework that forms the conditions of possibility for certain selves (Probyn, 1993, p. 168).

Teachers can engage students from an early age as active, empowered learners able to critically read the social and political world about them - the ways individual and group

identities and behaviours are shaped by social and cultural factors (race, class, ability, gender, family background, sexuality, language, culture, etc.) and the dynamics of privilege, status and power - and to negotiate the politics of daily life. Teachers can cultivate students' understandings, attitudes and skills for resisting narrow ways of being that impact negatively on their own and others' lives, for example by examining exceptions to dominant forms of masculinity and femininity, and challenging the ways we construct our gender identities.

Pedagogy makes the difference in the multiplicity of ways that dominant groups and power relations, and normative narrow and restrictive beliefs and identities, can be continuously analysed, debated, and challenged through the everyday curriculum and life of the school.

References

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Resources for professional learning and teaching

Professional learning and implementation

A Guide to the Change Process - http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/12765_Chapter_1.pdf

Pedagogical Practices That Contribute to Social Justice Outcomes

<http://www.cfans.umn.edu/diversity/web%20text/Pedagogical%20practices.pdf>

Scanning Democracy

http://users.monash.edu.au/~dzyngier/Doing_Democracy_Introduction.pdf

Chapter 1 - Doing Democracy: Striving for Political Literacy and Social Justice

The Care of the Self: Poststructuralist questions about moral education and gender
http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/1688/Golden_Care%20of%20the%20Self.pdf?sequence=1

Teacher Action Research: Collaborative, Participatory, and Democratic Inquiry
http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/27030_2.pdf?utm_source=buffer&utm_campaign=Buffer&utm_content=buffer42ef1&utm_medium=facebook

Chapter 2 - Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies

A feminist reframing of bullying and harassment: transforming schools through critical pedagogy

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/files/attachments/31038/meyer-2008-mje-reframing-bullying-and-harassment.pdf>

Article

An End to Bullying with Dr. Elizabeth J. Meyer, PhD

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7A078F0E34993728>

3 audios (39 mins)

Teaching Boys: Issues of masculinity, violence and gender justice

Video presentation for teachers and community workers, by Dr. Amanda Keddie and Professor Martin Mills, University of Queensland.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_Td9F9mrGQ&feature=relmfu

Teaching Boys: Gender just classroom practice

Video presentation for teachers and community workers, by Dr. Amanda Keddie and Professor Martin Mills, University of Queensland.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAsrjPvC_rg&feature=relmfu

Just boys, just girls and just schooling: Curriculum, behaviours (including bullying) and gender

A professional development paper focusing on gender perspectives across the curriculum

<http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/ATT/%7BB116A2B7-F89E-4898-B172-7A10231963D7%7D/boysgirls.pdf>

Promoting Positive Gender Relationships

A report on research that indicates that effective prevention of gendered violence can occur through curriculum for all age groups

<http://www.education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/docs/genderreport.doc>

Pedagogies and critical reflection: key understandings for transformative gender justice

http://www.personal.psu.edu/scs22/blogs/gender_education_fall_2008/Keddie%202006.pdf

Article

Classroom Management, Bullying, and Teacher Practices

http://theprofessionaleducator.org/articles/combined%20spring_10.pdf

Article

Productive Pedagogies & Discipline: The Challenge of Aligning Teaching and Behaviour Management

http://eprints.usq.edu.au/7919/1/Fields_AARE2004_PV.pdf

Article

Promoting Critical Literacy across the Curriculum and Fostering Safer Learning Environments

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_PromotingCriticalLiteracy.pdf

Article

Critical Literacy and the Language of Difference and Power: A Difficult Concept for First Year Preservice Teachers

<http://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/1994/wilse94431.pdf>

Article

Teaching about language, power, and text: A review of classroom practices that support critical literacy

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/reading/events/summerworkshop2013/handouts/Lewis_Behrman%20critical%20literacy.pdf

Article

Confronting Bullying: Literacy as a Tool for Character Education

<http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/E00413/preface.pdf>

Book preface

Critical Literacy as an Anti-Bullying Tool

<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/7527/umi-indiana-1887.pdf?sequence=1>

Thesis

Critical Literacy and Visual Texts Windows on Culture

<http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/English/browett.htm>

Article

Core principles of media literacy education in the United States

<http://namle.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/NAMLE-CPMLE-w-questions2.pdf>

Article

Adding value through inquiry: Independent study

http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/early_middle/kla_sose_sbm_509.pdf

Example of an inquiry based unit

The Philosophy Club

<http://thephilosophyclub.wordpress.com/2014/01/12/kids-philosophy-films/>

A range of videos and other resources

Dr Sara Goering - Philosophy for Kids: Sparking a Love for Learning

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DLzXAjScXk&feature=share>

Video (10:42 mins)

Dr Phil Cam - Philosophy for Children

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk_B32HtnWg

Video (4 mins)

Philosophy: A School of Freedom

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001541/154173e.pdf>

UNESCO International report on the teaching of Philosophy around the world (280 pages)

Philosophy for children: Fostering communities of philosophical enquiry and reflection in primary and secondary schools
<http://core.kmi.open.ac.uk/display/336842/tab/similar-list>
Thesis

PLATO: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organisation
<http://plato-apa.org/>
Professional learning and teaching resources
Senior years

Tomas Wartenberg: Teaching children philosophy, Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts
http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page
Professional learning and teaching resources
Early and primary years

The northwest centre for philosophy for children, University of Washington
www.philosophyforchildren.org
Professional learning and teaching resources
Primary, middle and senior years

PLATO: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organisation
<http://plato-apa.org/>
Professional learning and teaching resources for senior years