

Bullying Prevention Programs: Too little too late

The Theory and Practice of ADR

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Introduction

Bullying; we have all been one, known one or been subjected to one. Prior to the early 1980's when the first significant anti bullying programs emerged,¹ bullying was considered to be part of a normal childhood and not something that needed attention from adults. If incidents were reported, victimized children were told by teachers and parents alike that it was part of growing up and that "kids will be kids". As the serious consequences of bullying emerged in the media and academic research, programs designed from an intervention perspective were developed on an international scale.² Yet after years of efforts to curtail bullying and its effects, programs designed to reduce bullying and victimization have met with varying success. Bullying programs, while focused primarily on prevention, are in fact interventional. The primary focus of these efforts has been the delivery of single component programs separate from the general curriculum. In addition, most programs are not introduced at the optimal period of a child's cognitive development. To prevent bullying and related behaviour, conflict resolution education, which includes social emotional learning skills, needs to be introduced to children at a much earlier age. While traditional theories of child development have dictated otherwise; children at a preschool and kindergarten level have the capacity to develop social and emotional learning skills including empathy. In

¹ Ross A. Thompson & Emily K. Newton, "Emotion in Early Conscience" in William .F. Arsenio & Elizabeth A. Lemerise, eds., *Emotions, Aggression, and Morality in Children. Bridging Development and Psychopathology* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010) at 26.

² *Ibid.*

addition, programs need to be integrated in to the whole school curriculum if a sustained learning experience is to be achieved. As the development of moral emotions necessarily involves adults, both parents and teachers need to be trained, as many lack the skills they are being asked to teach. If these skills are taught early, taught often, integrated in to the school curriculum at every opportunity with appropriate teacher training, the need for future intervention programs will likely decrease. This paper offers an overview of bullying, the foundation of conflict resolution education and social emotional learning on which bullying programs have been built, highlights the problem with many of the programs, and suggests recommendations for the future.

Overview of Bullying

Bullying is a form of abuse where one uses power and aggression to cause distress to another.³ There are two key elements of bullying that set it apart from other types of aggression. First, it is a form of aggressive behaviour imposed from a position of power. It can take the form of physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidation that are intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim.⁴ While the term bullying is usually associated with power in a physical sense, power for the child that bullies can also result from being part of a dominant social role, (e.g. teacher compared to a student), higher social status in a peer group (e.g. popular versus rejected student), strength in numbers (e.g. group of children bullying a solitary child) or through systemic power (e.g. racial or cultural groups, sexual minorities, economic disadvantage,

³ Jennifer Lamb, Debra J. Pepler & Wendy Craig, "Approach to Bullying and Victimization" (2010) 55 Can Fam Physician at 356.

⁴ *Ibid.*

disability).⁵ Power can also be achieved by knowing another's weaknesses (e.g. obesity, stuttering, learning problem, sexual orientation, family background) and using that knowledge to cause distress. The power imbalance that results from these relationships is not always apparent to or acted upon by adults leaving the victimized child few avenues for help.

In addition to power, bullying results not from a single incident but repetitious behaviour over time. With each incident, power becomes consolidated for the bully with a corresponding loss of power for the victim.⁶ Bullying can be direct (overt, face to face) or indirect (being rejected or ostracized from your peer group, having belongings taken away or teasing covert, spreading rumours) both of which cause damage to the victim in terms of their self esteem and their relationships with others.⁷ School yard dynamics often see those who witness a bullying incident side with the bullying child rather than the victimized child. This further reduces the power of the victimized child. In terms of location, bullying can happen both on and off the school yard, during school hours or during after school activities. Areas and times where there is a lack of adult supervision become prime opportunities for children who bully. In the past, misconceptions about the nature and consequences of bullying led adults to conclude that bullying was just part of the fabric of childhood and children were often encouraged to solve the problem on their own thereby increasing the stressors on an already stressful situation.

With the explosion of the Internet, cyber bullying has become a more common form of bullying. Children of all ages have access to the Internet at all times during the

⁵ Wendy Craig, Debra Pepler & Julie Blais, "Responding to Bullying: What Works?" (2007) 28 *School Psychology International*, at 466, online:< DOI: 0.1177/0143034307084136>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

day and night, often without adult supervision. Cyber bullying includes use by peers of email, cell phones, text messages, and Internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships.⁸ Cyber stalking, as an extension of the physical form of stalking, is where an individual utilizes electronic mediums such as email, cell phones, text messages, and Internet sites to pursue, harass or contact another in an unsolicited fashion. Cyber bullying presents a unique set of difficulties. There are no witnesses to this type of bullying as it will be conducted exclusively on line and often the identity of the bullying child is unknown to the child who is being bullied. The effects on both the bullying child and the victimized child will match those of other types of bullying behaviour.

Bullying at its core is a destructive relationship problem where children who bully learn to use power and aggression to control and distress others while victims become increasingly powerless to defend themselves.⁹ In Canada the rates of bullying and victimization are sufficiently high to cause concern for parents and educators. In a World Health Organization survey of 2005/2006, Canada ranked 26th and 27th of 35 countries on measures of bullying and victimization.¹⁰ Among 13 year olds, 17.8 percent of boys and 15.1 percent of girls reported frequent victimization.¹¹ The results are likely higher as children often do not report and adults are unaware of the incidents.

The physical and mental impact to both children who bully and those who are victimized is significant. Children who are chronically victimized evidence physical

⁸ Faye Mishna et al., "Interventions for children, youth, and parents to prevent and reduce cyber abuse" (2009) *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 3, online: DOI: 10.4073/csr.2009>.

⁹ Lamb and Pepler, *supra* note 3 at 357.

¹⁰ Craig et al, *supra* note 5 at 466.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

symptoms including headaches, stomach aches, sleeping disturbances, bedwetting, depression and anxiety. Victimized children are also at higher risk for disliking or avoiding school which may result in decreased academic success.¹² Children who bully are also at risk for similar symptoms, in addition to alcohol and substance abuse, and in extreme cases suicidal thoughts or suicide.¹³ Bullying has also been linked to high levels of depression and anxiety in adults. Often those children that have experienced bullying as children may repeat the behaviour as adults. Lessons of power and aggression learned in childhood can lead to sexual harassment, dating aggression and may later extend to workplace harassment and marital, child and elder abuse.¹⁴

The costs to society as a whole are evidenced in increased use of the health care system due to health problems; rising educational costs due to low school attainment and increased costs for police and the justice system due to increased criminality.¹⁵ There continues to be significant negative effects of bullying on the population at large despite prevention programs being in place for approximately thirty years. Prevention program designers and educators need to critically examine studies on the efficacies of past programs, in addition to expanding the parameters of existing programs.

¹² Lamb et al, *supra* note 3 at 357.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴Wendy M. Craig & Debra J. Pepler, "Understanding Bullying: From Research to Practice" (2010) 48 (2) *Canadian Psychology*, at 88 online:< DOI: 1297474601>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Conflict Resolution Education

It is essential to explore the role of conflict resolution education (CRE) and its definition as it is in this domain where most bullying prevention programs reside. The goal of CRE is to teach the necessary skills to ensure that, by the time children are adults, they have developed the attitudes, knowledge and skills which will enable them to cooperate with others in resolving conflicts in work, family, school and the community at large.¹⁶ In this way, children will develop as better people, and be socially and emotionally competent so that they can lead happier lives and be productive members of society. CRE teaches students about the nature of conflict, the dynamics of power and the role of culture in how we see and respond to conflict, essential skills for dealing with all types of conflict in the future.¹⁷ The goal of most CRE programs is to create a safe learning environment; to create a constructive learning environment; to enhance the student's social and emotional development; and to create a constructive conflict community i.e. a community where conflict can be discussed.

Historically, CRE has focused primarily on the application of mediation models for kindergarten to grade twelve populations. Peer mediation teaches student mediators techniques to resolved conflicts among their peers. While peer mediation programs have had some success, they should only be considered one piece of a larger CRE curriculum. With the broader acceptance of social emotional learning as a core competency for success, CRE now overlaps with a number of related fields like peace

¹⁶ Tricia S. Jones, "Conflict Resolution Education: The Field, the Findings, and the Future" (2004) 22:1-2, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, at 233.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

education, violence prevention, and antibias education, in addition to social and emotional learning.

CRE and social and emotional learning programs help students develop emotional, cognitive, and behavioural competencies. Conflict resolution educators endorse the suggested competencies articulated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (“CASEL”) many of which reflect the core goals of CRE. In the emotional domain, students should learn to identify emotions, control anger, manage frustration, and respect others’ feelings. In the cognitive domain, students should develop the ability to take the other’s role or perspective, problem-solve, set goals, and cooperate. In the behavioural domain, students should build interpersonal skills necessary for positive social interaction, including negotiating disputes, taking responsibility for actions, managing time, respecting others’ space, and appreciating social norms.¹⁸ As programs become integrated into all levels of the curriculum and across all subject areas, CRE and SEL will become more and more fused with each other and the core curriculum at large.

Social Emotional Learning Skills

In 1995 Daniel Goleman’s book “Emotional Intelligence” created the foundation for leadership development programs internationally. Goleman’s research concluded that emotional intelligence; knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating one self, recognizing emotion in others and handling relationships, sets effective leaders apart from non effective leaders more than IQ.¹⁹ The frontal lobes of the brain, which

¹⁸ *Ibid.* at 237.

¹⁹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York, U.S.A.: Bantam Books, 1995) at 44.

are the seat of emotional self-control, develop from infancy through sixteen to eighteen years of age.²⁰ This, concludes Goleman, makes early childhood a crucial window of opportunity for shaping lifelong emotional propensities; habits acquired in childhood become set in the basic synaptic wiring of neural architecture, and are harder to change later in life.²¹ Following Goleman's lead, a significant body of research has been done on the importance of emotional intelligence for success at all levels. Although the focus of much of this work has been applied to the adult population, the field of social emotional learning skills has expanded in to the main stream curriculum for kindergarten to grade twelve populations in recent years.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others, or the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge and skills to help navigate through life's challenges.²² The competencies encompassed by SEL overlap Goleman's EQ competencies in all but decision making. The interest in SEL began at a similar time to Goleman's work and it has continued as the foundation for research in the area of bullying prevention. The focus of most SEL programs is universal prevention of behaviour problems by promoting social and emotional competence-rather than direct intervention. There are five key competencies taught, practiced and reinforced through SEL programming. These competencies include self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship skills.²³ Many SEL

²⁰ *Ibid.* at 226.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Joseph E. Zins, & Maurice E. Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning" in G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke eds., *Children's Needs III*, (National Association of School Psychologists) at 1, online: <<http://www.casel.org>>.

²³ *Ibid.* at 3.

programs focus on prevention based on research showing that there are risk factors that cause children to make bad choices and protective factors that prevent bad choices. One of those protective factors is being socially and emotionally competent.²⁴ There are multiple levels where SEL skills can be integrated in to the current curriculum; at the treatment level where a problem already exists, at the intervention level for at risk students and at the prevention level for all kids.²⁵ Unless programs address the larger school climate issues, the goals of SEL are not likely to be achieved. As Goleman concluded, if children develop these competencies in early life, they will be more likely to use them as adults. However, if these skills are not introduced in early childhood, the likelihood that they will be integrated in to a child's emotional competence is doubtful.

SEL programs are currently implemented in a random fashion with few jurisdictions having an articulated and formal set of skills imbedded in to the curriculum. While the Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8²⁶ lists "Living Skills" as part of their core skills, they are contained in the Health and Physical Education curriculum rather than holding a position of their own as a core competency. Teachers are generally left to rely on their own experiences with social emotional learning with the result that skills are delivered inconsistently. Although categories such as personal skills, interpersonal skills and critical and creative thinking skills cover many SEL competencies, the curriculum does not identify these skills as social emotional learning skills. Given the prevalence of research and instruction in this area, these skills should be described in terminology that

²⁴ Rose Opengart, "Emotional Intelligence in the K-12 Curriculum and its Relationship to American Workplace Needs: A Literature Review" (2007) 6 Human Resource Development Review, at 449.

²⁵ Zins and Elias, *supra* note 22 at 3.

²⁶ Ontario Ministry of Education, online:<
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/healthcurr18/pdf>>.

models current research. At the other end of the spectrum are the Social and Emotional Learning Standards developed for the Illinois State School Board.²⁷ Clear guidelines outline the goals for teaching each skill, the expected learning standard and the appropriate age group at which these skills should be taught. By articulating these competencies in this manner, the school board has made it clear to educators, parents and teachers that these skills are an important part of the core curriculum.

Many of today's programs are fragmented and there are few comprehensive preschool to high school programs available for schools to consider. Rather than implement a variety of uncoordinated programs, schools and more importantly, school boards, need to view the framework of SEL as an opportunity to make bullying part of the main stream curriculum. Core SEL skills are the foundational competencies that students need in order to deal with bullying;

- Self awareness/management: Children need to recognize and manage their emotions in order to respond to conflict in a calm and assertive way. Children who bully have difficulties managing their anger and victims often react inappropriately which prolongs and escalates the episode;
- Social awareness: Children need to be tolerant and appreciate differences, and interact empathetically with peers. Children often lack empathy for victims of bullying, and view the cause of the bullying as being different from the social norm, or ideal;
- Relationship skills: Children need to learn to initiate and sustain friendships and other relationships. Victimized children tend to have fewer friends and

²⁷ Illinois State Board of Education , online:<http://www.isbe.net/ils/social_emotional_standards.htm>

more of whom are also victimized. They are therefore less likely to have other children come to their defence;

- Responsible decision making: Children who frequently bully tend to misinterpret social interactions as being more hostile than their peers do. They are also less confident about using non violent strategies to resolve conflict. Children who are both bullies and victims tend to be emotionally volatile and react aggressively before thinking through the consequences. Children who have been victimized lack social problem solving skills.²⁸

Successful programs have been found to increase children's attachment to the school and the classroom while teaching skills of goal setting, problem solving, achieving self-discipline and developing character and responsibility. An increase in academic success has been found to be an additional, non targeted success.²⁹

Establishing safe and caring, well managed classrooms results in greater attachment and less risky behaviour although the ability to make decisions and solves problems does not guarantee that young people will use these skills for good rather than harm.

Respect and responsibility for others needs to be taught. By teaching a range of social and emotional competencies the likelihood that these goals will be achieved increases.

As research suggests that individual, peer, school, family and community factors influence bullying behaviour, it makes it critical to ensure that prevention programs are

²⁸ Katherine Ragozzino & Mary Utne O'Brien, "Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention" (2009) Prepared for the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Social and Emotional Learning Research Group, at the University of Illinois at Chicago, at 8 , online:<<http://www.casel.org>>.

²⁹ "Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs", The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) In Cooperation with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) March 2003, at 3, online:<<http://www.casel.org>>.

integrated at the whole school level.³⁰ When schools imbed bullying prevention programs into their social emotional learning curriculum, bullying programs will become true prevention rather than intervention programs.

Empathy and the Development of Moral Emotions

The development of moral emotions is the understanding of the relationship between self and others through self-evaluation or the cognitive ability to take another's perspective.³¹ Moral emotions include such emotions as compassion, guilt, pride, shame, embarrassment and empathy. Although seemingly linked, the study of aggression and moral development in children has developed independently.³² When the two areas of research are interwoven, they provide a better understanding of why some children follow a path of increased aggression and others do not. It is this missing link that underlies one of the flawed assumptions in the design of bullying prevention programs. Designers need to understand both theories in order to best address not only the concepts that need to be taught, but the age/stage at which these concepts should be introduced.

The development of moral emotions has traditionally been an area thought not to be within the grasp of young children due to their egocentric frame of reference. Children were thought to be pre-moral and incapable of developing the required

³⁰ *Ibid.* at 2.

³¹ Thompson and Newton, *supra* note 1 at 18.

³² William F. Aresnio and Elizabeth A. Lemerise, "Introduction: An Integrative Approach to Emotions, Aggressions, and Morality in William F. Arsenio & Elizabeth.A. Lemerise, eds., *Emotions, Aggression, and Morality in Children. Bridging Development and Psychopathology* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010) at 4.

cognitive functions that would allow them to take another's perspective. Recent findings suggest that self-conscious emotions emerge early in a child's cognitive development and may provide an important, emotional foundation for conscience development.³³ Studies show that infants and toddlers are sensitive to the emotional and mental states of others. Their interactions with adults create the foundation for the development of moral emotions. At a very young age, infants and toddlers learn that emotions, as evidenced in the facial expressions of others, portray feelings and subsequent related actions. If a child observes her parent greet another in a warm and familiar way, she will associate the parent's facial expression with the overt behaviour that followed. If the parent withdrew and protected the child from the stranger, then the look on the parents face would be internalized by the child as one of fear. In this way, children learn to construct their understanding of right and wrong on the basis of their everyday experiences, particularly with adults. If the need for help is clear to young children and they know how or are taught how to help, they will exhibit the capacity to help.³⁴ They are assisted in this understanding by adults who may act as role models and interpreters of moral conduct in their interactions with children and each other. When adults talk to children about emotions and their feelings at various moments in their day, children are provided with cognitive learning opportunities. This represents a shift from the traditional focus of most preschools where children are often left to engage in free play for the balance of their day. This adult intervention becomes more important when ones considers that although young children may understand the validity of moral rules,

³³ Thompson and Newton, *supra* note 1 at 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.* at 19.

they do not necessarily understand the emotional consequences of following or breaking those rules.³⁵ Evidence of this is found in the “happy victimizer” phenomenon where although young children understand the validity of a moral rule that was broken, they expect the wrongdoer to be happy because they focus exclusively on the wrongdoer’s personal gain.³⁶ With the appropriate adult interventions, cognition about emotions and the importance of weighing one’s emotional consequences when deciding how to treat others emerges very early in development.³⁷ As the lack of this ability appears to be a key part of bullying behaviour, this should be a critical part of early childhood education programs.

Empathic concern for others is a cornerstone of both emotional intelligence and social emotional learning competencies. Notwithstanding this, teaching of empathic skills is fraught with problems that may contribute to the lack of effectiveness of many bullying prevention programs. Empathy as an emotion is both affective, a feeling of concern for others, and cognitive, an awareness of others experiences.³⁸

³⁵ Tina Malti & Brigitte Latzko, “Children’s Moral Emotions and Moral Cognition: Towards an Integrative Perspective” in Brigitte Latzko & Tina Malti, eds., *Children’s Moral emotions and moral cognition: Developmental and educational perspectives. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010) at 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Elliot Turiel & Melanie Killen, “Taking Emotions Seriously: The Role of Emotions in Moral Development in William F. Arsenio & Elizabeth A. Lemerise, eds., *Emotions, Aggression, and Morality in Children. Bridging Development and Psychopathology* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010) at 47.

³⁸ Bruce Maxwell & S. DesRoches, “Empathy and social-emotional learning: Pitfalls and touchstones for school-based programs,” in Brigitte Latzko & Tina Malti, eds., *Children’s Moral emotions and moral cognition: Developmental and educational perspectives. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010) at 35.

It is defined as “an affective response stemming from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition”.³⁹ Although Elias describes a universal need to be a generous and contributing member of the important groups to which one belongs, there is considerable debate about whether empathy, in the affective sense, is something that develops from teaching empathy skills in the cognitive sense.⁴⁰ Current research has also emphasized the need to include the inculcation of a variety of moral emotions and moral action in efforts to develop moral competence, not just empathy. Despite this, current interventions not only tend to focus on empathy alone, they focus almost entirely on cognitive empathy, or worse, do not distinguish between the types of empathy at all.⁴¹ Only a small number of prevention programs focus on developing systematically a variety of individual components of children’s morality. It is only when this broader and more integrated approach is implemented that children will develop into the responsible and caring individuals that most prevention programs are designed to create.

An additional problem arises in the context of teaching empathy skills with an overemphasis on perspective taking or social inferencing. Perspective taking is that of standing in another’s shoes or considering what another might be feeling in a certain situation.⁴² Critics argue that perspective taking does not necessarily lead to affective

³⁹ Nancy Eisenberg, Natalie D. Eggum & Alison Edwards, “Empathy-Related Responding and Moral Development in William F. Arsenio & Elizabeth A. Lemerise, eds., *Emotions, Aggression, and Morality in Children. Bridging Development and Psychopathology* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010) at 115.

⁴⁰ Maurice J. Elias, “The Connection Between Academic and Social-Emotional Learning” in Maurice J. Elias and Harriet Arnold, eds., *The Educator’s Guide to Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press) at 9.

⁴¹ Maxwell and DesRoches, *supra* note 38 at 37.

⁴² *Ibid.*

empathy as although you may understand the way another is feeling, you do not necessarily care or act on that understanding.⁴³ Knowing what the appropriate response is to a given situation does not always compel one to act that way. When program designers and educators fail to appreciate the two types of empathy are, in fact, developmentally and psychologically independent social skills, the stated goals of the program will often not be met.⁴⁴ A program aimed at teaching children to understand another's emotions does not necessarily result in the development of affective empathy as a personal trait or result in the motivation towards pro social behaviour (behaviour that is voluntary and intended to benefit another including helping, sharing and communications of caring). The blurring of these two states of empathy resulted initially from the work of Piaget and later Kohlberg where a child's cognitive development was related to the ability of the child to move from an egocentric or "me world" to the ability to take another's perspective.⁴⁵ While not disputing the process that underlies cognitive moral development is decentration, critics of Kohlberg contend there are no theoretical resources to explain why perspective taking or cognitive empathy should serve pro social rather than egoistic ends.⁴⁶ Although studies have shown that feelings of empathy (cognitive) increase the likelihood that the empathizer will respond by helping, cognitive empathy without affective empathy can actually be used to victimize another. If a child knows something about how another person feels about a particular trait, nickname or weakness, she may actually use that to hurt the other, the exact opposite reaction of affective empathy. Programs designed to teach empathy in

⁴³ *Ibid.* at 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* at 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* at 43.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the cognitive sense will not necessarily result in the development of affective empathy, despite that being the stated goal. While empathizing may involve perspective taking, perspective taking does not necessarily involve concern for others.

The development of affective empathy is now thought to be relatively precocious and require adult intervention.⁴⁷ Relative to cognitive moral development, the main achievements of empathic development occur in early childhood. When tertiary cognitive abilities begin to arrive in late childhood, they start to work in conjunction with an already established disposition to respond to others' distress with concern.⁴⁸ Empathic development also depends on adult intervention. Studies show that between the ages of four and seven is a crucial period for empathic development.⁴⁹ It is where at-risk children appear to drop away from their peers in terms of making age-expectant gains in personal concern. Moral emotion, defined as a biological aversion to human suffering, needs to be taught by adults and learned by children.⁵⁰ The ability to empathize allows children to be trained out of always prioritizing their interests in conflict with others. The role adult's play is crucial if this moral socialization is to develop. Adults must react appropriately to aggression by children by drawing attention to the nature of the harm and the fact that the child is responsible for that harm. In this way the child, makes the connection, necessary for guilt and moral internalization, between their own egoistic motives, their actions, and the behaviours harmful consequences for others.⁵¹ If emotional understanding skills are a program goal, then social inferencing lessons

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* at 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* at 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* at 44.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* at 45.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

alone are inadequate.⁵² There are substantial grounds for believing that empathy is a socialized disposition and that preschool/kindergarten age is a critical period for developing empathy. Leaving the development of affective empathy to the hazards of socialization leaves at risk the precise children who stand to benefit most from a school based anti violence program.⁵³ Preschool is a crucial time for kids who do not receive this in their home environment making the role of teachers critical.

Further work in this area was done by Batson and Ahmad in their work on using empathy to improve intergroup attitudes. The authors divided the psychological state of empathy into two broad categories: Cognitive/Perceptual states which include imagine-self; imagining how one would think and feel in another's situation or "shoes" and imagine other perspective; imagining how another person thinks or feels given his/her situation and Affective/ Emotional states which include emotion matching; feeling as another person feels and Empathic concern, feeling for another person who is in need.⁵⁴

In reviewing a number of programs aimed at improving intergroup relations, the authors found that each of the empathy states outlined above produced different results in the group dynamics. While the initial three empathy states could lead to empathic concern, empathic concern did not directly produce any of the other three. Different programs produced differing states of empathy indicating that no program operated on a one size fits all bases. The authors concluded that although empathy shows promise as a means to improve intergroup relations, it is necessary to clearly understand which state of empathy was being targeted. Each of the four states of empathy may have

⁵² *Ibid.* at 47.

⁵³ *Ibid.* at 48.

⁵⁴ C. Daniel Batson & Nadia Y. Ahmad, "Using Empathy to Improve Intergroup Attitudes and Relations" (2009) 3 *Social Issues and Policy Review*, at 144.

different effects on intergroup relations making the design of intervention and prevention programs at a group and individual level an important phase of the program. Together, these four states could have a profound effect on breaking barriers and promoting intergroup understanding, respect, trust, and even concern but, only when the program design ensured that empathic concern and imagine other perspectives were both targeted.⁵⁵

Bullying Prevention Programs

Although studies all vary widely on the efficacy of current prevention programs, researchers agree that a multi faceted approach is more likely to succeed than single component programmes.⁵⁶ While often intervention programs are aimed at children who bully or are bullied, it is essential to the institutionalization of SEL to have school wide programs. SEL then becomes the systemic development of a core set of social and emotional skills that help kids handle challenges more effectively and thrive in both learning and social environments.

In 2009 Farrington and Ttofi conducted a systematic review of 622 reports on bullying programs between the years of 1983 and 2009.⁵⁷ The review is the most comprehensive and current review available and considers programs on an international scale. Of these 622, 89 reports were included in their review which described 53 different program evaluations. Programs were evaluated against 20 elements which included: whole school anti bullying policy, classroom rules, school

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* at 173.

⁵⁶ Ragozinno and Utne O'Brien, *supra* note 28 at 2.

⁵⁷ David P. Farrington & Maria M. Ttofi, "School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization" (2010) *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 6, online: < DOI:10.4073/csr.2009?>.

conferences, curriculum materials, classroom management, cooperative group work, work with bullies and victims, work with peers, information for teachers and parents, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, non-punitive methods, school tribunals and bully courts, teacher training, parent training/meetings, virtual reality computer games and videos.⁵⁸ Over all, the programs reviewed showed a reduction in bullying by 20-23% and a reduction in victimization between 17-20-%.⁵⁹ Results showed that the most critical elements for a bullying program to be successful was parent training/meetings, disciplinary methods, duration (days) of the program and its intensity (hours).⁶⁰ Also of significance was increased playground supervision, school conferences and assemblies classroom rules against bullying, and classroom management techniques for dealing with bullying.⁶¹ The authors concluded that disciplinary methods were better for the younger children (grade 4) while the non-punitive methods were more appropriate for grade 6 and above. Finally, they recommend that programs should be targeted to children aged 11 years and older as “older children have superior cognitive abilities, decreasing impulsiveness and an increased likelihood of making rational decisions.”⁶² Of the programs reviewed, less than 10% were targeted towards children at a kindergarten level. The majority of the programs were geared towards the grade 4-8 level.⁶³ If the critics of the cognitive moral development theory are correct in their assertions that empathic concern at the affective level can be taught and acquired during early childhood, then the current target audience of the majority of bullying prevention programs is problematic.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* at 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* at 69.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* at 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* at 71.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.* at 108.

Teacher / Parent Training

With the changing nature of the family in today's society, the teacher's role in the successful development of social emotional learning skills is of critical importance. With the dramatic increase in families where two parents are working, and the increase in separated and divorced families, teachers have become the constant in many children's lives. As outlined above, adults play a pivotal role in the early development of moral emotions in infants and toddlers. Rather than allowing children to develop these critical moral emotions in a vacuum, parents and teachers need to react appropriately to early signs of childhood aggression, so that young children make the connection between their actions and the corresponding results. This is no small task for generations of parents who have had little or no training in social emotional intelligence. While it would be impossible to train all new and expectant parents in the foundations of social emotional learning, these skills should form a significant part of the training that educators at all levels receive as part of their certification. There is currently little or no focus in the area of SEL in teacher education programs in Canada or the US.⁶⁴ Most teachers in the school system today have had no training either during teacher's certification/preparation courses or at the pre/in-service level.⁶⁵ A 2009 survey of 264 teachers in two US states revealed that although half of the teachers surveyed were delivering some type of SEL in their classrooms, 40% of those teachers felt they did not

⁶⁴ Dianne M. Hoffman, "Reflecting on Social Emotional Learning: A Critical Perspective on Trends in the United States" (2009) 79 *Review of Educational Research*, at 534, online: <DOI: 10.3102/0034654308325184>.

⁶⁵ Joseph E. Zins et al., "Social and emotional learning and successful school performance" in G. Matthews, M. Zeidner, & R. D. Roberts eds., *The science of emotional intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) at 388.

have the appropriate level of knowledge or skills to teach the required skills.⁶⁶ If Goleman and others assertions as to the importance of these skills in the future success of students is correct, then it is critical to ensure that the trainers are trained. While programs continue to be designed and delivered in increasing numbers, there is little chance of sustained success if teachers are not given the skills to deliver the programs as designed.⁶⁷

The role of adults, and in particular teachers, is not only to model appropriate reactions to behaviour but also to ensure that a positive environment is created in the classroom and the school at large. Teachers play a pivotal role in creating an environment which minimizes opportunities for negative peer interactions.⁶⁸ Teachers and parents are responsible for maximizing the positive environment that allows them to model positive relationships, skills and attitudes.⁶⁹ Their relationships' with children need to be positive and respectful if these are the results they wish to engender in children. This is critical if Farrington and Ttofi are correct in their conclusions that increased supervision in the playground is a prominent factor in the success of bullying prevention programs.⁷⁰ If the physical presence of an adult reduces the opportunity for children to be victimized, schools can easily address this problem.

⁶⁶ Rohanna Buchanan et al., "Social and Emotional Learning in Classrooms: A Survey of Teachers' Knowledge, Perceptions, and Practices" (2009) 25 *Journal of Applied School Psychology* at 210, online: < DOI:10.1080/15377900802487078 >.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Craig and Pepler, *supra* note 14.

⁶⁹ Craig et al, *supra* note 5 at 465.

⁷⁰ Farrington and Ttofi, *supra* note 57 at 441.

Parents and teachers also need to be aware of the signs of bullying and victimization and be prepared to open dialogue between the school and home. Often signs of bullying or victimization may only be evident either at school or home but not both. A dialogue between these two is necessary to ensure it is not left to the child to report. Children bullying others often exhibit physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches), psychosomatic symptoms (difficulty sleeping, bed-wetting), depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, alcohol and substance use, poor school functioning (low grades, dropping out) and in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts or suicide.⁷¹ Children being victimized might exhibit physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches), psychosomatic symptoms (difficulty sleeping, bed-wetting), depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, absenteeism from school, refusal to attend school, a drop in school motivation and performance, and in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts or suicide.⁷² Children who bully may also show aggression at home towards their parents and siblings and may have additional cash or objects that are unexplained. Victimized children may have the corresponding loss of items and money, be hungry after school or show signs of threatening themselves or others.⁷³ While this presents a rather daunting task for educators, parents and other adults involved with children, it is only this level of awareness and intervention that will result in successful prevention programs.

⁷¹ Lamb et al., *supra* note 3 at 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

There can be no dispute as to the devastation that bullying reeks on individuals and society as a whole. While adults have often developed the tools to deal with conflict in their lives, children and adolescents often struggle with the appropriate response to aggression and conflict. The literature on bullying is extensive as are the studies evaluating the various programs. In addition, public awareness is at a level never seen before as reports of the tragic consequences of victimized children remain a media priority. Programs to prevent bullying have been in existence for approximately thirty years and a review of the countless resources devoted to this subject indicates there is no shortage of information available. Despite this, the development of a comprehensive approach to bullying in schools has yet to emerge. Documented barriers to success include programs not being conceptualized clearly or being a central focus of the school; program goals are not linked to issues for which teachers and other school personnel are held accountable; and staff and administrators have not been involved in the design and development of these programs. Although there is a critical need for educators to be trained, existing demands on their time results in an overburdened and overwhelmed teacher population. As current programs are implemented on a single component basis, it is difficult to engage the leadership and ensure support from school and district administrators.⁷⁴

Although there remains disagreement as to the appropriate age at which to introduce the development of moral emotions and social emotional learning skills, the trend in the research suggests that early intervention is key to the development of these skills. Despite evidence pointing to early intervention and integration in to the school

⁷⁴ CASEL, *supra* note 29 at 151.

system at all levels, the fact is there are remarkably few schools and or school boards that are taking a broad view of the issues. Individual schools are still left to choose their own intervention strategies from a myriad of programs with limited knowledge as to their efficacy and design goals.

The field of emotional intelligence and its relevance to the success of adults has become a national obsession. Bookshelves in the offices of today's leaders are lined with titles reflecting the importance being placed on this relatively new domain. The passion for the development of these skills is not reflected in our schools where the impact will be most felt. Had we as adults been exposed to these skills at a time when they could become part of our moral fabric, we would not now face the uphill battle of developing these skills at a later stage in life. The goal for school systems must be the teaching of social emotional learning skills and in particular, affective empathy prior to the development of aggression. In this way bullying behaviour will be targeted in its infancy with the hope that we can radically reduce its prevalence.

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