The Macarthur Model for Comprehensive Intervention in Bullying in Schools: A Methodology for a Customised Response

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Bullying in schools has become a major educational issue of concern to teachers, students and parents in the new millennium. As evidence mounts of the destructive, pervasive and at times lethal impact of the phenomena within the education milieu it has become apparent that an approach which comprises a pragmatic, comprehensive intervention, informed by new and innovative theoretical and psychological perspectives, is urgently required. This paper describes an attempt to address this requirement through the Macarthur Model for intervention in bullying in schools customised to address local issues and needs, based on data collected at the specific location.

The first component of the Model involves an initial investigation of the parameters of bullying in the setting using the School Safety Survey adapted and developed for use in this research. The instrument yields substantive baseline data related to student perceptions, experiences and attitudes in relation to bullying in the school.

The next five components of the model are initiated on the basis of the data collected in the educational setting and should be applied simultaneously and progressively to ensure efficacy.

The second component involves identifying and delivering staff development needs and training and the appropriate focus of community education programs; this component provides the opportunity to for the school community to examine their own data and begin to develop customised products and processes;

The third component facilitates the development of a specific school policy based on the levels, types and locations of the bullying reported in the setting;

The fourth component involves the school in determining the level, focus and types of organisational restructuring required to address the issues of student safety and supervision raised in survey responses for the particular setting;

The fifth component involves schools implementing generic, widely applied curricula for the general student population to provide education in regard to origins, indicators and appropriate responses to bullying at the school;

The sixth component involves assisting teachers to address the psychological needs of individuals involved in the bully/victim paradigm, including the acquisition, through training, of personal attributes to facilitate resistance and resiliency to bullying.

Analyses of the evidence gathered in a range of educational settings in which bullying was present provided the structure for the model and revealed several insights into the psychological bases of the phenomenon. The fundamental thesis presented here is that schools have the capacity to effectively intervene in bullying utilising the structured and customised Model described in this paper.
Introduction

Bullying has become a major focus of concern for a wide range of social organisations partly as a result of the costs incurred for failure to provide supportive, safe environments for members of the relevant community. Some social institutions, organisations and professions currently demonstrate a commitment to dealing with the bullying affecting their sector through the development of a range of approaches, specific programs and interventions. The range of policy, training, curricular and individual intervention mechanisms and initiatives developed in Australia and overseas require an enormous commitment of resources but often their effectiveness has not been evaluated. Given that bullying behaviours may have their origins in individual psychology and social pathology, it is appropriate for the wider community to take responsibility for intervention in the bullying behaviours of young people beyond the school gate, as indeed some social institutions have accepted.

Paramount to an understanding of the nature of victimisation in bullying is an understanding of the social forces which appear to reinforce, condone and encourage bullying while ignoring victims (Byrne, 1994). The potential for victimisation often results from the social isolation of the target individual in the bullying paradigm and this disconnectedness from a supportive community in turn enables the bully to continue (Monaghan-Blout, 1996). Since social isolation facilitates the abuse of young people (Garbarino, 1996; Tomison, 1996) establishing and maintaining supportive social networks can equip young people with the resources to seek and access the help they need to resist bullying.

Additionally, the continuation of the bullying behaviour in a climate which endorses it, inevitably leads to further costs. Stress, absenteeism, litigation and the incapacitation of victims through psychological damage, all deplete social capital as well as adding to the financial costs of any organisation. (De Maria, 1996; Mann, 1996; Lennane, 1996). During childhood and often into adulthood, individuals who have been severely victimised by bullies require additional social, medical and legal resources which could be avoided if early intervention was offered when the bullying was first identified. However, as with untreated health and ecological deficits, the postponement of intervention leads to gradually increasing service requirements for recovery or remediation.

Often, society seems to view bullies as successful leaders in a competitive environment where aggression is a justifiable means to secure a good future. Bullies are described by young people in glowing terms as popular, attractive, having lots of friends, wealth, power and ability (Healey, 2002).

It is the very characteristics which society so values, and which bullies are so skilled at demonstrating, which places bullies in a position to wield such destructive influence over their victims. A substantial commitment of time and resources is required to achieve the philosophical and pragmatic shifts necessary to secure change to the bullying behaviours evident across the social spectrum.

Previous Interventions

There has been a wealth of interventions developed internationally to address bullying in schools. For example, an approach described as P.E.A.C.E. (Policy, Education, Action, Coping, Evaluation; Slee, 1996 a and b), has been attempted, which incorporates several of the keys of the approach described in this paper, as components in an educational application to address bullying in Australian schools. The P.E.A.C.E pack provides schools with information on how to raise awareness, develop policy and work with children. Results have
been supportive with reports of reductions of at least 25% in bullying in schools utilising the intervention, as well as increased awareness and knowledge about bullying. Similarly, the Sheffield project addressed “whole school policy, curriculum work, work in playgrounds and work with individual pupils and small groups involved in bullying situations” (Smith, 1997, p. 68).

This intervention focussed strongly on policy development and implementation, with the other components offered as optional extras. This has been identified as one of the more effective interventions with a recent evaluation indicating 29% of participant schools had developed a separate whole school policy and 58% addressed bullying specifically in welfare and discipline policies (Smith and Madsen, 1997).

Sullivan reports on the New Zealand anti-bullying initiative ‘Kia Kaha’ produced by the NZ police force. Based on the Maori tradition meaning to ‘be strong’, the resource kit was provided to late primary and early secondary students, which is a prime target group for such interventions. In his analysis of the program, Sullivan (1998) points out a long held myth regarding bullies – that they will surrender in the face of opposition, which appears to be proposed in the program. On the contrary, bullies are keen to engage in aggressive interactions and would often welcome a further opportunity to dominate and harm the resistant victim. Although resiliency is a critical skill to learn in response to bullying (Healey, 2001) it does not involve stoically putting up with the victimisation nor being lured into a reciprocal fight. Sullivan supports this view and calls for revision of the program with an emphasis on shared responsibility.

Rigby (2003), in his definitive meta-evaluation of early bullying interventions found that, “The commitment of a school to a program and strong involvement by staff in its implementation appears to be an important and possibly crucial factor in reducing bullying” (p. 3). He reports on a range of international interventions each of which comprises a number of components, with mixed effectiveness. Indeed in some instances increases in bullying behaviour was reported as an outcome. The Toronto Study implemented by Pepler (1993) was devised to operate at four levels: the community, whole school, each classroom and individual students.

A peer conflict-mediation program was introduced as well as increased supervision by teachers and some curricular intervention. Nevertheless, the results were seen as disappointing with more children reporting bullying after the intervention. This could indicate a greater awareness and capacity to identify bullying which is an important step to reduction. However, conflict mediation which served as a basis for Pepler’s intervention has been criticised as an inappropriate methodology for use in bullying intervention since bullying is not reciprocal conflict and the participants are not equivalently culpable as is the case in fighting or conflict situations (Healey 1999). Sullivan (1998) also remarks on the Cool Schools (Cool Schools, 1994) project in New Zealand which utilises a conflict-resolution strategy for students in relation to bullying intervention. Although there can be no doubt about the effectiveness of teaching students peer mediation and conflict resolution skills for use in their daily interactions, these are not appropriate methodologies for addressing the abusive and dominant behaviours of bullies within the unequal power relationship that characterises the bullying paradigm. Just as conflict resolution would not be deemed an appropriate response in abusive spousal relationships, nor can it be seen as appropriate for dealing with the abuse of young people by their dominant peers. Nevertheless, there does not appear to be a structured,
systematic, widely applicable approach which offers the requisite foundation philosophies and strategies to ensure efficacy.

The Model presented here seems to satisfy these requirements. The components are equally applicable in a broad range of community organizations and non-education settings including workplaces and social organisations where proximity of personnel provides the milieu for bullying. The six components presented here are widely relevant and have emerged as essential to efficacy. When delivered in schools, the intervention is reliant upon their capacity and willingness to establish and maintain preventative and proactive strategies within the limitations of their resources, structures and responsibilities.

While most of the institutions and organisations examined have addressed some of the requisite components, few have addressed all in a systematic and comprehensive manner. It is apparent, nevertheless, that it is the combined impact of the components of the Macarthur Model that is the key indicator for successful intervention.

In particular, the definitive factor differentiating this Model is the research–based customised application. Few organisations have attempted to determine the parameters of bullying in their sector prior to the implementation of crisis, conflict resolution, punitive or other responsive interventions, nor to establish the efficacy of such responses when delivered in isolation. Generally speaking, then each of the components of the Macarthur Model of intervention described here may be evident individually in a range of social organisations responsible for managing bullying in the broader community, yet none has established the full Macarthur Model recommended.

Underpinning the model are several theoretical perspectives which locate the bullying paradigm within individual psychology but intervention within the realm of responsibility of both the individual and the community.

Individual resiliency for example, is indicated in the capacity of victims of bullying to emerge from the abusive experience with increased skills. Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990) differentiate resiliency on three separate dimensions:-positive outcomes despite experiencing high risk environments, competent functioning in the face of acute and chronic life stressors and recovery from trauma. Children who are able to ‘function within normal or acceptable bounds on measures of competence with respect to behavioural, social and/or cognitive functioning’ despite adverse experiences are also identified as resilient (Kinard, 1998; Healey, 2001b). Further, peer abuse can be viewed as child abuse (Ambert, 1995; Healey, 2000) and current child protection legislation may be utilised to address the ongoing harmful behaviours. This proposal for protective intervention is rarely discussed in the current literature.

Nevertheless there is an upsurge in litigation and applications for apprehended violence orders between victims and bullies (Coates 2001) and this seems to indicate the need alternative legal interventions. Peer Advocacy (Healey, 2001a) is another perspective to emerge in recent research by this author as sympathetic attitudes and supportive responses of peers witnessing bullying need to be established and mobilised.

**Key Components of the Macarthur Model for Intervention in Bullying in Schools**

The Macarthur Model for Intervention in Bullying in Schools was developed over a lengthy period of investigation and comprises six key components which can structure, guide and
facilitate a whole school response to this pervasive problem. The critical factor is the comprehensiveness of the approach which will determine long term positive outcomes.

This paper describes the application of the Model in educational organisations, where it has been developed and implemented with some success. Schools have a pivotal role in addressing issues of bullying through a comprehensive intervention which provides access to knowledge, skills and feedback to assist students and schools to recognise, resist and respond appropriately to bullying. Ideally, a systems approach should be established whereby each component is required of individual schools within a supportive macro-system of education. This level of commitment and service delivery is yet to be considered, however. The Macarthur Model of intervention in bullying in schools comprises the following components:

**Component 1 Determining the Nature and Parameters of Bullying**
This involves the application of the School Safety Survey a questionnaire designed to elicit demographic data such as age, gender and cultural background and responses from the student population with regard to issues in bullying. These include their experiences of nine identified bullying behaviours, (Smith et al 1999; Rigby & Slee, 1998) their preferred or recommended source of support, locations where they believe students feel unsafe, and the descriptions or names of bullied and bullying individuals.

This component is pre-requisite to all other components of the Model as the data provides the research basis for the subsequent intervention.

**Component 2 Training for School and Community Personnel**
An understanding of the origins, indicators and impact of bullying is essential to effective intervention (Olweus, 1993). It is therefore necessary for the school to commit to in-servicing to provide the background information and strategies required to ensure bullying is addressed. Often the data reveal students’ perceptions about teachers’ capacity and willingness to intervene in bullying and offer indications for a focus in training. During the training program, members of the school community are given access to the preliminary analysis of their own data.

**Component 3 Policy Development for the setting**
Policy development is a critical inclusion in the intervention and the participants are assisted to devise policy which is based on their own data and which reflects the following essential factors:

*Collaboration:* the policy must be written collaboratively by all members of the school community to whom it will apply. This is done in a structured manner as described further.

*Accessibility:* the policy must be made available to all members of the school community in language and format that makes it readily accessible.

*Applicability:* the policy must be written in such a way that it is clearly applicable to all members of the school community including teachers and parents who must be seen to model appropriate behaviours(Smith & Barajas 1988).

*Specificity:* the policy should leave no doubt whatsoever about a) the specific behaviours expected of all members of the school community with regards to their responsibilities for supporting, protecting, helping and advocating for victims of bullying; reporting, resisting,
and refusing to participate in bullying; b) their rights to safety, security, support and intervention as necessary.

**Component 4 Organisational Restructuring**
The school data reveal substantial information about the locations, times and perpetrators of bullying in the school. Issues related to supervision, movement about the school, unmonitored areas of the school environment where bullying is most likely to occur and the behaviour of individuals all need to be addressed if the intervention is to truly be comprehensive. These are often the most difficult decisions to make but those which also have the greatest impact with regards to efficacy in reducing bullying.

**Component 5 Generic Curricula**
Students require similar information to staff and other community members with regard to the origins, impact and indicators of bullying and violence in their social milieu. A specific curriculum designed to impart the information and skills necessary to identify and resist such behaviour need to be implemented for all students. One such curriculum has been produced and is available internationally -“Resolving Violence-an Anti-Violence Curriculum for Secondary Students” (Jenkin, 1996).

Alternatively a specific anti-bullying program needs to be developed to provide the instruction and information required to support peers as advocates.

The introduction of Peer Advocacy (Healey, 2002) as an intervention which teaches peers the specific skills needed to effectively support victims is also a suitable program for students.

**Component 6 Individual Intervention**
Individual interventions, which address the psychological and social, needs of the bully and the victim also form an essential component of the Model. Systematic attention needs to be paid to those students who do not demonstrate a natural propensity for social competence and to broadening the repertoire of protective behaviours young people have to draw on in difficult situations.

Victims of bullying are often seen as passive and ineffectual, however other explanations must be explored to interpret their responses to bullies. Often it is an unsupportive environment within which they are forced to function that provides the access and indifference which facilitates bullying; it may be a lack of resiliency (Healey, 2002; Rutter 1998) or the immense psychological impact of the abuse which determines their responses.

All of these matters need to be addressed in individual interventions with victims. With regard to bullies, their inability to be introspective or reflective about the impact of their behaviour, their lack of empathy, coupled with inappropriately high social status require intervention.

**Objectives of the Macarthur Model**
The Macarthur Model is not a ‘prevention’ intervention. This model is a customised anti-bullying or anti-violence intervention devised to achieve specific, achievable, measurable objectives derived from research-based evidence in the particular setting.

If the Model is implemented in all schools across a state it will nevertheless be customised as the products and interventions initiated within the school will be defined by the data collected.
in the school, not by data collected in a range of unrelated schools. This is critical to the intervention as will be discussed further within the sections related to each component.

As a result of participating in this model all participants will:

- demonstrate personal and interpersonal behaviours which indicate an acceptable level of respect for the safety of others in the particular setting, including:
  - appropriate verbal interactions
  - appropriate physical interactions
  - acceptance of responsibility for protective intervention
  - demonstrate a knowledge of the indicators and characteristics of bullying behaviours as differentiated from conflict, fighting and reciprocal disputes
- construct and distribute a specific anti-bullying and anti-violence policy statement based on data collected at the setting
- implement organisational structures which provide support and protection for all members of the specific community including:
  - adequate supervision to discourage bullying or violence
  - adjustments to programs, timetables and routines which facilitate protection and supervision,
  - adequate resourcing for training personnel and community members,
  - reporting and investigative procedures which lead to individual intervention
  - develop, adopt and implement specific curricular materials and activities to provide education, knowledge and skills in relation to bullying and violence
  - provide individual interventions for victims and perpetrators of bullying and violence to develop appropriate behavioural responses.

**Application of the Model**

The Macarthur Model has been developed over a number of years through in-servicing school staff and assisting with the implementation of the intervention in the particular setting. This has proven extremely effective as the data collected at the setting yield specific issues which require a customised approach. The Macarthur Model is applied in four stages:

**Negotiation Stage**: at which time the Model is explained to executive staff, a decision taken to continue the process and a commitment to follow the whole process is requested.

**Assessment Stage**: data are collected from the whole school population and analysed to reveal the specific problems and issues facing the setting. Data yields statistical and descriptive information regarding the environment, school climate and student characteristics including the country of birth of themselves and their parents, gender and year level as well their bullied status.

**Induction & Planning Stage**: the whole school staff are given in-servicing regarding bullying generally to raise their awareness of the issue. The data is used as the basis for ten structured workshops dealing with identified problems and issues within the school (environmental factors, physical and verbal bullying, administrative structures which facilitate or ignore bullying etc). During these workshops decisions are taken about the policies, processes and procedures to be implemented to address the bullying problem.
Structured discussions take place which have as their goal the production of policy statements, an information booklet or other resource for distribution to all in the school community and the selection of strategies to address the issues raised.

**Implementation Stage:** involves the introduction of the changes determined by staff and community discussion, monitoring and evaluation of the impact, outcomes and processes.

**Summary**

The Macarthur Model for Comprehensive Intervention in Bullying in Schools is described briefly in this document. The key components of the Model provide a methodology for customising the intervention for each specific setting according to the needs identified. The process for implementation is long-term and requires the commitment of school communities to ensure efficacy and enduring results. The Model specifies for the first time a thorough approach to the issue of bullying and clearly identifies measurable goals towards a solution. It offers a timely intervention for the contemporary problem of bullying in schools.

**References**


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