

ACTING AGAINST BULLYING

Executive Summary

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Acting against Bullying is a three-year action research program of Griffith University and Education Queensland, following the seven-year *Cooling Conflicts* action research project carried out in Queensland and New South Wales. The program reaches students from upper secondary to lower primary in selected schools. By the end of the three years of the program in a school the aim is for every member of the school community to understand the nature and consequences of bullying and to feel competent to deal with the varied manifestations of bullying in their school.

Acting Against Bullying aims to empower school students with strategies to prevent or address bullying through knowledge; to provide teachers with the professional development necessary to support the students; to investigate ways of utilising school policy and administrative structures to help support the process; and over the three years of the program to begin to change the cultures of schools by helping the teachers and students to recognise and reduce the power imbalances that provoke or provide an environment for bullying.

The program uses a unique blend of **tightly structured drama techniques and whole class peer teaching within the normal school curriculum**. Through the drama students explore the causes of bullying, identify types of bullying behaviour – physical, psychological and emotional - and the protagonists – the bully, the victim and the complicit bystander. They investigate the combination of power imbalance, clashes of interest and stereotyping that spark or fuel bullying. They devise and try out strategies for preventing, combating, de-escalating and resolving bullying. Through the peer teaching the learners share experiences of direct relevance to themselves with students only a little older, who would remember their own traumas; they then pass what they have learned to still younger children. As peer teachers they reinforce their own knowledge and develop confidence in their mastery of anti-bullying understanding and strategies; together, learners and teachers throughout the school establish networks of support and friendship that replace bullying-prone age barriers, hierarchical structures and the vertical power relationships of schooling. By the end of three years every student in a school will have experienced the program as both a learner and a peer teacher, often a number of times.

The teachers are crucial in this, and *Acting Against Bullying* sets out to give teachers the skills to use the structured drama techniques and underlying pedagogy, and to understand and manage the peer teaching and its dynamics, through an intensive classroom-based sequence of collaborative planning and teaching with the program's drama teacher and facilitator. Over the three years of the program every teacher in a school will have received professional development in facilitating the program in their school.

The program demands a considerable commitment from the school, including the appointment of an *Acting Against Bullying* co-ordinator at deputy Head level, in-service development and the willing participation of the staff and administration.

The program will be extensively documented and scrutinised throughout all its phases to attempt to identify its effects and evaluate its success. A major element of this will be the ongoing monitoring of the flexibility and robustness of the school's policies and administrative structures in supporting the program and the students.

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ACTING AGAINST BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The Acting Against Bullying Program is an approach to empowering secondary students to manage their conflicts and become leaders in bullying management in their schools and in their communities.

The program encourages a whole-school approach to bullying management, and is being implemented in partnership with Education Queensland funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant. The program follows the successful *Cooling Conflicts* action research program carried out in Queensland and New South Wales.

Acting Against Bullying uniquely combines two key approaches: **educational drama techniques** and **peer teaching** in a carefully structured sequence:

- It starts by teaching a senior drama class, the **Key Class**, about the roots and causes of bullying, and bullying management and mediation, all through drama techniques.
- This class then reinforces their own learning and starts the cycle of empowerment by teaching the concepts, again through drama, to younger classes in another curriculum area, the first group of **Relay Classes- Relay 1**.
- These classes then reinforce their own understanding and are empowered to use the techniques to teach a third group of classes of younger students, either in the school or in local primary schools, the second group of **Relay Classes – Relay 2**.
- These students then take the process further within their own school, teaching colleagues or sharing their work.
- In addition, the Key and/or Relay Classes may take the process a major step further, into the community, by identifying significant bullying issues of community concern, and devising an interactive presentation of **community theatre-in-education** to clarify the issues and stimulate healing discussions with the concerned community group.

The Program, when introduced to a school through inclusive professional development, is a highly motivating and exciting approach to whole-school bullying management. It strengthens communication among the different age and cultural groups in the school, the feeder primary schools and the community, and reinforces the School's collective identity.

IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM

Implementing the Acting Against Bullying Program will place some demands on the School's administration, the staff as a whole and the administrative flexibility of the school community. The Program has been trialed in schools with very different administrative structures and has been designed to fit naturally and with little disruption into:

- **the curriculum**
- **the school's management and logistical structure of the school**
- **the school's social learning agenda.**

There are correspondingly a number of essential elements for the program to be successful:

- **The School administration is committed to its support.**
- **There is whole-school support for the Program's aims**
- **There is a senior teacher/administrator willing to act as Acting Against Bullying Coordinator**
- **There is a trained or experienced drama teacher.**
- **There is a Senior Drama Class – The Key Class**
- **There are appropriate Year 8-10 Relay Classes (not Drama) available and with willing teachers.**
- **The Primary school(s) and teachers to be involved are interested and willing.**

OUTCOMES FOR THE WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

A range of classes from Years 3 – 11 learn about bullying management using drama techniques. The students then become the vanguard in maintaining a healthy bullying management agenda in the school.

Through the peer teaching, the students learn from each other, and in turn are empowered to teach their fellow students. The strongest learning lies here with the peer teachers, as they reinforce their own learning of the key concepts of bullying management in the process, in order to teach it to their peers.

The students become ambassadors in bullying management for the school's neighbourhood community including feeder primary schools and particular community groups targeted through the Theatre-in-Education component.

THE CONCEPTS ABOUT BULLYING

- Bullying is always a bad thing, but it is a form of human behaviour that exists in all societies and social contexts.
- Bullying can be defined as the **ongoing misuse of an imbalance of power causing disempowerment, fear, suffering or humiliation to other(s) less powerful.**
- Bullying and harassment can be physical (being hit, tripped, pinched), verbal (name-calling, teasing, putdowns), psychological (gestures, threats, being stalked), social (ostracisation or having rumours spread) or sexual (physical, verbal or nonverbal sexual conduct).
- People bullying always perceive their actions to be in their own **interest**, but are always infringing the **rights** of the bullied[s].
- Bullying is always **egotistic** and never **empathic**; it usually emphasises **difference** of the victim from the dominant power group, and stereotypes the victim
- There are three parties to bullying:
 - the **bully** (or bullies), who misuses power
 - the **bullied**(or bullies) who suffer the misuse of power
 - the complicit **bystander** (or bystanders), who permits or approves the bullying (NB the bystander may be one or more humans, or may be an institution or agency that encourages or tolerates bullying, or allows it to continue)
- All humans have the capacity to be **bully**, **bullied**, or **bystander** depending on the context. Some contexts and personal characteristics
- Many bullies and bystanders are unaware of their roles, or of the distress to the bullied[s].
- Situations of bullying, because they are ongoing, **escalate** over time, and can be seen to have three identifiable stages:
 - **latent** (where the imbalance of power exists, but the parties are not aware of misuse)
 - **emerging** (where some but not all of the protagonists recognise bullying is taking place)
 - **manifest** (where suffering is caused to the bullied[s] with the knowledge of the person[s] bullying and the bystander[s])
- Bully[-ies], bullied[s] and bystander[s] all bear some **responsibility** and have some **power to de-escalate or end** the bullying.
- Strategies for all three parties to address bullying include:
 - **confronting and acknowledging** the bullying
 - **avoiding** the bullying situation
 - **mediating** or appealing to others to assist in ending the bullying.

- Some bullying situations can be addressed by the parties involved, if there is willingness among all three parties to address the questions of interest, rights and power; others, where there is no willingness, need third-party intervention.

THE DRAMA TECHNIQUES

The central drama technique used is a tightly structured sequence of work called **enhanced forum theatre**. This is a mixture of performance and improvised drama, based on the celebrated ‘Forum Theatre’ developed by Augusto Boal in his Theatre of the Oppressed. Changes have been made, and additional techniques of process drama and role-play have been incorporated, to enhance its effectiveness in investigating, understanding and managing bullying. **Enhanced forum theatre** forms the basis of the peer-teaching through drama. Other drama techniques and interventions will also be used from time to time, particularly with the Key Class, including structured role-play and process drama, playbuilding and other improvised and participatory drama forms. Training in these will be given as appropriate to the teachers in the in-service program, and described in detail in the handbook.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The teachers are in-serviced within their own schools, in their familiar environment, by a teacher researcher who is skilled in the necessary techniques (in this case drama and peer teaching), and also has recent experience in the classroom.

In stage 1 the researcher designs a series of lessons using the teacher’s curriculum content, and teaches the teacher’s class, modelling the techniques;

In stage 2 the researcher with the teacher’s help designs another lesson or lessons, using the teacher’s curriculum, and using the teacher in an auxiliary teaching role;

In stage 3 the researcher and the teacher together plan a third series, this time with the class teacher leading the lesson(s) and the consultant in an auxiliary, supporting role;

In stage 4 the teacher alone plans and teaches a series, with the researcher available (by phone or e-mail) to offer advice before and between the lessons, and reflect and critique with the teacher after the event.

In stage 5 the teacher becomes the master teacher for another teacher or group of teachers, either within the school or the neighbourhood. The teachers already trained therefore become a supportive network, either face-to-face or on-line through the web site.

IDENTIFYING THE CLASSES

The Key Class(es)

It is recommended that the Key Class or classes be Drama students with some experience, preferably Year 10 or Year 11. Key class students should have the drama skills to manage and model the initial peer teaching, and the maturity and confidence to grasp the key concepts and lead the Program.

The Relay 1. Classes

The Relay Classes should be younger students – Years 7, 8 or 9. The number of these will be dictated by the number of Key Class students, who will be peer teaching the Relay Classes in groups of between four and eight. Therefore if the Key Drama Class has 24 students, there could be between three and six Relay 1 classes.

The Relay Classes can be drawn from a number of subject areas. They should not be drama classes or else the Program is seen to be the province only of drama, not the whole school.

The Relay 2. Classes

Carrying through the third phase of the Program with new, younger peer students is very important. In the first place, the peer teaching is, for the Relay Classes, by far the most significant, empowering and exciting part of the Program. Secondly, by peer teaching, the Relay Classes reinforce their own understanding just as the Key Class(es) have. Thirdly, it provides the opportunity for the major concepts of bullying handling to be disseminated further and wider beyond it.

The primary schools are an integral part of Acting Against Bullying, and need to be contacted early in Term One, even though they will not actually be involved until Phase 3. The purpose and structure of the Program needs to be explained to the Primary School's administration and they should be provided with a copy of the Handbook. It should be decided which primary students will be involved - whether the involvement will be as part of the induction, or whether the Relay Classes 1. will make special visits to the school, and whether there will be a further TIE involvement. Then the relevant teachers need to participate in the in-service

Space

This Program does not make high demands on space. For the Key Class work, whatever space is normally used for drama will be quite adequate. For the Relay 1. Classes, it is usually preferable for the peer teaching to take place in their normal classrooms if possible - with the drama strategies tailored to fit - provided that some open space can be cleared within the classrooms. The Relay Class students are 'at home' and likely to take the Program work more in their stride if they are in a familiar space. For teaching the Relay 2. Classes, and any further Relay classes, the same may apply. If however, the occasion is a 'special occasion' such as a primary schools induction day, it would be helpful if the Relay Classes can be given a larger than normal space to work in.

Peer Teaching Ratios

The ratio of peer teachers to peer students is very important. Exactly how the peer teaching is organised will vary in each school, but is likely to involve both whole-class teaching and working with sub-groups of the client-classes. The peer teachers will need to work in groups both devising the work and teaching sub-groups. This is for a number of reasons:

- Working with colleagues gives reassurance and moral support when facing the clients, especially for the first time.
 - During the peer teaching, the client-classes will themselves need to be broken into smaller working groups and there needs to be sufficient peer teachers to manage and supervise one each of these.
 - Absences, either in planning or during the peer teaching sessions, can be covered.
 - The tasks of peer teaching can be shared and if a student falters at any time, there is somebody familiar with the plan who can pick up the thread and continue.
 - The pooling of ideas in planning is very important.
 - There is a 'critical mass' necessary for effective and energised work to be carried out, particularly in the planning phase.
- * the sub-groups will need to operate as actors in their Forum Theatre.

Appropriate peer teaching group sizes per client group vary between *three* and *seven*. Fewer than three students will not provide the conditions above. More than six or seven students will make collaborative planning very difficult.

Ratios should proceed on this numerical rule-of-thumb:

- **Key Class**

The number of students in the Key Class will determine the number of initial Relay Classes that can be used:

Under 6 students: The Program is probably not possible.

6-12 students: One Relay Class.

13-15 students: One or two Relay Classes.

16 or more students: Two or more Relay Classes

- **Relay Classes (initial)**

Depending on how the subsequent Relay peer teaching is organised, the numbers may vary here. It is important to use the above ratios as a rule of thumb, and add to that the question of logistics of travel to and from the primary school, space for Enhanced Forum Theatre, preparation and breakout, etc.

- **Relay Classes (subsequent)**

The same principles apply to any Phase 4 peer teaching that operates in the Primary school workshop.

THE STUDENTS

The Program builds on young people's own natural desire to gain control and mastery over the bullying in their lives. They will get a lot of new understanding and life skills, without going outside their normal curriculum. The major advantages are in self-esteem and social development. The second and subsequent Relay Classes appreciate, as a real privilege, the peer teaching. The Key and Relay 1. Classes gain pride, confidence and satisfaction from the peer teaching. All enjoy the drama work and can recognise the value of developing their bullying handling skills and understanding.

Focusing on the concepts being learned can actually help these real-life bullying, but this is not enough. Establishing an overall atmosphere of trust and goodwill is a necessary pre-requisite for any drama work in schools. In drama education terminology this is known as 'establishing the contract'. If students do not trust each other enough to collaborate, establishing any fictional situation is impossible, especially if personal matters are at stake. Within the Key Class, and to a lesser extent the Relay 1. Classes, it is essential to establish this contract at the beginning of the process, and re-invoke it whenever necessary.

THE TEACHERS

The staff are absolutely fundamental to the project - and not just those directly participating in the Program. All the staff should be encouraged to feel ownership of the program from the beginning and be able to involve themselves: by observation and reporting, by advice, and by facilitating the possible logistical difficulties of timetabling etc. Perhaps the single most effective strategy here is to involve other teachers and welfare personnel, not just the Key and Relay Class teachers, and encourage some of them to attend the preliminary in-services.

Once the teachers involved in the first year of the program have developed proficiency in the techniques, they will in-service the rest of the staff. In this way the whole school becomes progressively involved in the program.

THE WHOLE-SCHOOL ACTING AGAINST BULLYING PROGRAM

This Program is explicitly aimed at having an effect on the whole school. It will already be evident that the dissemination of the concepts and ethos of the Program throughout the school, directly or indirectly, is of paramount importance. The Program lends itself to a high profile, to creating a 'buzz' round the school, at student and staff level - and in the local community. Some of the students will feel important and empowered and behaviour changes may be evident. This should be encouraged and the Key and Relay Class students given publicity for their participation.

ESTABLISHING A MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The School Management Committee

In order to ensure the effective working of Acting Against Bullying throughout the School and deal with problems that may arise, it is important to establish a management committee within the school. This should normally consist of:

The Principal (who may not be involved in the day-to-day management)

The Acting Against Bullying Co-ordinator

The Key Class Teacher

One initial Relay 1. Class Teacher

One further Relay Class 2. Teacher from each contributing primary school.

This Committee should meet at the outset of the Program to develop the planning process, select the appropriate groups etc. The Committee should then meet as necessary during the Program.