

TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS
OF CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS THAT
MAINTAIN BULLYING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

Although extensive research has been conducted on bullying, few studies have explored factors that elicit, impact, and maintain the dynamics of bullying from the perspectives of teachers and principals. The purpose of this study was to understand the complex nature of bullying through exploring the ecological risk factors that allow this alarming phenomenon to flourish. The influence of factors at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem on the dynamic interaction between the bully and the victim is explained. Another goal of this research was to capture the complexity and multidimensionality of the teacher's role in bullying prevention and intervention. The study offers the first comprehensive analysis of the ecological and contextual variables that interact to provide fertile grounds for bullying. Detailed information about principals' and teachers' perceptions of bullying experiences was gathered through 8 in-depth focus groups for teachers and 10 interviews with principals. Qualitative analyses of the data led to the emergence of overarching themes and related subthemes. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) was used to provide a conceptual and comprehensive framework that addressed the multifaceted variables. The finding indicated that a complex interrelation of variables was found to be central to victimization. The incidence of bullying was found to be directly influenced by individual traits as well as all the other ecological systems. Among the most salient findings was the influence of the peer ecology on bullying as a group phenomenon. The etiology of bullying as a manifestation of much deeper problems at the bully level was among the new findings. The impact of video games and television reality shows on bullying behaviour was also identified. The findings emphasized the significance of the teacher

personality, positive teacher-student relationship, empathy, and training in classroom management for efficacy in addressing bullying prevention and intervention. Finally, the study offers recommendations for teacher training institutions.

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DEDICATION

To my father, Dr. Awad Ghaly, who continued to inspire me long after his passing. His faith in me served as a guiding light that continued to challenge me to make a difference. He was indeed and always will be the impetus behind my pursuit of lifelong learning.

and

This study is also dedicated to all the children and youth who contributed to my learning, to those who suffered the pain and injustice of bullying as well as those whose unhappy childhood has indirectly contributed to their aggressive behaviour.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
List of Appendices	xiii
PART I 1	
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
My Journey	1
Research Focus.....	7
Overview of the Study	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
Prevalence	10
Types of Bullying.....	11
Negative Effects of Bullying.....	12
Bronfenbrenner’s Model and Bullying	15
Bullying: The Social-Ecological Model.....	16
Targets.....	18
Bullies Within the Peer Ecology.....	19
Victims Within the Peer Ecology	21
Responses to Bullying.....	22
Victims.....	22
Bystanders.....	24
Teachers	24
Teachers’ attitudes towards bullying.	24
Teachers’ responses to relational bullying.....	27
Teachers’ characteristics.....	28
Teachers’ self-efficacy.....	28
Classroom management.....	29
Student-teacher relationship.....	30
Teacher training.....	31
Schools.....	31
Anti-bullying interventions.....	31
School climate.....	33
Purpose of Study	33
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	35
Rationale for a Qualitative Study.....	35
Method	37
Participants.....	38
Phase One: Focus Groups With Teachers.....	38
Phase Two: Interviews With Principals.....	40
Qualitative Data Analysis	41
Verification	42

PART II 44

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	44
Social Contexts	44
Perceptions of Bullying.....	45
Towards a Definition of Bullying: Responses of Principals and Teachers	45
Methods of bullying and its harmful effects.	45
Power imbalance between bully and victim.	46
Distinguishing bullying from peer conflict and rough play.....	47
A lack of precise definition.....	48
Settings.....	50
“It’s everywhere.”	50
Schoolyard.	50
Grades	52
Impact	52
Safety and security.....	52
Academic progress.....	52
Psychological Effects of Bullying	53
Long-lasting effects.	53
Exclusion and withdrawal.....	54
Types of Bullying	55
Gender differences.....	56
Socioemotional bullying.	59
Cyber bullying.	60
Bullying and Group Dynamics	62
Profile of Bullied Students.....	66
Personal Characteristics: Difference.....	66
Appearance	67
Weakness	68
Communication Skill	68
Self-Esteem	69
Vulnerability	70
Disability.....	71
Race and Ethnicity	73
Sexual Orientation	74
Socioeconomic Status	79
Profile of Students Who Bully	79
Personal Problems.....	79
Extroversion.....	82
Family Cycle.....	82
Anger	82
Disappointment.....	84
Domestic Abuse.....	85
Learned Behaviour.....	86
An Unstable Family	87
Need for Attention	88
Low Academic Achievement.....	90

Self-Esteem	91
Socioeconomic Status	93
Impervious Bullies	94
Bystanders	95
Analyses of Bullying Interactions	97
Gender Differences	97
Reporting	103
Bullying Past Versus Present	113
Girl bullies.	120
CHAPTER 5: CONDITIONS	125
Situational Obstacles That Affect Intervention	125
Curriculum Pressures	126
Time Constraints	130
The Evolving Role of the Teacher	134
Diffused Responsibility: “Passing the Buck”	137
Limited Resources	139
Parents’ Resistance	140
Additional Obstacles to Intervention	142
Obstacles identified by principals.	142
Solutions and Consequences	143
Policies	151
The <i>Safe Schools Act</i>	151
Suspensions	157
Generally ineffective as a means to end bullying.	157
Inconsistently applied.	158
Alternative measures.	159
Complicating factors.	161
Benefits of suspension.	163
Parents and suspension.	164
Students who bully and suspension.	168
Behavioural programs for chronic bullies.	172
The School Culture	174
Role of staff and colleagues.	174
Bullying intervention programs.	176
High-needs schools.	178
Social Trends in Modern Society	179
Public Conduct and Civility	179
Language	180
Moral Development	181
Media Messages	183

CHAPTER 6: SOLUTIONS—A MULTIFACETED, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO BULLYING	190
Community Partners	190
Solutions That Address Students’ Needs	191
Raising Awareness.....	191
Programs	193
Prosocial Skills.....	195
Solutions for Students Who Bullied.....	197
Solutions for Students Who Are Bullied.....	200
Strategies for Parents.....	200
Support Services	201
School Culture.....	204
Principals’ Leadership	204
Teachers’ Involvement.....	205
Team Approach.....	206
Parents as Partners	207
Positive Staff Relations.....	208
Improving the Teacher-School Fit	209
Teacher Training in Bullying.....	209
Teacher-Student Relationship.....	211
Rapport	211
Classroom management.....	212
Empathy.....	217
Teacher education programs.....	219
Teachers as Catalysts of Change.....	224
Can We Eradicate Bullying?.....	225
 PART III 228	
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION.....	228
Emergent Themes.....	228
Ecological Variables at the Individual/Child Level	229
Victims.....	229
Bullies	232
The Microsystem.....	235
Ecological Variables Inherent in Relationships	235
Peers	235
Parents.....	236
Teachers	237
Ecological Variables in the School Community	241
School Climate.....	241
Exosystem	243
Ministry and Board Policies.....	243
Macrosystem	246
Societal Variables Serving to Support Bullying	246
A Multimodal Model of Intervention Based on Grounded Theory Analysis	248
Conclusion	249
Contributions of the Study	253

Theoretical Implications.....	254
Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs.....	255
Directions for Future Research	256
Personal Reflection	258
My Journey	258
My Message: Have Adults Abdicated Their Responsibility?.....	258
REFERENCES	263
APPENDICES	281

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Grounded Theory: A Multifaceted Approach to Addressing Bullying **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Ecological model of human interaction and development.....	16
Figure 2. Overarching themes and categories generated by the data.	44
Figure 3. The overarching theme of Social Contexts.....	45
Figure 4. Conditions contributing to teachers' sense of self-efficacy in dealing with bullying.	125
Figure 5. Obstacles to intervention, as identified by teachers.....	224

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A. Research Summary	282
Appendix B. Information and Consent Form	283
Appendix C. Focus Groups.....	284
Appendix D. Focus Group Demographic Information	287
Appendix E. Questions for Focus Groups	288
Appendix F. Questions for Principals	289
Appendix G. Principals Interviewed.....	290
Appendix H. Interview Information and Consent Form	291
Appendix I. Principal’s Demographic Information.....	292
Appendix J. Research Summary Request Form	293
Appendix K. Ecological Variables That Contribute to the Incidence of Bullying	294
Appendix L. Words Used in Participants’ Definitions of Bullying	296

PART I

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My Journey

Teaching and counselling children and adolescents at all levels of inner-city schools have afforded me the opportunity to experience the immediate and sometimes extensive needs of students who are bullied, as well as those who bully. These experiences sparked my interest in researching bullying in schools.

I had a happy childhood; bullying was not part of my formative years or my school experience. However, I do recall an embarrassing incident that helped shape my values. I grew up in a society observing the distinct contrast between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” I was one of the “haves.” At the age of 10, in a moment of frustration, I insulted a young man who worked for my family. Suddenly, my father, who had overheard my comment, appeared in the room. He explained that the fact the man worked for us did not mean that he was less of a human being; it just meant that he needed the job. He inquired whether I would like the young man to insult me in the same way. He then called the young man and asked me to apologize. I never forgot this humbling incident or the lesson learned from it. As I grew up, the experience served to generate in me the beginning of an unrelenting passion to protest against social inequities.

I started my teaching career in Toronto inner-city schools at a young age. Bullying was rampant. Having grown up in a very secure, sheltered private school, I had difficulty believing how cruel children could be to one another. I was not ready to give in to the overwhelming dynamics of group bullying, nor was I willing to give up the struggle to attain harmony in my classroom. It did not take me long to realize that defending the victims further alienated the bullies and strengthened their resolve. According to my preservice teacher training, I was supposed to achieve rapport with my class and, hence, I was determined to have positive

relationships with my students, even with those who appeared intimidating. I had to be inclusive in my efforts to gain harmony and cooperation. I had to appeal to all of the students: bullies, victims, and bystanders alike. In the process, I secured a firmer grasp and deeper appreciation of the complex problems of educating these students. Many suffered from disadvantaged home environments, sleepless nights, neglect, abuse, and poverty. Some had to endure parental addiction, witness the use of weapons and violence, bear the disorganization of broken families, and cope with the lack of structure and values. Bullying began to look to me like the symptom of much deeper problems, a façade that hid other problems, difficulties, and unhappiness. The more I understood the students, the more I realized the magnitude of the goals I had set out to achieve.

I realized that my students needed a role model, mentor, friend, and nurturer, not just a teacher. To motivate the students and accommodate their needs, I had to be a creative and charismatic leader. I incorporated social skills and cooperative problem solving into the curriculum. I divided the class into groups of six students each. All the groups were heterogeneous and comprised both genders. Each was considered a family, with a leader who was decided upon and changed periodically by the group members. My system drew from the parallel concept of the family: group members had common goals, shared problem solving, decided on important matters together, divided and shared chores, sought to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, and protected one another. Thus, I established a unique class culture, a family. Each family was given a name and could gain points for positive achievements, which translated into privileges at the end of the week. On a daily basis I ensured that acts of kindness, group cooperation, empathy, and collective responsibility were immediately rewarded with points.

Most importantly, all the groups belonged to one big family: the class family, with me as its leader. I devoted time to class and family meetings and vowed to be their advocate and

protector so long as they continued to be devoted to our class rules, resolving all problems within our own democratic system. I insisted on high academic standards, which further contributed to the students' sense of achievement. Harmony, positive discipline, and a sense of belonging permeated the classroom atmosphere as the class developed trust, recognized that I cared about them, and felt successful. The close bonds we created were manifested in the privileges, special activities, and field trips that the class treasured and enjoyed.

We made our classroom into our shelter and dealt with all of our problems internally. We shared successes, accomplishments, and acknowledged everyone's contributions. We learned to overcome obstacles, failures, weaknesses, and difficulties. We discussed our challenges and limitations and found avenues to draw on our strengths and accommodate them. Communication in the classroom was based on positive discipline, empowerment, respect, self-worth, empathy, equity, and collective responsibility.

The students learned to help one another and accept each other's uniqueness. Even students with a history of bullying thrived in this setting. In fact, such students learned to influence and persuade others in positive ways. Indeed, they were so devoted to the class rules and systems that they became prominent class leaders in positive causes and initiatives. With pride I watched the children thrive in this class culture. As a homeroom teacher, I replicated these results in several intermediate (Grades 7 and 8) classes. Consequently, my classes became a haven for adolescents with a history of bullying and behavioural difficulties.

Perhaps the key element in the success of this method was the absence of coercion and traditional authority. Discipline and order were maintained through harmony, acceptance, caring, empathy, and guidance. I began to change too. The more exemplary the class environment became, the more involved I became in actively trying to leave a lasting positive influence on my students. I began spending a great deal of my spare time listening to students' problems and went

on to obtain my Guidance Specialist Certificate so I could counsel and advocate for students full time. Working as a guidance counsellor in two large schools, serving approximately 1,300 students, I was faced with diverse and complex bullying issues.

I was saddened by the number of students that lived in fear and anxiety trying to avoid peers who bullied them and was bewildered by their resolve not to report. They would refuse to report or testify, even when they were required to do so. Police were involved in several cases where students were threatened with weapons. Social alienation and exclusion were rampant amongst the girls, particularly, at the junior and intermediate levels.

I had a compelling sense of commitment and determination to make a difference in these students' lives. Some teachers found me a Pollyanna but I operated as a skeptical optimist. I sought to provoke the teachers' interest; I invited them to listen to the cries for help, understand the intricacies of the situations, see through the complexities of the system, and elicit solutions and interventions. I hoped to encourage them to understand the bullies' opposition, rebellion, poor conduct, and defiance, and the victims' lack of security, assertiveness, and self-esteem. I saw the need for changes in philosophy, school culture, curricula, and teacher training in order to address the changes in society. I was moved by the new generation of students, a generation that spent less time with adults at home and more time with teachers at school, a generation that needed school to be a home away from home. It was a generation that was becoming increasingly multicultural, but it continued to be taught by middle-class, Anglo teachers.

So I poured myself into my work, running bullying intervention and prevention programs at both schools but I experienced great frustration. Despite my expertise in working with bullies and victims, I could not even approach the level of success I had experienced previously in my own classroom, for I no longer was the leader of any class. Moreover, the success of my proposed interventions and solutions was largely determined by others. Teachers had strikingly

different levels of awareness of the problems of bullying. Some teachers inadvertently contributed to the social demise of students who consistently became targets. Some showed little interest in contributing positively to the professional development I offered. Others were strong advocates for the victims, but were unable to protect them or arrive at effective interventions. This was often true of some administrators as well. More and more, I found myself responsible for dealing with the lion's share of these bullying problems.

It was difficult to keep up with the demand for my services that continued to grow over the four years I served in both schools. Alas, my goals were too lofty to achieve in this short time. At the end of my fourth year as a guidance counsellor, the school board for fiscal reasons decided to minimize guidance services. As a result, I found myself needing to change careers. Relinquishing my commitment to serving students who had struggled to have a safe and happy childhood at school was not an easy decision for me to make. I pacified myself with the thought that I could still make a difference as a policy analyst on a team that dealt with program standards for students with behavioural exceptionalities at the Ontario Ministry of Education. Following is an excerpt from my journal, outlining my inner struggles as I left my school and parted with the students with whom I had worked.

On the last day, I packed the contents of my office and breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed that I had closed a chapter of my life and found my road to the future. I felt free to imagine where I'm going, what to expect, and free to continue my quest into the future. I knew I would persist on advocating for these youngsters, for I felt my destiny strangely bound to theirs although they didn't seem to understand my departure. . . . I tried to leave and escape the visions of their disappointed faces when they found out I was leaving. A part of me had to give in to tears as I watched some of them turn away from me in anger and disappointment, unable to comprehend the politics behind my choice.

I had chosen a different, nontraditional, and unique path in my relationship with these students. I had developed a therapeutic alliance that was based on empathic, compassionate, authentic, and nonjudgmental methods. I knew that I had enabled some of them to become far better than they thought they could be. Some learned to be responsible towards peers, while others learned to stand up to adversity and not submit to a cruel and unjust world. I felt I was letting them down; betraying them. Yet another side

of me was exhilarated as I imagined being able to inform and influence policy. Indeed, I felt I will be in a special place to reach many more students.

I had to lock the memories and the thoughts of what may become of some of my rebellious students and trust my instincts. I finished packing, got in my car, and let my tacit knowledge guide me away from the past. (Journal notes, June, 1999)

My dream of making a difference dissipated as proposed policies were hampered and then halted by the bureaucracy at the Ministry of Education with the subsequent change of government. I left at the end of my two-year contract and continued my doctoral studies. Shortly after completing most of my courses, I took a position as a behaviour consultant at ErinoakKids (2006), a treatment centre that serves children and youth with disabilities. My new position promised a different, more clinical role. But as therapists, physicians, and other professionals at Erinoak found out about my early experiences with bullying in schools, I was asked to conduct workshops and presentations on the topic for parents and professionals in the community. It took no longer than a few months to be bombarded by bullying issues and problems.

Research shows that children with disabilities, like those at Erinoak, are often victims of severe and persistent bullying (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Whitney, Nabuzoka, & Smith, 1992). Many Erinoak victims were wheelchair bound or unable to communicate effectively due to their physical condition. Many had not reported the bullying for years and several had lost faith in being helped by the adults in their schools. Inconsistencies in the interventions and logistics of handling problems in daily school life appeared to present educators with significant practical challenges that have been largely unstudied by research.

Funded by Erinoak, I advocated for bullied students at their schools, made presentations, and gave workshops on bullying to school staff. Because I presented mostly on professional development days, I expected that the teachers would leave precisely at 3:30 p.m., the official end of the school day. Much to my surprise, they actively engaged in further questioning, and

showed no signs of wanting to rush out. They expressed an interest in such workshops and protested the fact that such opportunities were not provided by their school boards.

My discussions with teachers, during and after my workshops, provided me with an overwhelming desire to capture some of their opinions, thoughts, and ideas with regard to bullying. Their insights and first-hand experiences provided a wealth of information that needed to be captured in research for future benefit and potential interventions. I felt that teachers were in a unique place, dealing with a reality that was difficult to predict or fathom by external researchers. This was the impetus behind my research.

My journey continued as I started to gather data for my research. I worked as a psychotherapist in private practice and counselled adolescents under the Children's Aid Society, all the while continuing my fight against bullying. Now, as a professor, I teach psychology and disability studies to educational assistants and prepare them to become advocates for children who are bullied. More importantly, I urge them not to accept the status quo and to take a proactive stand regarding bullying intervention.

Research Focus

Bullying is a complex phenomenon that may be exhibited in many different ways; it evokes many different responses, feelings, and attitudes in those who must address it. Teachers' ability to empathize with students, their problem-solving skills, and their level of awareness of the impact of students' peer groups greatly influence the incidence and outcomes of bullying. Understanding and capturing such complexities is crucial to tackling bullying in schools. However, despite research, interest, and responses to bullying at the policy level, the implementation of interventions and prevention really falls on teachers who are often ill equipped to deal with this considerable problem (Roberts & Morotti, 2000; Rodkin & Hodges,

2003). Moreover, the fast-paced, regimented environment of a school places multiple demands on the staff, which may present obstacles to dealing with bullying in a timely fashion.

Despite the numerous negative physical and mental health consequences related to bullying in schools (Nansel et al., 2001; Salmon & West, 2000; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010), research investigating teachers' efficacy in reducing bullying is scarce (Marshall, Varjas, Meyers, Graybell, & Skoczylas, 2009). Indeed, bullying situations at the elementary level are often addressed by principals rather than teachers. In a significant omission, research on the principal's role in bullying situations is also lacking. Principals' opinions on the dynamics of bullying, including the impact of pupil-teacher relations, would add a critical dimension to existing research.

Overview of the Study

The study is presented in three parts. Part I comprises Chapters 1, 2, and 3. In Chapter 1, I summarize my past experiences with bullying, as a teacher and a guidance counsellor in Toronto inner-city schools, and give an overview of the research focus. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature on bullying, with particular emphasis on its negative impact from social and ecological perspectives, and the role of teachers in addressing the problem. In Chapter 3, I describe the study's methodology, provide the rationale for choosing a qualitative design for it, and review its limitations and strengths. Part II contains Chapters 4 to 6, which integrate the major findings of the study from the teachers' focus groups and principals' interviews, under categories of emerging themes. I also make comparisons between the findings of the present study and my own experiences with students who bullied or were victims of bullying.

Part III comprises Chapter 7 and the references and appendices. In Chapter 7, I discuss and summarize the main findings and highlight the study's contribution to the literature. I provide a critique of the social and environmental factors that maintain bullying, outline factors

that interfere with teachers' efficacy in intervention and prevention of bullying, and offer recommendations for changes in teacher selection and training. To conclude, I offer suggestions for future research.

The use of both the terms "bully" and "victim" throughout this dissertation is not meant to label students that become involved in bullying interactions. Indeed, I had begun my work describing such students as "students who bully" and "students that are bullied." This became rather cumbersome and long, as the work on this thesis became more extensive and involved. Eventually, although I recognize the potentially stigmatizing effects of such labelling, I gave in to the common use of "bully" and "victim" for brevity and for lack of better terms.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying is a serious school challenge that infringes on the rights of students to learn free from fear in a safe school environment. Bullying occurs in the absence of provocation and the harm inflicted is often intentional. Bullying is characterized by deliberate negative action and an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999). It is a form of aggression that spans a gamut of demeaning and humiliating behaviours ranging from physical assault and verbal taunting to emotional intimidation and social exclusion (Donahue, 2004; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1994).

Prevalence

Bullying in schools is a significant problem around the world (Olweus, 1994; Smith et al., 1999; Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001). In a cross-cultural study of several countries, bullying was found to be a universal phenomenon (Eslea et al., 2003). In an international study of 6,500 students from 35 countries, Canadian schools were ranked as one of the top 10 arenas for bullying (Craig & Harel, 2004). In a study of 5,000 Canadian elementary school children (ages 5–14), 38% of those surveyed reported being bullied at least once or twice during the term and 15% reported being bullied more frequently; 29% reported bullying others once or twice during the term and 6% reported bullying others more frequently (O’Connell et al., 1999) In a Toronto study, 8% of the students surveyed reported being bullied weekly or more often (Ziegler & Rosenstein-Manner, 1991). These figures may be modest, since Mishna, Wiener, and Pepler (2008) showed that bullying can be confusing and may not be identified as such by its victims, particularly when the perpetrators are their friends.

Bullying appears to be more prevalent in elementary schools than in secondary schools. In a study of more than 6,000 students, Whitney and Smith (1993) found that 27% of elementary students said that they had been bullied (sometimes or more often) compared to 10% of secondary students. Moreover, 10% of elementary students admitted being bullied once a week compared to 4% of their secondary counterparts. At the elementary school level, much of the interaction between bullies and victims has been found to take place in the classroom (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Pierce & Cohen, 1995). Bullying appears to peak at age 7 (Grade 2) and at ages 10 to 12 (Grades 6 to 8; Glew, Rivara, & Feudtner, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001). Incidence, victimization, and related bullying issues were found to vary with developmental stages (Glew et al., 2000). Self-report victimization was found to decrease in secondary school as students were more reluctant to disclose and less likely to seek help (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Monks & Smith, 2000). Christie (2005) reported that bullying among adolescents had risen and that 29% of schools in the study considered bullying their most problematic discipline issue. Hence, bullying is viewed as a serious detriment to healthy development in schools worthy of research and intervention (Zimmerman, Glew, Christakis, & Katon, 2005).

Types of Bullying

Age and gender often determine the type of bullying experienced. Research shows that, in general, boys more than girls tend to be victims of bullying, perpetrators of bullying, or both (Hazier, Hoover, & Oliver, 1992; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). While male bullies tend to be physical in their approach, girls tend to resort to social alienation, friendship manipulation, and malicious gossip (Rivers & Smith, 1994; Siann, Callaghan, Lockhart, & Rawson, 1993); these are often referred to collectively as relational bullying (Smith, 2004; Espelage & Swearer,

2004). Verbal aggression and name calling are evenly distributed between both genders (Rivers & Smith, 1994).

Students may also resort to cyber bullying, in which harmful and demeaning messages are sent via relatively anonymous means such as the Internet, text messaging, or other digital devices (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Willard, 2004). In a study by Juvonen and Gross (2008) about half of cyber bullying victims knew their perpetrators from school; it follows that cyber bullying serves as an extension to school bullying.

Victims of bullying have reported that social exclusion is the most harmful form of bullying (Sharp, 1995). Relational bullying was found to be predictive of adult social and psychological maladjustment (Espelage, Mebane, & Swearer, 2004) including low self-esteem and depression (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Olweus, 1993). Relational and indirect forms of bullying were found to be more likely to “cause the greatest amount of suffering, while they have a greater chance of going unnoticed by teachers” (van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003, p. 1312). Group exclusion and the instability of friendships were regarded by girls as the most anxiety provoking factors of their social interaction in school (Besag, 2006). Moreover, physical bullying in schools decreases after intervention but relational bullying was observed to increase (Woods & Wolke, 2003) indicating that schools focus on physical bullying and lack policies to deal with relational bullying (Vail, 2002).

Negative Effects of Bullying

Bullying causes negative, long-lasting effects on victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and on society in general. Victimization in childhood has been related to unhappiness, poor social adaptation, behaviour-related problems at school (Arseneault et al., 2006), and anxiety and social phobias in adulthood (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006). Children who have suffered the prolonged stress of being bullied are more likely than those who have not been bullied to report

having insomnia (OR 3.6), stomach aches (OR 2.4), headaches (OR 2.4); feeling unhappy or sad (OR 3.6), and experiencing enuresis (OR 1.7; Glew et al., 2000).¹ The psychological harm that victimized children suffer can interfere with their social, emotional, and academic development (Delfabbro et al., 2006; Due et al., 2005; Klomek et al., 2006).

Repeated bullying can cause great distress, lower self-concept, and result in depressive symptomatology (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Follow-up studies indicated that young men who had been victims of bullying at school tended to suffer from depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Craig, 1998; Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, & Verloove, 2006; Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2003). Craig's (1998) research also showed a high positive correlation between depression and victimization, particularly among girls. A study by Foltz-Gray (1996) suggested that 7% of American Grade 8 students stayed home at least once a month because of fear of other children. Avoiding school and losing motivation result in declining grades (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997) and poor academic functioning (Beran, 2009; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005). More alarming is a study by Hazier et al. (1992) which suggested that 20% or more of all school children were frightened throughout their school day which served to interfere with their attention and concentration on school work and affected their academic success (Boulton, 2008). A low level of social support by teachers and peers, along with being bullied in school, was even found to be related to suicide ideation in students (Rigby & Slee, 1999).

Several cases of school shootings and youth violence since the late 1990s were found to have their roots in bullying behaviour. Researchers found that these youth acted to avenge long-term bullying, victimization, and social isolation (McGee & Debernardo, 1999; O'Toole, 2000).

¹ The odds ratio (OR) equals the number of times more likely that the child was to have symptoms as a result of bullying compared with if he or she was not bullied.

Recent data on bullying behaviour showed that perpetrators of such violent crimes were youth who retaliated aggressively when bullied. These findings demonstrated the crucial importance of programs designed to help teachers recognize and respond to incidents of bullying among students (Anderson et al., 2001).

Studies supported the view that bullying may be a component of antisocial and rule-breaking behaviour patterns. A school climate permeated with bullying is likely to reflect poor social relationships and poor citizenship skills (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1997). Childhood aggression has been found to be associated with unemployment, substance use, depression (Farrington 1991), and criminal convictions later in life (Olweus, 1993; Nansel et al., 2004; Rigby, 1997). Approximately 35% to 40% of boys who were described as bullies in Grades 6 to 9 had at least three criminal convictions by the age of 24 compared to 10% of control groups. In fact, former school bullies have a fourfold chance of becoming repeat criminals (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying has pervasive negative effects on the school population as a whole. Although 85% of bullying takes place in front of others (Craig & Pepler, 1997), most students do not intervene. Whitney and Smith (1993) found that the vast majority of bystanders did not get involved directly, either because they did not know how to help or because they thought it was not their business (Slee, 1994; Whitney & Smith, 1993). However, Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2001) suggested that bystanders, by expressing vicarious thrills when watching the bullying take place, tended to encourage the bully. Moreover, peers often reflected the negative behaviours of the students who bullied when interacting with a student who was bullied. They were usually less respectful and friendly to the bullied student than to the student who bullied (Craig & Pepler, 1997).

Bronfenbrenner's Model and Bullying

Bullying has been conceptualized from a social-ecological perspective, based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ground-breaking ecological systems theory (Swearer & Doll, 2001). Using this theoretical framework, this study has viewed bullying as an ecological phenomenon that reflects the dynamic interplay between individuals' characteristics and their ecological contexts, including peers, teachers, schools, families, and community factors. Bronfenbrenner's model depicts the individual at the centre of the systems (Figure 1). At the individual level, both the victim and the bully bring with them personalities, interests, and beliefs that are formed through biological, social, and environmental factors. These factors can guide or influence decisions about the type of activity they engage in, including bullying and victimization. The second ecological level is the microsystem. For students, microsystems include relationships with peers, teachers, and family. Other microsystems include immediate communities such as the classroom environment and the school culture. To varying degrees, microsystems and their associated mesosystems (interactions between microsystems) influence how students interact and perceive their relationships. The third level of context is the exosystem which involves the processes between two or more broad settings or community partners. Such interactions indirectly influence processes in the microsystem, thereby influencing the immediate environment of the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). For example, policies regarding bullying generated by the Ontario Ministry of Education and adopted by school boards directly influence and correspond with Codes of Conduct set out by schools. In turn, this directly impacts the level of bullying at the individual level. Finally, the macrosystem is the largest system and is often referred to as the societal or cultural milieu. It comprises the set of beliefs and expectations, widely held in society that directly influences the individual's world view and perceptions

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system is not as directly related as other systems but is just as influential in determining relationships, expectations, and bullying interactions.

From this ecological systemic perspective, although personal characteristics such as depression (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Craig, 1998) and anxiety (Craig, 1998; Olweus, 1994) were connected to bullying and victimization, bullying is not solely connected to the student who bullies or to the victim. Bullying evolves in the social context; the actions of peers, teachers, school and family factors, and societal influences maintain bullying and allow it to thrive (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005; Olweus, 1994; Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2011).



Figure 1. Ecological model of human interaction and development. *Source:* Giardino, Giardino, & Moles, 2012.

Bullying: The Social-Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner (1979) constructed an elaborate model for social environments with social levels from micro to macro which he described as “nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). He postulated the microenvironment as the immediate setting

in which a behaviour unfolds, amidst a context of paramount importance (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). From this perspective, bullies and victims can be seen as foreground, embedded within a background of peers, teachers, other adults, their relationships to them, and society in general. In this social environment, bullying thrives and is influenced by various social-ecological factors.

From an ecological perspective, bullying is conceptualized as “an interaction that occurs between an individual bully and a victim and unfolds within a social ecological context” (Atlas & Pepler, 1998, p. 86). Thus, in a school, the peer ecology is the microsystem where children develop through interacting and socializing with one another. Such interactions can affect and be affected by the adults around them and, to a certain extent, by general social messages. Hence, it is important to recognize the importance of contextual variables (peers, adults, school structures, and the home environment) as determinants, correlates, and perpetrators of bullying behaviour (Furlong, Morrison, & Greif, 2003; Lee, 2011; Sawyer et al., 2011; Barboza et al., 2009).

Peer groups allow children to integrate into this ecology. Some groups adhere to dominant, expected values while others provide shelter for those who oppose messages endorsed by adults and revel in defiance and nonconformity (McFarland, 2001). Childhood peer groups were found to be highly stratified by social status (Adler & Adler, 1998). Social status and power were connected to likeability and popularity (Pellegrini, 2002; Rodkin, 2003) and acute awareness of status hierarchy dominated interactions. Members of popular groups, who tended to be revered, formed exclusive circles that exerted disproportionate influence on the class as a whole (Haynie et al., 2001). Conversely, lower status peers were rejected, isolated, and ridiculed. Bullies tended to seek out as targets those who had been marginalized by the peer group. Longitudinal studies have confirmed that children of low status tend to be victimized repeatedly (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Pellegrini, 1995).

Targets

According to studies, children are bullied on the basis of physical appearance, body image, style, and school achievement (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Espelage & Asidao, 2001). Targets of bullying included students who did not typify certain social images; they were not fashionable, slim, strong, or popular. Others were victimized for their high academic achievement or their low socioeconomic status. Students in middle school reported ethnic and racial victimization (Storch, Zelman, Sweeney, Danner, & Dove, 2002).

Bullying based on perceived sexual orientation was often expressed through the use of homophobic epithets (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). Along with relational and cyber bullying, homophobic bullying receives less attention and intervention by teachers and school personnel. Bauman and Del Rio (2006) hypothesized that teachers may have difficulty and experience discomfort with ambiguous situations that lack physical evidence and they tend to lack the confidence to respond to such covert methods of bullying (Nishina, 2004). Unlike the Winnipeg School Division, with their groundbreaking anti-homophobic bullying program (Taylor, 2008), most Canadian school boards have yet to develop programs in defence of this basic human right.

Students with disabilities are targeted for bullying more often than their peers. One study explored the direct observations of 90 special education teachers of bullying amongst their students; most of the participants (96.7%) reported that they had observed more than one incident of repetitive bullying (Holzbaur, 2008). Although some students with mild disabilities were perceived by teachers as being bullies, they were also rated significantly higher than students in general education for being bullied by peers (Estell et al., 2009). In a study by Flynt and Morton (2008), principals believed that 90% of students with disabilities were victims on some occasions and bullies on others. Students with intellectual disabilities were perceived to be

likely targets while students with behavioural exceptionalities were perceived as perpetrators of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2008).

Bullies Within the Peer Ecology

Several studies have shown that bullies have generally been considered to be uncaring, hostile, and aggressive (Byrne, 1993). They need to be in control of others and of situations in order to feel secure (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). They were found to lack empathy and to be less likely to be affected by inflicting pain and suffering on others (Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992; Rigby, 1996; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). This lack of empathy and insensitivity to punishment could act as risk factors, enabling children to engage in acts of bullying and making them particularly resistant to current forms of bullying interventions (Viding, Simmonds, Petrides, & Fredrickson, 2009).

Child maltreatment and domestic violence have been associated with bullying (Bowes et al., 2009). Research has also shown that bullies are often the product of hostile, rejecting homes where harsh discipline is practised (Bernstein & Watson, 1997; Carney & Merrell, 2001). Bullies' parents often lack problem-solving skills and may model and teach their children to resort to aggressive behaviours at the slightest provocation (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Bullies were found to experience violence in their neighbourhoods and to have more negative perceptions of their teachers than their peers (Bacchini, Esposito, & Affuso, 2009). From an ecological perspective, it is not surprising that children who grow up in such environments use aggression, exploitation, and bullying in their interactions (Koenig, Cicchetti, & Rogosch, 2000). Moreover, Jessor, Van den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, and Turbin (1995) found that children who resort to bullying view aggression as less wrong than their peers. They also regarded an aggressive response to be the solution most likely to yield a positive outcome (Arsenio &

Lemerise, 2004; Crick & Dodge, 1996). Several researchers have recently challenged the assumption that bullies are generally hostile.

Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham (1999) argued that ringleader bullies have a superior “theory of mind,” making them adept manipulators of others.² They are able to maintain gang loyalty, know how to hurt others, and escape teacher detection. They try out a number of possible victims and focus on those with the weakest coping strategies (Monks & Smith, 2000). Teachers’ lack of understanding of such group dynamics evidently interferes with their ability to detect and intervene in bullying situations.

Bullying is a multifactorial phenomenon (Bacchini, Esposito, & Affuso, 2009). As mentioned, it is the product of the interconnectedness of individual, social, and environmental factors. Several researchers have shown that aggressive and antisocial children tend to affiliate with one another (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), and suggested that such groups tend to lie on the periphery of the peer ecology. Farmer et al. (2002), however, questioned the deviance hypothesis. In a study of Grades 4 to 6 students, they found that aggressive boys were well connected to others in the peer ecology (Farmer et al., 2002). Moreover, the students in their sample nominated the bullies among the “coolest” kids in the school. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) also recognized that not all bullies fit the profile of social deviance. Rather, they identified “popular bullies” within the peer ecology and school culture. They argued that such bullies tend to be well liked, using their charm to attract peers to engage and join in the bullying behaviours (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradish, 2000; Slee & Rigby, 1993). Peers who valued social status and who had a reputation of being feared by others,

² “Theory of mind” is the ability of individuals to attribute mental states to themselves and others in order to explain and predict behaviour (Astington, Harris, & Olson, 1988; Whiten, 1991).

befriended bullies (Slee & Rigby, 1993). Together they gained a reputation for intimidating others and harassing vulnerable individuals (Salmivalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997).

Although the intent of bullying may or may not be malicious (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, & Rimpela, 2000), it has been argued, based on peer ecology and group dynamics, that bullying is a group phenomenon (Sutton & Smith, 1999). This was supported by empirical evidence derived from several observational studies (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Pepler & Craig, 1995) which suggested that peers were involved in 85% of bullying episodes. Hence, bullies were not the stereotypical, socially incompetent loners but rather highly regarded and ingrained in peer groups (Langdon & Preble, 2008). They were popular and were able to manipulate their social environments; even teachers were found to overlook bullying by these popular, “good” students (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003).

Bullying is a way of gaining power and status in a group or class (Billow, 2012; Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). This status is often maintained through a show of power using verbal abuse that focuses on the victim’s difference. This difference is interpreted in the peer ecology as a culturally avoidable characteristic. In this way, bullying behaviour creates cultural norms and forces all peers to follow (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008, p. 333). This explains how one student is often alienated by the majority in class.

Victims Within the Peer Ecology

A consistent profile of bullying victims has emerged from research, including physical weakness, lack of prosocial skills, and lack of confidence and self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998; Hodges & Perry, 1999; Pellegrini, 1995). Victims of bullying tended to be more quiet, sensitive, cautious, and withdrawn from other children (Hazier et al., 1992). Individual risk factors, such as having higher rates of depression and anxiety, were related to being victimized (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Greene, 2000; Hodges & Perry, 1999). Lack of certain social skills, such as

assertiveness and ability to socialize and make friends, has also been associated with peer victimization (Fox & Boulton, 2006).

Studies have focused on trying to unravel the variables that tend to make certain children more vulnerable to being victimized. Two types of bullying victims have emerged in the literature. Most have been identified as *passive* (Griffin & Gross, 2004; Olweus, 1993). These generally insecure children are unable to retaliate and tend to react by withdrawing and crying (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Their inability to reach out for help and their lack of friends to protect them make them targets of persistent bullying (Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001). Most victims of bullying were found to be socially marginalized by their peers (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Olweus, 1994)). A smaller group of victims, the so-called provocative victims, are described as *bully-victims*. While bully-victims are victimized by peers, they also engage in bullying others (Griffin & Gross, 2004). Such children tend to react with aggression, are hyperactive, anxious, and lack social skills (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). As a result, they are less likely to have friends and may be at a greater risk for social and psychological problems.

Responses to Bullying

Victims

Most bullied children and adolescents do not report the incidents to either teachers or parents (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Victims of bullying tend to lack assertiveness not only to stop the bully but also to report the bullying to teachers (Brown, Birch, & Kancherla, 2005). Their reluctance to tell teachers increases with age; Oliver and Candappa (2007) found that only a third (31%) of Grade 8 students were willing to talk to teachers about bullying compared to just over half of students in Grade 5.

Many school systems lack the policies or cultures to engender confidence, leading students to believe that nothing can be done to help them. Research shows that students' main concern is a perceived increase in bullying as a result of telling teachers (Kanetsuna, Smith, & Morita, 2006). In fact, many students believe that a teacher's intervention will make the situation worse (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003).

Students who were wary of sharing their stories with adults attributed their reluctance to parents' and teachers' incompetent responses. Adult responses were perceived to be ineffective, insensitive, or excessive. Doll, Song, & Siemers (2004) reported that students perceived teachers as "inept, uncaring, or unable to protect them" (p. 169). Middle school students believed that teachers and administrators did nothing to stop bullying (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). Garbarino and DeLara (2002) agreed, indicating that adults tended to ignore bullying, and emphasized how important it was for teachers and other adults to model and respond appropriately.

Bullying is surrounded by fear, secrecy, and a misplaced loyalty to the perpetrator(s) (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Students were found to engage in a process of risk assessment, based on dynamics of the peer ecology that eschewed "telling" and other help-seeking behaviours (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Mishna and Alaggia (2005) found that victims within a peer group feared losing the relationship if the bully was considered a friend.

Sensitivity and an ability to detect signs and symptoms of bullying are integral to responding effectively to bullying interactions (Garbarino & DeLara, 2002). Black and Newman (1995) have likened bullying to other forms of child abuse, suggesting that children are unlikely to disclose it spontaneously because bullying has made them feel ashamed, embarrassed, and fearful of recrimination. The teacher's task in detecting bullying is made more difficult by this

unspoken code of silence and they may underestimate the prevalence of bullying and its effects for the same reason.

Bystanders

Most bystanders do nothing to help the victims (Rock & Baird, 2012). They may find bullying entertaining or they may try to avoid being the next victim (Brown et al., 2005). They often validate the bully with applause or belong to bully-led peer groups (O'Connell et al., 1999). Their presence and inaction serves to embolden the bully and make the victim feel isolated and rejected. In a study of Canadian children in Grades 1 to 6, Craig and Pepler (1997) videotaped bullying episodes and found that peers were involved in 85% of the interactions. Of these, 30% actively participated in the bullying, 23% observed the interactions, and a modest 12% intervened. Moreover, peers were reported to be respectful to the bully in 74% of the episodes while being respectful to the victim in only 23%. In another study, Craig et al. (2000) found that 54% of the peers simply watched, providing reinforcement to the bullying behaviour. Similar results were achieved by O'Connell et al. (1999).

Studies that employed peer-evaluation and self-report questionnaires produced higher estimates of bystanders' desire to help the victim (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). This was attributable to the students' desire to respond in a socially acceptable manner or the inability to evaluate the factors present in bullying situations (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). Intervening to support victims was also found to decrease with age (Salmivalli, 1999).

Teachers

Teachers' attitudes towards bullying. Lack of appropriate consequences reinforces the bullying behaviour hence, indirectly contributing to repeated victimization and perpetuation of feelings of alienation (Pepler et al., 1994). However, research on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards bullying has been limited. Siann et al. (1993) explored teachers' views of what

constituted bullying and found that the repetitious nature of the harmful behaviour was not recognized. Despite the extensive research on victims and children who bully, some teachers were unable to describe the bully personality profile (Olweus, 1993; Pearce & Thompson, 1998; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988).

Bullying needs to be more fully described and defined for teachers. Research data have indicated that teachers are not aware of the extent of the problem (Olweus, 1991; Pepler et al., 1994) and may be unable to identify the bullies in their classroom (Leff et al., 1999; Pepler et al., 1994). Teachers often approach bullying with a nonchalant attitude, or use arbitrary interventions, which have a negative impact on bullying (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). In addition, Ferguson (2000) found that teachers often gave up on children who come from disadvantaged and challenging homes; they believed that bullying was an established social pattern, and that their efforts to change it would be futile.

Teachers tend to underestimate the prevalence of bullying at their school (Houndoumadi & Pataraki, 2001; Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002) and they may expect children to resolve these situations on their own (Newman, 2003; Stockdale et al., 2002). They may exacerbate the problem by blaming the victim (Olweus, 2003) and failing to stop bullying when they do see it. They may respond ineffectively by minimizing concerns or mishandling the situation which places the victim at heightened risk (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005; Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Teachers typically believed that they intervened in bullying situations more than they actually did (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Newman & Murray, 2005). However, Pepler et al. (1994) found that while 84% of teachers said they usually intervened in bullying incidents, just 35% of students reported that teachers intervened. In another study, teachers were found to intervene in only one-third of the bullying cases that came to their attention (O'Moore, 2000; Rigby, 2001; Smith & Brain, 2000). The majority of victims

indicated that teachers rarely intervened to stop bullying (Hazier et al., 1992). These results may explain why students do not report bullying incidents to teachers. Their experience may have taught them that adults are ineffective in such situations.

Research suggests that teachers contribute to student bullying. This topic remains largely underinvestigated, even though Pepler et al. (1994) showed that teachers' behaviours and attitudes, such as overlooking bullying problems or modelling the use of coercive power in their interactions with the students, can inadvertently support aggressive behaviours. More alarming are the results of a study by Whitted and Dupper (2008) which indicated that students were bullied by teachers in multiple harmful ways. Special education students reported being physically and psychologically bullied by teachers to a surprising degree.

Nevertheless, teachers have a vital role to play in preventing bullying and victimization (Pellegrini, 2002; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Given the sensitive nature of self-disclosure and the complexity of achieving desirable outcomes (Vogel & Wester, 2003), teachers play a key role in early identification of signs of victimization and effective intervention in bullying situations (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Olweus (1993) recommended that teachers supervise children's relationships and demonstrate nontolerance for bullying. Teachers' awareness of the problem is imperative in reducing bullying; however, research shows that teachers differ immensely in terms of their attitudes, perceptions, and responses to bullying (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Yoon, 2004). Teachers' perception of the seriousness of bullying incidents was found to be the most important factor that influenced whether and how teachers intervened (Ellis & Shute, 2007). Other factors included whether teachers considered the victimized child responsible, whether the child matched their assumptions about victims' characteristics, and whether they felt empathy for the child (Mishna et al., 2005).

Teachers' responses to relational bullying. Several studies identified teachers' misconceptions regarding relational aggression (Pervin & Turner, 1994). They correctly categorized physical aggression as bullying but viewed verbal attacks and social exclusion as less serious, easier for children to cope with, and were not considered bullying behaviour (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). In a sample of 138 teachers, Boulton (1997) used questionnaires to explore teachers' beliefs and attitudes. He found that although teachers identified physical and verbal bullying, they were unable to identify social isolation. In a Canadian study, Craig et al. (2000) showed preservice teachers 18 vignettes and asked them to identify bullying behaviours. Their responses showed that physical attacks were considered more serious and more likely to be identified as bullying than verbal attacks. Social exclusion was the least likely to be identified as bullying and was considered the least important. Other studies have shown that teachers and preservice teachers seemed unaware of the significance and impact of social exclusion behaviours (Boulton, 1997; Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Craig and Pepler (1997) also concluded that teachers are less likely to observe social exclusion since such interactions are often brief and covert.

A comparison of teachers' and pupils' perspectives reveals different conceptualizations of what constitutes bullying behaviours (Boulton, 1997; Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001). Teachers seemed to give more attention to physical forms of bullying and had difficulties differentiating verbal and social exclusion from playful interactions. Students, on the other hand, recognized the negative impact of relational bullying. These differences are alarming since they directly influence intervention and prevention efforts.

Teachers reportedly use passive approaches to deal with relational bullying. Yoon and Kerber (2003) found that teachers minimized social exclusion, were less sympathetic to the victim, were less likely to get involved, and used such passive strategies as ignoring those

behaviours or “[having] the perpetrator and the victim talk about it.” The absence of effective, consistent disciplinary responses to social exclusion sends a message that social exclusion is tolerated which may in turn be perceived by the victims as lack of caring by the teacher or inability to protect them (Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

Teachers’ characteristics. Teachers’ responses to bullying were found to be influenced by variables such as self-efficacy, empathy, and their perceived seriousness of the bullying situations (Yoon, 2004). On questionnaires, teachers with higher self-efficacy and greater empathy were more likely to report that they would intervene (Bradshaw et al., 2007). The perceived seriousness of the situations highly predicted the teachers’ intentions to intervene. Yoon concluded that such findings indicated that training and raising teachers’ awareness of the seriousness of bullying could change teachers’ appraisal and result in increased intervention (Yoon, 2004). However, on open-ended questions, the same characteristics proved only to predict intentions rather than produce actual interventions. This suggests that in addition to personal characteristics, teachers’ behaviour is also influenced by organizational and contextual variables. The results of this study suggested the importance of taking into consideration the teacher’s role within the organizational variables and system constraints (Yoon, 2004).

Teachers’ self-efficacy. Misconceptions and gaps in teachers’ knowledge are likely to interfere with their ability to identify and intervene in bullying situations. Teachers are typically not confident of their abilities to resolve or deal with bullying (Boulton, 1997). Often overwhelmed by bullying’s prevalence, they attempt to eradicate it without an understanding or appreciation of peer ecologies (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003) which only results in opposition and defiance in the classroom. It is evident that teachers must be well-informed about bullying to feel confident in their ability and skills to intervene.

Bradshaw et al. (2007) concluded that most teachers needed more training in effective interventions and developmentally appropriate strategies for dealing with bullying. In a study of 270 preservice teachers (Nicolaidis et al., 2002), the great majority (87%) of the teachers felt that it was their responsibility to deal with bullying issues. They expressed a desire for more training. Teacher candidates considered the issue of bullying quite important and had reasonable knowledge about it. However, the decline in self-reported victimization and age and gender differences in the rate of bullying were less understood. Inconsistent with the literature on bullying, many preservice teachers believed that bullies had low self-esteem and lacked social skills.

Teachers do not feel confident in their abilities to handle bullying situations at school (Boulton, 1997), often claiming that intervening will only cause more harm to the victim (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Olweus, 1994). In fact, teachers with greater self-efficacy for handling bullying situations were more likely to intervene than their peers and less likely to make the situation worse. In general, however, Bradshaw et al. (2007) concluded that most teachers needed more training on effective interventions and developmentally appropriate strategies for dealing with bullying.

In an interesting study by Di Fabio and Palazzeschi (2008), teachers' self-efficacy beliefs were linked to their emotional intelligence. Higher emotional intelligence indicated higher self-efficacy in the capacity to manage the classroom, use of appropriate teaching strategies, and effective communication with students. To be emotionally prepared for the classroom, preservice teachers were found to need improvement in self-assertion, self-confidence, empathy, decision-making, self-esteem, and stress management (Justice & Espinoza, 2007).

Classroom management. There is significant variance in teachers' discipline approaches and classroom management skills (Roland & Galloway, 2002) that have been related to the

incidence of bullying in a classroom. Self-efficacy with regard to behavioural management is considered a teacher characteristic that influences the likelihood of intervention and the level of confidence and involvement with students who are bullies (Yoon, 2004). In an intriguing study of teachers' classroom management skills, Chang (2003) found that teachers' approaches resulted either in student cooperation or opposition. Teachers who had rejecting attitudes and demonstrated a lack of warmth and caring towards aggressive children allowed these students to perceive themselves as an alternative and oppositional authority structure. Roland and Galloway (2002) found a strong inverse relationship between teachers' strong positive classroom management and the incidence of bullying in the class. This continued to be true even when disadvantaged home conditions of the students were included in the analysis, indicating the importance of teachers' influence on the bullying interactions (Roland & Galloway, 2002).

Student-teacher relationship. Teachers exert significant influences not only on the students' school experiences but also on their psychological and emotional adjustment (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). Teacher-student relationships defined as warm, close, and communicative were linked to positive school adjustment. A powerful example of the influence of positive teacher-student relationship was portrayed in a study of at-risk children (Werner, 1990). Skillful teachers, those who provided emotional support, promoted self-esteem, and rewarded competences were considered important for offsetting adjustment risks and decreasing vulnerability in high-risk students. Conversely, students who were disempowered by their teachers sometimes compensated by bullying peers or by becoming victims themselves (Bacchini et al., 2009).

Several researchers investigated what determines the quality of teacher-student relationships. Teachers with high self-efficacy were found to be more positive and responsive to students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). In turn, teachers' high responsivity and involvement were

linked to positive teacher-student relationship (Hows & Segal, 1993). On the other hand, teachers' stress was associated with interactional problems between teachers and some students (Yoon, 2002). Based on such mounting evidence of the significance of teacher-student relationships, additional investigation is required.

Teacher training. Students with behavioural problems create difficulties for teachers and pupils alike (Nucci, 2006). Nicolaides, Toda, and Smith (2002) found that preservice teachers had limited sporadic training in classroom management and positive discipline and lacked expertise in minimizing behavioural problems in general and bullying in particular (Nicolaides et al., 2002). Teacher candidates indicated a need for such training as part of their basic courses (Nicolaides et al., 2002) in order to be better prepared to cope with bullying situations. Earlier studies by Merrett and Wheldall (1993) had also suggested that teachers were not satisfied with their initial training in this area.

Several studies showed that teachers wanted to learn more about bullying (Boulton, 1997; Nicolaides et al., 2002). Numerous researchers have advanced the urgent need for teacher training and have pointed out that preservice programs are ideal settings to provide such training (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Pepler, Smith, & Rigby, 2004). Pepler et al. (2004) emphasized that this “cannot be left to the chance that a principal or a school system will see fit to implement a programme” (p. 311).

Schools

Anti-bullying interventions. Several authors have proposed that peers may lack the confidence and the effective skills to intervene (Dillon & Lash, 2005). Thus, recommendations have been made to train peers in an effort to change the peer ecology and encourage reporting. Schools have also been encouraged to create a culture in which students who report will not be threatened or face retaliation (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). An array of anti-bullying programs has

been implemented with some degree of success in some schools (Olweus, 1992; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies et al., 2001). Olweus's Norwegian program was adapted for North America with limited success and mediocre results (Pepler et al., 1994; Roland, 1993). One such program, Bullyproof, was shown to have little effect on the frequency of bullying behaviours, despite a significant increase in anti-bullying attitudes by the majority of a sample of elementary students (Hallford, Borntrager, & Davis, 2006). This suggests that students may repeat but not necessarily follow adult-espoused values. A reduction in bullying was only achieved in schools with a strong commitment to implementing such a program. Moreover, an inverse relationship was found between relational bullying and comprehensive anti-bullying policies (Woods & Wolke, 2003); hence, either such programs did not adequately address relational bullying or because only direct bullying was addressed, children turned towards more covert methods of bullying.

To date, only limited rigorous scientific research has evaluated whole-school anti-bullying or bullying prevention programs (Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). Findings of large-scale intervention studies varied, with most reporting decreases in bullying of between 5% and 20% (Smith, 2004). In general, such programs had definite but often limited impact on bullying behaviour. An important component in successful programs was found to be the degree of commitment of the teachers involved (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004). Teachers' attitudes were found to affect the adherence and hence success of school-based programs (Biggs et al., 2008). These findings underscore the importance of teachers as contributors to the success of such programs.

The majority of anti-bullying programs rely mainly on adult efforts in general and on teachers' direction in particular. The magnitude and serious nature of bullying and the responsibility placed on teachers, necessitate a high level of training and competence (Drake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003). Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan (2007) suggested that by

increasing awareness of the problem and providing training in handling bullying situations, teachers' ability to intervene effectively was likely to increase (Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). In fact, a significant inverse relationship was found between teacher support and the frequency of being a victim for girls (Rigby & Slee, 1999). Researchers have advised adults in the school to set the standard for respect in order to create a positive school culture with diminished bullying (Langdon & Preble, 2008). To create a more positive classroom climate, Nucci (2006) also recommended classroom modules addressing assertiveness training, anger management, problem solving, and social prejudice. Researchers considered programs that focus on perspective taking, respect, compassion, kindness, social inclusion, and acceptance of others to be critical to creating safe learning environments (Fonagy, Twemlow, Vernberg, Sacco, & Little, 2005; Rigby, 2005).

School climate. Leff, Power, Costigan, and Manz (2003) have suggested that prevention and intervention programs need to take the school climate into consideration as a potential contributing factor that may promote or inhibit bullying. High academic aspirations and achievement as well as student attitudes and behaviour were found to contribute to the school climate and serve as deterrents to deviant behaviour (Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990). Factors such as tolerance for aggressive behaviour and role modelling were found to influence the incidence of bullying and aggressive behaviour in schools (Baker, 1998). On the other hand, students were found to be more likely to report bullying to supportive school personnel reflecting the importance of a positive school climate in bullying intervention (Elliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010).

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study is designed to understand the complex nature of bullying through exploring the conditions, relationships, and contexts that allow this alarming phenomenon to flourish. Having worked in schools, I recognize the significance of the school environment as a

social arena and a “mini world” where students spend a great deal of their time creating identities and social realities. In order to capture social interactions within the school world, one must attempt to see this world through the eyes of the adults that are poised to deal with such interactions on daily basis. Little research explores the perceptions of teachers and principals of factors that illicit, impact, or maintain the dynamics of bullying (Beran & Li, 2005). Given that teachers are the most likely individuals to handle bullying incidents (Smith & Sharp, 1994), their perceptions and experiences are likely to provide the best account of such factors and their roles should be integral to prevention and intervention (Craig et al., 2011). Perhaps more importantly, insights from their experiences can identify realistic, practical, and long-lasting solutions to the serious phenomenon of bullying. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were chosen as qualitative research approaches to permit the researcher to listen to the participants, study their perceptions and experiences, and discover their reality. Through the reflective comments of the participants, this study attempts to broaden the concepts of bullying and deepen our understanding of how contextual variables interact to provide fertile grounds for bullying.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

The goal of this study was to describe teachers' and principals' experiences with bullying and their level of involvement and competence in implementing interventions. To capture the complexities of the ecological conditions and interactions surrounding bullying, including the meanings that participants attributed and extrapolated from such interactions, I chose a qualitative research design. Most studies on bullying use quantitative approaches to data collection and analysis (Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2006). In such approaches, participants speak only to questions posed by the researcher. A few researchers have complemented their qualitative studies with children's graphic and narrative illustrations of their bullying experiences (Goodwin, 2002). However, because bullying is dynamic and multidimensional in nature, capturing the lived experiences of peer interactions through quantitative methods is difficult (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative research can provide insight into the subtle dynamics of bullying (Cullingford & Morrison, 1995; Mishna et al., 2005; Smith & Brain, 2000). Qualitative research allows the investigator to view a phenomenon through the participants' responses and perspectives. I, therefore, deemed focus groups with teachers and interviews with principals of elementary schools to be appropriate to gain an in-depth understanding and provide a rich description of the contexts and environments where bullying thrives. The emphasis of this approach was to discover the context, rather than explore a specific variable. I intended this research to provide data for broadening the understanding of the role of interpersonal factors and social contexts in the incidence and maintenance of bullying in schools.

The study was guided by the principles of heuristic inquiry as described by Moustakas (1990). A heuristic inquiry begins with a research question that emanates from the researcher's deep interest and for which she can maintain a passionate interest throughout the research

process. In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. This is followed by choosing mostly open-ended methods to obtain first-person accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. The participants are encouraged to engage in open-ended dialogue to allow for the unveiling of meanings and essences of experiences. Qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews typically involve the collection of information about a particular topic from relatively few individuals. Respondents who volunteer have shown interest in the topic which increases the likelihood that important information will be revealed. Analysis and synthesis of research data require the researcher's intermittent immersion in the data interrupted by periods of rest in order to gain a depth of understanding of the participants' experiences. Identification of core themes that emerge from the data and synthesis of the information comprise the final stage of heuristic research.

Having been a teacher for a number of years, I was aware that teachers have few opportunities to engage in intellectual discussions related to common concerns or problems. Hence, I believed that discussing bullying in groups would create very lively and informative discussions. The rationale behind using focus groups was to elicit teachers' attitudes and opinions rather than testing or confirming any preconceived hypothesis. Morgan (1988) argued that, under such conditions, cognitive processes and underlying social cognitions would be revealed. Focus groups have been advantageous in cases of social psychological research where the emphasis is on the interaction (Morgan, 1988). Participants' interaction among themselves takes precedence over interaction with the researcher. This leads to a greater emphasis on the participants' points of view and allows the participants, rather than the researcher, to keep control over the situation. According to Morgan, low levels of moderator involvement are important in emphasizing exploratory research and allow for the sharing of ideas rather

conveying the researcher's own views. Hence, the pooled knowledge and ideas arise out of the participants' perspectives rather than from a researcher-imposed agenda.

Method

The use of two or more methods to address similar research questions in investigating the same conceptual phenomenon aims to strengthen the validity of the findings. When the results are substantiated by two or more methods, then the validity of the findings is enhanced and triangulation has been achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present study, focus groups and in-depth interviews comprised the main data collection methods. Data from the teachers' focus groups provided insight on key issues related to bullying in schools and these findings formed the basis for interviews with the principals. The interviews provided a further way to address similar research questions and another opportunity to replicate the focus groups' findings. I verified the data through triangulation of sources; that is, by examining bullying interactions and teachers' interventions from the different perspectives of focus groups, interviews, and field observations. At the same time I sought to research bullying through autobiographical exploration (Cole & Knowles, 2000) of my experiences as a teacher and a guidance counsellor.

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold:

1. to understand the complexity of bullying through the perceptions of teachers and principals of the conditions, relationships and contexts that surround bullying; and
2. to explore teachers' and principals' perceptions of obstacles that interfere with teachers' competence in tackling bullying situations and the impact of teachers' relationships with students on bullying interactions.

An application for ethical approval of the study was granted from the Ethics Committee of the University of Toronto. The consent of the Director of Education of the Toronto Catholic District

School Board (TCDSB) to conduct the study was formally requested through a research application to the Psychology Department at TCDSB. Approval was granted two weeks later.

Participants

All participants, teachers, and principals worked in elementary schools in the TCDSB jurisdiction. My research spanned 18 urban Catholic schools that were located in communities that differed in income, family composition, and percentage of recent immigrants. The eight focus groups included 48 teachers; two focus groups were all male, three were all female, and four were mixed genders. Teachers' assignments ranged from teaching junior kindergarten (JK) to Grade 8, with one teacher librarian and four special education teachers. Their years of experience in the profession ranged from 1 year to 30 years, with 62% of all teachers having had 15 or more years of experience. Teachers were asked to provide their contact information if they wished a summary of the research results (see Appendix J). All focus groups and interviews were transcribed, omitting any identifying information, including names of participants and their schools. Each audiotape was assigned a number and all were stored in a locked cabinet to be destroyed after the completion of this thesis.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 principals of another 10 Catholic schools within the same school board. Their years of experience as administrators ranged from 3 to 21 in addition to their former experience as teachers which ranged from 13 to 26 years. Most of these schools had a high percentage of multicultural and new immigrant populations. Two of the schools populations were described as middle class.

Phase One: Focus Groups With Teachers

Principals were informed of the purpose of the study and a written summary was provided (see Appendix A). After securing their consent to hold a focus group with a group of six to eight teachers, their cooperation in recruiting teachers and distributing the introductory

letters was requested. The introductory letter outlined the purpose of the study and requested the teachers' participation in an audiotaped focus group lasting 1.5 to 2.0 hours (see Appendix B). Assurances were given as to the anonymity of teachers' participation through the use of pseudonyms and the omission of any identifying information from the transcripts. Nine principals approached were able to recruit a focus group comprising six to eight teachers, with the exception of one principal who declined due to having a small staff. Most focus groups were conducted in a room at the school that was arranged by the principal.

Two all-male, two all-female, and four mixed-gender focus groups were conducted. The all-male and all-female groups were designed to capture opinions about potential differences in gender-related practices in dealing with bullying. Descriptions of the participants and the composition of the eight focus groups are summarized in Appendix C. Participants signed the consent form (see Appendix B) and completed a demographic information sheet form (see Appendix D). To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used on the forms and on the name tags. Focus groups were audio-recorded for purposes of transcription. An assistant moderator made a diagram of the seating arrangement, kept a speaker's log, and took field notes about key points, important observations, contradictory statements, energy level, and enthusiasm. Group protocols regarding speaking in turn, confidentiality, and respecting each individual's unique experience were discussed at the beginning of each focus group.

The focus group questions were sequenced to gradually delve into more complex issues of the topic. Completely participant-dominated focus groups could have resulted in discussions of questions addressed in earlier research. The questions I wished to research (see Appendix E) were based on areas not fully covered by previous research such as obstacles faced by teachers in attempting to address bullying. Hence, I posed open-ended questions, semi-structuring the discussion in order to maintain comparative advantage in managing the data I was collecting.

Several of my questions drew from field observations based on my experiences with bullying situations in elementary schools in Toronto. Field notes captured the information and affect of the participants and recorded any relevant occurrences. The notes served as an aid to help me recall the actual focus group discussion and relive the experience when analyzing the data.

The focus groups were very relaxed. As moderator, I played a highly nondirective role consistent with Krueger's principles (1994). The teachers were talkative, humorous, and engaging. I had the privilege of witnessing them at their playful best, expressing passionate views and displaying a deep commitment to their profession. Since the meetings were held after school hours, I had expected teachers to be in a rush to leave. To my surprise, they lingered, basking in the camaraderie; they expressed an interest in more such networking opportunities. The focus groups served to enhance my already established appreciation of the teacher's integral role in addressing bullying.

Phase Two: Interviews With Principals

A list of schools and principals was obtained from the TCDSB. Several principals were contacted on a geographical basis. Similar to the focus groups, these schools were situated in different areas of the city, not near to one another. This was followed to avoid geographical bias and capture principals' perceptions on different communities, with different cultural backgrounds and different socioeconomic status. All principals I contacted were willing to participate in interviews; I interviewed 10 principals in total. Appendix G lists and describes the experience of those 10 principals. I asked them open-ended questions at these semi-structured interviews which were conducted subsequent to the focus groups for teachers. Some of the questions were similar to those used in focus groups with teachers while others were guided by issues raised in the focus groups (see Appendix F). Each principal signed a consent form (Appendix H) and completed a demographic information sheet form (Appendix I). Before ending

the interview, participants were encouraged to share any additional thoughts they believed were important to the study. The interviews lasted from 1 to 2 hours; most interviews lasted 1.5 hours.

Qualitative Data Analysis

A hybrid of grounded theory and autobiographical exploration was used to analyze the data. I applied grounded theory methods of data analysis and coding, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). I performed the analysis as data were collected, providing opportunities to further explore relevant concepts and to define and redefine categories (Dey, 1993). Data analysis is central to grounded theory building research. For the study as a whole, data collection, data ordering, and data analysis were interrelated. During the course of analysis, data were analyzed using different coding methods such as *open*, *axial*, and *selective*. Coding represents the operation by which data are analyzed and conceptualized in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is the central process through which theories are built from data. Open coding, writing preliminary codes in the margins of the paper, was used to break the data down into categories. Open coding refers to that part of analysis that deals with the labelling and categorizing of phenomena as indicated by the data. The product of labelling and categorizing are concepts, the basic building blocks in grounded theory construction. All focus groups and interviews were open coded. When this was completed, documents were transferred to NVivo[®], a qualitative software program, for further data analysis and management. NVivo permitted axial coding through examination of the data in new ways and making connections between categories. In selective coding, certain data could be organized under more than one category, thus establishing significant connections for later analysis. Hence, the fit between data and the process of developing categories was one of continuous refinement.

Themes and concepts were compared and contrasted using the grounded theory technique and the constant comparison method in which data are analyzed using the aforementioned steps

so as to allow social relations to emerge. This process continues until a strong theoretical understanding, a grounded theory, of the phenomenon emerges (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this inductive research method, the theory is developed from the data rather than the other way around. In my study, teachers' perceptions were compared and contrasted taking into account gender and number of years of experience. Preliminary analyses of the focus groups assisted in developing the questions and forming the basis of the inquiry for the principals' interviews. Findings from teachers' focus groups were compared to those gathered from principals' interviews. Comprehensive interpretation of data was achieved through the continued refinement and development of the emerging categories.

Focusing on my past classroom practice, student experiences, and school contexts, I wanted my research to seek the essence of my experience as a guidance counsellor and capture some of the intense interactions surrounding bullying. Life history research as described by Cole and Knowles (2001) is guided by principles that place self and relationships as central in the research process. Hence, my personal experiences were added to reinforce research findings wherever applicable.

Verification

The concept of validity is often termed as *trustworthiness* in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). However, Creswell (1998) has recommended using "the term verification instead of validity because verification underscores qualitative research as a distinct approach, a legitimate mode of inquiry in its own right" (p. 201). Hence, methods of verification as described by Creswell (1998) were used to establish the validity of this research. Two such methods were employed in this study: triangulation and peer review (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In triangulation, several methods or sources of data are used to gain a deeper and clearer perception of the social phenomenon being studied. The data in this study were collected from

multiple sources, perspectives, and methods. Collecting information from a range of individuals in schools set in different communities reduced the risk of systematic biases and chance associations. The multiple sources of data revealed different facets of the phenomenon of bullying and an overlapping of certain strong themes. This, in turn, led to a fuller, richer understanding of the conditions and contexts that surround bullying. The extensive use of text quotes taken directly from the focus groups and interviews demonstrates the qualitative rigour of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that peer de-briefing provides an analytical and probing component to the research process. The peer de-briefer acts as a secondary researcher, questioning the primary researcher and urging her to become more reflective about methods and interpretations. In the present study, my friend, an elementary school principal, assumed the role of the peer de-briefer. We had no significant disagreements; rather, the de-briefer added insight with regards to some category development.

To more accurately reflect participants' views, their feedback was solicited on two occasions. In the first, preliminary findings of one focus group were shared with members of that group to get clarification and make distinctions concerning emerging themes. In the second, a principal (chosen at random) was asked to review his own transcribed interview and provide feedback regarding its accuracy. The principal indicated that the transcript was an accurate record of his interview.

As a researcher who is highly passionate about this subject, I was well aware of the importance of acknowledging my own biases in order not to influence the results of this study. I sought to interpret the analysis and implications of the study accurately, by employing sensitivity, integrity, and analytical skills. The process was enhanced by integrating work experiences and clinical examples with an in-depth understanding of the data.

PART II

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Social Contexts

The qualitative data obtained from eight focus groups of elementary school teachers and 10 interviews with elementary school principals were analyzed using NVivo 8, a qualitative software program that assisted in data management and analysis. The data, analyzed using *open*, *axial*, and *selective* forms of coding, revealed a range of experiences and perceptions associated with the phenomenon of bullying in general, and teachers' ability to affect such interactions in particular. Through the process of open and axial coding, a number of concepts and categories were generated and developed (see Figure 2), as well as several subcategories.



Figure 2. Overarching themes and categories generated by the data.

Most of the themes emerged spontaneously in the course of participants' discussions, not generated directly from the questions. In general, the information was considered significant and necessary as a category if it met one or both of the following conditions:

- it corresponded with a number of responses from participants regarding similar concepts or beliefs; and
- it was relevant to themes that appeared integral to understanding the dynamics of bullying and the attempted interventions.

This chapter describes the overarching theme of social contexts. Participants' descriptions of contexts of bullying are represented by two major themes as shown in Figure 3, perceptions of bullying and analyses of bullying interactions. I discuss these in detail in this chapter and also provide profiles of bullied students and students who bully.

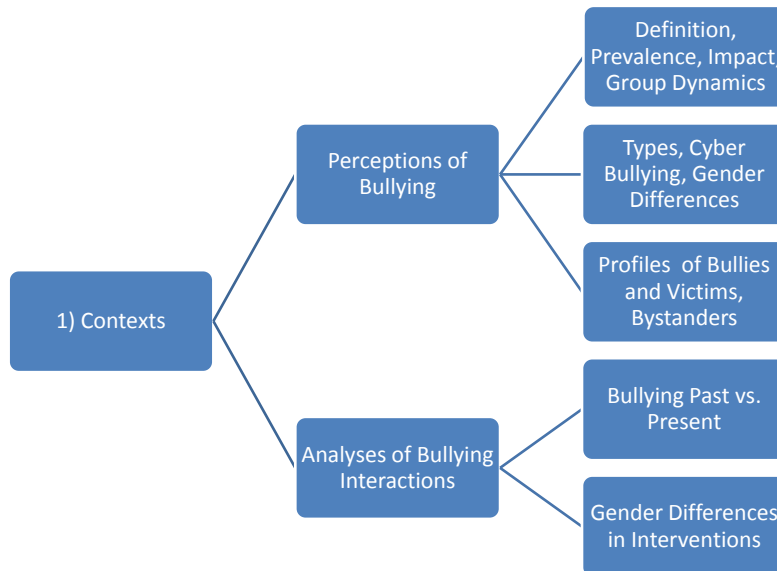


Figure 3. The overarching theme of Social Contexts.

Perceptions of Bullying

Towards a Definition of Bullying: Responses of Principals and Teachers

Methods of bullying and its harmful effects. Principals were asked to define bullying. Several principals articulated definitions of the negative effects and the type of bullying.

I would say it's unwarranted action by somebody that adversely affects [somebody else], the recipient of that action. Sometimes bullying is prolonged. If it has a negative effect on a student, a long-term negative effect, I'd consider it to be bullying. (Principal 6)

Bullying could be physical aggression. It could be intimidation. It could be talking about another student, spreading rumours, gossip about another student. It doesn't always have to be something physical. It could be emails to another student or to other students about a student. It could be stealing somebody's apple from his lunch every day. It could be asking somebody for a loonie to buy milk. (Principal 7)

These definitions were in line with the role of the principal who is ultimately responsible for ensuring the safety and general well-being of students. The definitions attempted to capture the different methods and types of bullying and its impact on victimized students. Some principals added the motivation behind bullying as an important dimension.

Bullying is an act of gaining control and it can be by physical intimidation, verbal and psychological warfare, or gossip. It can take the form of freezing somebody out. It can also be done with body language and facial expressions. It can be done at all times and by all ages from zero to 103. (Principal 3)

Teachers and principals used word associations and definitions that coincided with those used in research: such words were aggression, intimidation, ostracizing, rumours, and gossip.

Appendix L contains some of the words most commonly used.

Some teachers, like Dorothy, offered definitions of bullying that were similar to those of the principals.

I think anything that's harassment that is continual, repeated over again, that somehow takes away from that individual, prevents them from doing what they would normally do, or prevents them from thinking about themselves in a positive light is bullying, if it has long-term consequence on that individual, and it doesn't have to be physical; just being left in silence by peers. (Dorothy)

Power imbalance between bully and victim. The teachers engaged in lively discussions over important components of the definition. Most of them agreed that the main feature of bullying was the imbalance of power between bully and victim.

I really think power is the big thing . . . it's as simple as "I'm bigger than you and I'm going to get my way." This is a form of bullying. . . . But I think any time people use their physical strength or mental ability to empower themselves over someone else, and belittle another individual, it's a form of bullying. (Jackie)

A bully can demand a dollar off a kid and it can be done without any aggression whatsoever. There may be no violence or physical aggression involved but it's certainly a form of bullying. I don't think it's all about aggression, it's more about power. (Dr. Bob)

When interpreting bullying interactions, some teachers may fail to consider the psychological impact of bullying. In the above quote, Dr. Bob did not seem to recognize the implied threat of violence to the victimized student.

One teacher agreed with the idea of power as the most important goal sought by the bully but she extended the hypothesis further to include the use of power to secure social status and acceptance.

I think it's a power issue. Kids who are bullying . . . or anybody who is bullying someone else to a certain extent is looking for power over that person, or power within a group. . . . People who bully someone in a group, for instance, or outside of a group may be looking for acceptance from the other group. So, by bullying somebody else, they're accepted by another group. (Candy)

Candy's thoughts resonated with my own experiences as a teacher. One year, I came to understand the phenomenal power a student can have on peers in his own pursuit of popularity and acceptance. I had accepted Tom³ into my Grade 6 class during a process of restructuring the school model. Tom's previous teacher admitted that he was unable to deal with Tom effectively. The boy's power did not come from physical strength; in fact, he was slim and average in height for his age group. His power stemmed from an elusive quality that had the students vying for his approval. Bullying was a game he excelled at and he surrounded himself with a team, including a physically powerful boy, which gradually gained power. Over time, I witnessed my class change; my students had become torn between my approval and Tom's approval.

Distinguishing bullying from peer conflict and rough play. The distinction between normal peer conflict and bullying was not clear to the participants. One principal appeared to have made parameters for such a distinction.

Bullying is persistent and pervasive. That's the way I see it. So that if a child has a disagreement with another child and it's isolated or may occur infrequently, then it

³ A pseudonym.

certainly isn't bullying. However, when the demands are persistent and when they're frequent and a child is targeted, that's what I consider bullying. (Principal 8)

Principal 8 distinguished bullying from peer conflict by relying on the frequency of the act. However, although frequency has always been recognized as one of the indicators of bullying, it does not address single cruel acts that meet all the other distinguishing characteristics of bullying. Many times in my work as a behaviour consultant for students with disabilities, I observed students who were victimized because of their vulnerability. One could easily distinguish bullying from conflict from the first incident. In my view, when such interaction results in distress for only one person to the amusement of the others, unequal levels of power and affect, which are the hallmarks of bullying, are indicated. I recall one incident, in which a wheelchair-bound adolescent was teased and taunted with a lighter by one of his peers. In this single incident, the boy's hair caught fire while the bully laughed. Clearly, the interaction was neither conflict nor disagreement but an obvious case of bullying. Waiting for a repetition of the cruel action to determine if it was bullying, would have been contraindicated.

Several teachers discussed difficulties they faced on a daily basis in distinguishing between bullying, peer conflict, and rough play. To them the lines between these were so blurred that it was hard to distinguish between them. They believed that the norms of play had changed; rough play was now what children learned from the environment and media.

When I go out there [into the schoolyard], I see all my class pushing. If they're throwing a ball they're whipping it, and whipping it at each other. "It's a game, Miss." I think it becomes the norm of play. Play has changed. It's rough play. They see it on TV, and imitate it. (Queenie)

So when we see kids bullying others in the yard, they don't see anything wrong with it because this is the message that they're getting from our society. (Nadia)

A lack of precise definition. Another teacher believed that such confusion was more directly related to the lack of a precise definition to be followed by teachers and students alike.

I think some kids are bullying and don't necessarily know that's what it is that they're doing because it's never been addressed in such a manner. (Kathy)

This indicates not only lack of precise definition of bullying for teachers to follow, but also a lack of understanding of the parameters of bullying by students. This lack was evident in some groups I addressed about bullying, particularly when dealing with groups of girls who engaged in excluding a student. Several members felt privileged to be considered members of the group but were really on the periphery of it. Such girls were often unaware of the impact of the group behaviour. They were more interested in following the group in order to continue to belong than in analyzing the consequences of their action or its impact on those that were victimized.

The more teachers discussed examples of bullying from their daily lives at school, the more they seemed to grapple with inconsistencies and vagueness of what constitutes bullying versus interactions that could indeed be considered typical peer conflicts. Although the majority of teachers were well aware of the harmful effects of bullying and the importance of tackling such a disturbing phenomenon in schools, getting lost in the details of an incident and differences of opinion amongst teachers were identified as possible detriments to effective intervention. The need for an objective, concise definition that can be used by all teachers was highlighted as an important determinant of consistency in the identification of bullying incidents.

[We need] a definition so that way you've got an objective framework that works for me, for you, and for everyone. If bullying means something to me but it means something different to Teresa, then we're going to have a problem especially in a school environment. If I'm on yard duty and I see a student doing something and in my opinion really isn't bullying, but when Teresa gets out there and it is: the students are going to be getting conflicting messages. . . . We need some sort of objective definition so that everyone can use it. Everyone knows what it is, there's no question. (Dorothy)

I think the key here is actually to come up with a definition of what is bullying, so that way we can use it as a point of reference and apply it to any situation that happens in the classroom. . . . In order to be better able to deal with bullying, I think, we have to actually say what bullying is so that way we can take this definition of what it is and say, "Okay,

does it fit here?” “Yes?” Well, then that’s bullying and then consequences follow from that line of action that we have to take. (Franz)

Settings

“It’s everywhere.” The schoolyard, the classrooms, the hallways, and the washrooms were all implicated as popular school settings for bullying. As one teacher exclaimed, “Everywhere, it’s everywhere! It’s a bigger problem than people realize!”

You see it in the classroom: writing notes in the classroom, leaving kids out of groups. (Helen)

As a researcher, I had wondered whether principals would be more guarded in their responses with regards to the prevalence of bullying. Admitting that bullying is widespread is an admission of schools’ failure to control such detrimental behaviour. Interestingly, principals were as candid as teachers in discussing their belief that bullying happens in all schools.

We keep people on short leashes here [in our school]. There’s so much intervention that I don’t see much of it. I mean sometimes it just goes underground and then you’ve got to start burrowing. It’s there, it’s there. You have to be a detective and always be alert. There is no school where there’s no bullying and there’s no preventative program that will eradicate it! (Principal 1)

Principal 1, having been an administrator in several schools, was emphatic that bullying happened in every school, whether overtly or covertly, and that intervention programs would never eradicate it. They might even drive bullying underground, requiring even more effort by educators to uncover such interactions.

Schoolyard. Several teachers addressed the bullying that takes place in the schoolyard, which, although widespread, goes mostly unreported.

I think that the control is fine in the classroom; however that doesn’t take care of the bullying situation. That situation still exists once those children leave the classroom . . . once you remove that setting to a schoolyard, like everything that was in place in the classroom disappears. Children engage in their bullying situations. It’s camouflaged, I think maybe, in the classroom. Once they have that free space of no direction, then it’s still there. (Jackie)

Jackie spoke of the controlled environment in the class “where everything is fine on the surface” but where bullying seemed to brew under the students’ controlled exterior. Perhaps nonverbal messages and body language not easily deciphered by adults were signals for what was about to happen in the schoolyard.

One teacher expressed frustration with the overwhelming number of physical bullying incidents that took place in the schoolyard on daily basis.

There’s so much violence out there [at recess time] that it becomes so hard to control. When the kids are playing, they’re not just playing. They’re shoving, they’re pushing, they don’t know how to play . . . , and I must say, “keep your hands to yourself” the whole time, to maybe every kid I encounter . . . Then when somebody gets hurt, “Well, we were just playing tag.” Lining up, lining up is huge because, “I was here, I’m going to shove you out.” Well . . . it’s everywhere . . . You’d have to send like 50 kids to the office at one time. You’re seeing it everywhere. (Queenie)

Images of the schoolyard and recess frenzy came rushing back as Queenie spoke. As a teacher, I had witnessed many similar events. Being on yard duty was similar to being a referee in a hockey game where things happened so fast that, by the time the teacher made it to the action scene, things were covered up and denied. The bell signalled the end of recess and another opportunity for bullying amidst the chaos of lining up occurred. Teachers were usually rushing to be in their classes on time and had little time to pay attention to such incidents. Moreover, attempting to sort out an incident, regardless of its nature after recess was over, was an insurmountable feat. It was evident to me that many teachers learned to move on. They had to carry on with their duties and there was no time to look back and attempt to gather evidence about such incidents.

Some teachers said that environmental factors such as limited space could possibly contribute to the increase in bullying.

I’ve noticed that in the past three years our students have become more aggressive. I truly believe it’s due to the environment [the school was under construction], the lack of space for play outside. I really do believe that because I have noticed a humongous increase in violence in the last three years. (Laura)

Grades. Most teachers thought that bullying started as early as Grade 1 and saw mostly physical bullying at that age. As students got older, bullying would increase and become more vicious particularly in Grades 4, 5, and 6. Bullying might decrease by Grade 8.

I have a Grade 5 group and it just seems like it's the tip of the iceberg, even Grade 4s and then it [bullying] just goes on. I think they mellow out a little bit somewhere in Grade 8. They're really cruel when they're in the Grade 5, 6, to each other. (Mary)

However, many Grade 8 teachers reported the prevalence of social and emotional bullying, indicating a more subtle and less detectable type of bullying in intermediate grades.

I think physical injury is the most obvious one. I think a lot of other types of bullying, like exclusion, don't very often get reported. You might get it once in a while but I'm sure there are a lot more cases of that happening. The term is "so-and-so is a loner" and so doesn't hang around with other kids. Well, it may be because they don't have a choice. (Franz, Grade 8 teacher)

Impact

Safety and security. Most importantly, participants focused on the negative impact of bullying on innocent students. For the targeted students, bullying interfered with the school experience and threatened their sense of safety and security.

Yes, some of them would be just devastated. I mean the fear of coming to school would be heightened and would deliberately not come to school, so that they don't have to face the peers. (Kathy)

Academic progress. Teachers acknowledged that bullying interfered with students' academic progress. They believed that being part of such interaction, regardless of the role, created a distraction from classroom instruction.

When there's bullying going on in the classroom, they're not concentrating on your math anyway. They're all looking at each other . . . and passing notes and whispering . . . They're not concentrating on geography and theorem. (Nancy)

My own experiences confirm that students who are bullied are anxious and distressed which in turn interferes with their motivation and ability to concentrate and understand academic

material. For bullies, having control over social interactions presents them with a much more exciting option than engaging in learning and curriculum-related activities.

Psychological Effects of Bullying

One of the major findings of this study was its highlighting of adverse psychological effects of bullying on those who are victimized.

Long-lasting effects. Participants endorsed the long-lasting nature of these psychological effects. Two male teachers, who disclosed having been physically and emotionally bullied by their fathers throughout their childhood, acknowledged having had lifelong personality and behavioural idiosyncrasies related to being bullied in their childhood. Both admitted to having great difficulty accepting suggestions, criticism, or direction by anyone including their superiors at work. They emphatically endorsed the potential lifelong psychological differences that victims may incur as a result of bullying.

So it's a really strong matter of respect that has been ingrained in me and it's almost a defiance I developed as a child that I will never have anyone tell me what to do. It's a rebellion, I would imagine to the day I die. (Sam)

It's odd because I have the exact same thing. I would bend over backwards and do anything for anybody if you ask. If you tell me, I've got a problem with that. I have a big problem with that. In a way I felt I was being dictated to, then I would rebel. It's odd, a strange thing. It's the residual effect of being pushed around. I'm glad Sam said that because I feel the exact same way. These kids that are going through these problems are going to have these lifelong scars that are going to affect them. It's strange, on my report cards, always "oppositional to authority." (Adam)

As a psychotherapist, I have come across many cases illustrating the lifelong scars of bullying. One beautiful, gifted young woman in high school suffered from extremely low self-esteem because of being bullied throughout elementary school. When asked to rate her appearance on a scale of 1 to 10, she rated herself as 2. The same young woman was rated as a 10 by all those close to her. She engaged in changing her appearance periodically and dyed her blonde hair black in order to fit in. She was depressed and continued to experience difficulties

with relationships with her peers. Another young woman in her 20s, who had a history of being bullied in elementary school, suffered from social anxiety related to communicating with others at the work place. Her greatest fear was being laughed at and mocked by others.

Exclusion and withdrawal. Several participants reported how exclusionary tactics negatively affected students' self-esteem, sometimes causing students distress about going to school.

In my first year of teaching, I had to deal with some bullying instances where it was students that were friends. . . . It was so easy for them to join together, join forces, and decide that they were going to leave one student out. All of a sudden they didn't want to be her friend and then they started picking on her and bullying her, name calling. . . . Yet day after day, this one little girl, her self-esteem and everything was just slowly disappearing . . . and slowly it just killed the little girl emotionally to the point where she would come to school crying. (Sunshine)

Students who were excluded often became isolated which often continued for several years. Prolonged exclusion was thought to alter behaviour and personality. Such students were described as withdrawn children who attempted to avoid the schoolyard and opted to help the teacher indoors.

Sometimes the victim of bullying you notice, you have to pick up on it, they want to stay in. They're wandering the school, they're not going outside but then you realize "wait a minute; it's a beautiful day, go outside." Sometimes you find out that maybe they've been picked on. . . . Sometimes you'll find out afterwards that it's because their friends are making fun of them. They're not feeling accepted by their peers. So that's their only way out. Instead of standing in the corner by themselves, they're inside as an excuse to be less noticed. (Candy)

Teachers reported that withdrawal could often become habitual until these students no longer attempted to be part of any group, which often earned them such labels as "loner," "odd," or "eccentric."

I think we have those euphemisms for different people that probably are more a result of bullying. Maybe in some cases you may have a kid in Grade 6 or 7 who's "a loner" but maybe the bullying created that loner. Maybe that happened when he was in Grade 2 or 3. It may be actually not going on anymore. It's just become the norm that he doesn't hang around with the kids. You don't have to bully him anymore because you did such a good job when he was in Grade 2. Well, now he's in Grade 8 and he just knows there's no

point. The other kids have no interaction with him at all. I think even as adults sometimes we tend to look at that “loner” and we see them as sort of a little different, a little bit eccentric, a little bit odd. I think that sometimes we just fall into the same trap. . . . Now it’s just the norm for this child to walk around the schoolyard by themselves because no one else will talk to them. It may not have to be going on at this particular time.
(Principal 4)

I resonate with these experiences. One student that I had counselled through Grades 6 and 7 had had a difficult childhood, and her appearance and social mannerisms departed from the typical “cool” teen. For this, she was excluded and avoided. The more she was excluded, the less she wanted to mingle and, in turn, the more she was considered odd. Both her Grade 6 and Grade 7 teachers joined the students in their thinking. Her Grade 6 teacher once reprimanded her, in front of me, for picking up and handing back a binder that had been dropped by one of her peers. The teacher turned to me and in front of the whole class yelled, “I’ve told her a million times not to touch their stuff.” When I looked at her inquiringly waiting for the punch line, she added, “No one wants her to touch their stuff. . . . They think she has cooties!” Her Grade 7 teacher refused my offers to run an intervention program aimed at helping this student assimilate into the class. He thought that she “brought it upon herself.” Even the principal could not help me change these teachers’ attitudes. Eventually, I recommended to the father to transfer his daughter to another school where she might have a better opportunity to be included socially, which he did.

Types of Bullying

Many types of bullying were identified by teachers.

We see bullying that varies from very subtle to very aggressive, violent, and intense and everything in between. . . . Everything from quiet intimidation, eye rolling, sort of a quiet ganging up on a student, threatening, demeaning, degrading, and everything in between.
(Rose)

Teachers were explicit about the insidious nature of bullying and the subtle tactics that are used by the students to keep the teachers in the dark.

It can be sneaky, hidden, teachers might not notice. Kids will do it behind the teacher’s back when she’s not looking and you’re not even aware sometimes that it’s going on and

then you might find out from the parent that one of the children is being bullied. Underhanded and sneaky! (Sunshine)

The influence of the community on students' behaviour was discussed. Some teachers proposed that the type of community governed the type of bullying that might take place. From their experiences, they concluded that students from affluent communities tended to resort to social and emotional bullying, while their counterparts from communities with lower socioeconomic status (SES) tended to engage more in physical bullying.

This is my sixth [year teaching] and thinking back to the different areas. There are different types of bullying as Dorothy said, the more affluent the community, the type of bullying seems to be more exclusion. Whereas in the lower [socioeconomic groups], it's more physical. That's what I have found. (Wendy)

Gender differences. Participants reported distinct differences in bullying behaviours between males and females. Boys were significantly more likely to exhibit physical bullying which was described as obvious and easily detectable. In contrast, girls resorted to social and emotional bullying and were much more subtle and consistent in their interactions. Most teachers admitted that cues for girls' bullying behaviours were hard to decipher although the effects were not. Participants believed that girls have great expertise and skill in masking their behaviours and deceiving adults.

I think with the boys even if it is a kick or a punch, a physical form of abuse or whatnot, it's not a continuous persistent bullying thing that's going on. With the girls it's more, it's persistent, it's constant, whatever it is, it's constant, and it's bullying. Boys might hate each one day or they think that they're being picked on, and then the next day they're playing . . . they forget about it much easier than females do. Females will go for the jugular. If you confide in someone, the next day they'll just rip you apart. It's very nasty. (Jane)

I just found that with girls it is a social, emotional type of bullying that can last years. You know you teach a child in Grade 4 and in Grade 8 it's still going on. And with boys it seems to be more physical, you know poking each other when they walk by, or tripping each other. (Queenie)

These comments may imply antifeminist attitudes. In their perceptions of girl bullies, teachers used words such as *catty*, *nasty*, and *underhanded*, while in their perceptions of boy

bullies, they used words such as *straightforward* and *upfront*. An analysis of the motivation behind bullying is helpful in understanding what underlies these sets of comments. Bullies of both genders aim to belittle and hurt their victim. However, what is valued and the methods that are most successful in inflicting harm may in fact vary by gender. For example, while boys value physical prowess, girls value friendships and relationships. This may better describe or explain the gender differences in the preferred type of bullying.

I find that especially with girls, they want to be more popular. So they try to pull people over by criticizing other people and bullying other people; intimidating them. (Diane)

Teachers' outlook on gender differences in bullying may be more related to their own ability to intervene in such interactions than it is to actually analyzing true gender differences. While physical bullying is much easier to prove than social and emotional bullying, teachers found dealing with girls' bullying more frustrating.

I think in essence girls are probably much better at it than guys are because I think that they are much more subtle and I think that bullying boy on boy is usually very obvious because it usually is a physical thing or very loud thing. Where I think typically with girls it sometimes tends to look like they're playing. (Candy)

Girls seem to be very good at masking what they're doing where guys it's just being Neanderthals; it just shows all over the place. . . . With girls, sometimes you don't even know it's going on, being bullied, you don't even know it's going on. Where with guys I think they stand out and brawl. Girls tend to hide it too, I guess in the washroom, whatever. But I think boys tend to be a little bit more obvious. (Franz)

One of the methods used by girls for exclusion is nonverbal communication, which is very difficult for adults to understand or detect. A variety of gestures, body language, and eye movements seems to permeate the prepubescent and adolescent girls' culture as part of their bullying language. Such language denotes who is in and who is out of the group.

They look you down; they'll give you that sort of shaking of the head and look you down. (Mrs. D2)

Well, I didn't notice it. I think it is something that I learned very recently, some of the kids in my class have said, "Miss, but don't you notice how she looks us down?" and I said, "What term is that? What is that? I never heard of that." . . . and then they showed

me, they came out and showed me. Well, you know, looking you down and sort of shaking your head . . . up and down kind of “who are you” kind of thing . . . They can be so cruel to each other, so cruel. (Mrs. S2)

A principal of a school in a predominantly Jamaican community provided the following explanation:

Some kids call it the look; the cut-eye. Cut-eye is a Jamaican thing. That is if you want to really be disrespectful to someone, you give them this. (Principal 1)

According to participants, using looks and body gestures has two main uses; to instill fear in victims and to provoke confrontations.

Whatever is the precipitating thing? [The looks and gestures are all] meant to elicit anger and confrontation. (Principal 1)

The one [type of bullying] that’s most damaging is fear of being physically hurt with a look that says “I’m going to get you later.” That I think goes too far. (Dorothy)

According to some teachers, girls are becoming more aggressive and are incorporating physical violence in their bullying approaches. The influence of media was cited as a possible contributing factor.

I’m sure a lot of these kids (boys) were involved in street gangs. I think that the macho image is becoming more prevalent amongst the girls too. They’re more willing to fight and you don’t get the tears as much. (Adam)

I have witnessed girls in inner-city schools who engaged in physical bullying in addition to socioemotional teasing and taunting. Some of these girls were tough and managed to instill great fear in peers. In my experience, most of them came from violent homes or were exposed to violent incidents. I will never forget the petite Grade 7 girl who managed to terrify girls and boys alike. Students refrained from reporting and adamantly refused to testify against her. After much investigation, I concluded that she was so menacing out of a total and dangerous lack of empathy.

Socioemotional bullying. The most difficult type of bullying to detect and control was unanimously found to be social and emotional bullying or *socioemotional bullying* as it was termed by one focus group.

The complexity of socioemotional bullying stems from the difficulties teachers face in attempting to assign blame and clarify all the details. Physical bullying is less of a problem for teachers because physical evidence of bullying becomes an administrative issue to be dealt with by principals and vice-principals.

In my experience, socioemotional girl bullies (particularly those from Grades 6 to 8) indeed inflict much harm on peers by using a variety of tactics including exclusion, rumour mongering, threatening and verbal bullying all at the same time. Several times, girls were suddenly excluded by the group. This was always, however, instigated by the group leader, whose identity was not always common information; teachers were often unaware of the head of the group. Several girls who were bullied found excuses to skip school. Many such students displayed symptoms of depression and loss of interest in school. Some resorted to unusual behaviours such changing their style of clothing to dressing all in black. These indicators, however, were not clear to many teachers who had multiple duties and tasks to juggle.

Emotional! Emotional bullying I think is hard because it's very subtle, it's insidious, it can be . . . something you wouldn't even be able to name. A kid comes in and two kids stop talking, or they make a face, or they alienate a child. There's no action to really make them accountable. You can't say to a parent "well, she looked the other way."
(Principal 1)

In this study, teachers noted that social and emotional bullying tactics were observed to be the bullying methods of choice used more frequently by girls. At the same time, they emphasized the serious nature of social bullying and the challenge of detecting such behaviours.

I've had situations where I've had to involve other resources, social worker, guidance counsellor, and so on. Probably the most difficult to detect would be social bullying. We could have exclusion, gossiping, rumours. . . . I find that females are usually quite good at

doing that, excluding other females from their group. It can be very subtle in the way they do it. So I would say that's probably the most difficult to detect. (Principal 10)

Girls were reported to use more covert and subtle forms of emotional and social bullying, including rumour spreading, malicious gossip, and friendship manipulation. They were described as inventive and malicious in spreading rumours, threats, and ostracizing others. Such methods made it more difficult for teachers to intervene.

Then you get girls in Grade 5 and 6 who are excluding, making each other cry, playing each other against each other, making sure that nobody knows the truth because it's conceived in dishonesty. In order to keep the secrets, you've got the stories all confusing so nobody knows what's really going on. That's really dangerous and really hard to figure out. You keep digging and digging. It's like a bottomless pit. Whereas physical, you know you see the marks right away, you see the torn clothing. So you can react to that. (Sandra)

For boys it's more physical, it's more verbal in negative ways. Whereas with girls, they could be a little more catty and they will use other people sometimes to help them with their bullying. So they will segregate that person and they won't speak to that person. (Jane)

Girls would go to great lengths to ostracize another student.

So this bully last week called all these girls to say they all had to wear skirts the next day. One student who is the victim was not told. She was hyperventilating the next day. She had a major anxiety attack because she didn't have a skirt on and she was worried about what would happen because she wasn't wearing a skirt. (Rose)

I remember very vividly my first year of teaching. There was a girl in class who had been away for a number of days. . . . A good friend of hers came up to me and said, "I think I know why she's away. None of the girls want to talk to her because so-and-so just formed a club and they don't want anything to do with her." . . . Upon looking through her [the perpetrator's] desk, I found about six booklets and each one had a title at the top called the "I hate . . . fan club." On the inside, there was a whole list of things that you had to do towards the girl in order to be a member of this club. I was stunned. (Franz)

My experience as a guidance counsellor confirms the widespread nature of social and emotional bullying. Girls of all grades engaged in such interactions and the higher the grade level, the more complex the bullying.

Cyber bullying. Social and emotional bullying is often hard to prove due to vague and confusing reports. Cyber bullying, on the other hand, provides a paper trail inviting parents and

principals to intervene. The identities of the perpetrators, however, are usually concealed, creating situations where, despite parents' demands for intervention, teachers and principals are unable to meet such demands.

The teachers unanimously agreed that cyber bullying was one of the most damaging forms of social bullying. They felt that it contributed significantly to victims' sense of insecurity and feelings of persecution. In comparing different forms of bullying, most of the teachers perceived that social and Internet bullying had serious consequences and destructive effects on victims and were as harmful as other forms of bullying, if not more so, because so many students could join in a chat to belittle someone. Moreover, there was no escape from cyber bullying; it could follow victims to many settings.

The amount of damage that's done on the Internet to some of our students, it's brutal. We have one student in our school that has moved schools to our school because of that, but it all followed her. It was the technology. I think that's the most difficult because there's no visible scars, nobody saw it. Everyone thinks the names will mask their identity and who they are. (Mango)

Participants vigorously discussed the anonymity that cyber bullying provides and the problems that spill out into the school environment as a result. As several teachers explained, "Internet bullying is just nasty stuff about people and then hiding under some kind of a pseudonym." "I think that they're using the computer screen, MSN lingo, the chat rooms, as an excuse to start the bullying, to start it, and then it continues at school." Participants said that bullies made creative use of technology, from gossiping on MSN to creating hate websites about other students: "A hate website was a direct bullying of a kid. They named him, drew his picture, the whole bit. It was just about this boy. Sign in and tell us what you think about him." Cyber bullying has offered fresh opportunities for students to brazenly insult, torment, and taunt their victims. It was a good starting point for gathering a group of followers to engage collectively in

bullying one victim, whether at home or school. With geographical barriers down between home and school, bullying could become a continuous affair.

A main concern about cyber bullying was the teachers' accountability in attempting to minimize bullying. They discussed their frustration at being unable to follow up or deal with cyber bullying because of the anonymity provided by this method.

I find a lot of Internet bullying going on these days. . . . Because they conceal who they are and can really intimidate and badger an individual to the point where they're constantly looking around trying to figure out who is doing this to them. It's obviously somebody who knows them. This was an incident that was taking place in our school with parents coming in and trying to figure out, they could surmise who it could be . . . but you can't ultimately prove that it's this individual. That kind of bullying has got to be the worst because you have no idea. (Sarah)

As in other forms of social bullying, girls seemed to be implicated more often than boys. Most teachers find them to be very creative and inventive in the use of technology to bully others.

Girls will take it to another level; girls will take it onto the Internet. They're much more creative than the boys. They could with a very straight face deny it, even though you may have witnessed the whole thing. They're much better at being able to deny it and put on kind of a puppy-dog face with the hope that you're going to be more sympathetic when deep down you know there's a certain malicious nature to it all. (Mrs. S2)

Bullying and Group Dynamics

The old notion of the single, strong bully has little or no chance to thrive in today's schools. Concepts of power are perceived in terms of groups and complex societies. As a guidance counsellor, I most often dealt with group bullying.

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, bullying was referred to as a group phenomenon rather than an individual interaction between a bully and a victim. Teachers and principals alike viewed the need to belong to a group as integral to students' behaviour and experience in school. As one teacher explained, "I think as the children get older, peer acceptance and the peer group is so strong. You do not want to be different in any way from your

peers.” Another said, “As a student, you don’t want to be by yourself. It’s almost scary that they’d be by themselves.” The need to belong to a group was perceived to be so strong that students were believed to conform to any demands placed on them by the groups.

I definitely think there is a group component to [bullying] because through your school years the biggest thing you want to do is belong; fit in. So if it means supporting a cause that may not be a good one but you might be popular for maybe a week or so, you may want to do it. (Sandra)

Students often engaged in highly negative, harmful behaviours so that they might be included in a group.

In any group dynamic you always want to be on the inside and one person in particular is the bully and has power over others, you certainly want to be on that person’s side as a child. If you want to be part of a particular social group and bullying of another person is part of how you stay on the inside of that group, that’s when the group dynamics play on students’ behaviour. (Doug)

As a counsellor, I worked with a girl who was desperately attempting to be a part of a group of bullies. Those girls had been involved in many incidents and delinquent behaviours and were known to school officials and some police officers. My client, on the other hand, came from a stable, middle-class family who espoused high moral values. In order for her to belong to that group of bullies, she took a very drastic measure; she fabricated a story of having been raped on her way to school. This required police involvement and, in her perception, qualified her as a “bad” girl which, she hoped, would have consolidated her status as a group member. Luckily for her, this went beyond her expectations and she was eventually referred for counselling.

Significantly powerful peer-group norms may depart drastically from teachers’ expectations.

It sounds to me like we’re talking about a new culture of students that the cool group means you need to stick with the standards and rules of the group as opposed to what the adults expect from you, or the teachers expect. (Larsson)

Even some students, they want to avoid accolades and praise because they want to have that sense of belonging in that sort of cool group that . . . they don’t want to be called student of the month, or be singled out and told, “You did a good job on this assignment,”

because they want to be able to fit into that borderline type of group that is not necessarily good in school, not necessarily the best behaved. (Sam)

According to some teachers, bullying is often considered a rite of passage into group membership.

I see that when new kids come into a school, they get bullied and they figure that it is the rite of passage into ultimately being accepted. If they report the bullying, they'll alienate themselves and build up that wall. They'll never be accepted. (Lola)

So a Grade 5 might recruit a Grade 4 and say, "If you do this, I'll help you back, and I'll do this for you; you'll be part of the gang." So with them it's a rite of passage. Bullying becomes a rite of passage. (Tony)

The insidious nature of bullying and the reason it continues to thrive among students was also explained in terms of students' desire to belong to the powerful group, as one teacher eloquently explained.

Nobody bullies who figures they can't get away with it. When you're in a group, you've got the power of the group supporting you, hiding you, concealing you, prompting you, propping you, helping you produce the feeling of that group strength and so you figure you can get away with it. The motive is self-gratification, the opportunity is there and the two come together and you have a little mini crime occurring; the crime of bullying. (Irena)

A hierarchy of power seems to emerge within the peer group with the bully as the leader who holds all the power. A bully is believed to engage in acts of intimidation and bullying to assert and maintain power over the group.

I've seen a lot of intimidation. I see it as someone who wants to take leadership in a small group and wants to show his power to that group. So they bully other people to show their group, "Hey, you guys, I am the leader. I am reestablishing that I am the leader" . . . "You follow me so this won't happen to you" kind of psychology. I see a lot of that happening where it's showing their own power within their own group and that's why they're bullying. . . . And it's not like "I want your money, I want this, or I want that from you." It's just to exercise my power, I'm the one you have to listen to and look at. Everyone follow me. (Sam)

Interestingly, bullying *within* the group is also integral to upholding the hierarchy of power and status. Teachers and principals seemed to agree that certain individuals tend to become the recipients of consistent bullying by other members but are, nevertheless, content to be part of the

group. They are perceived to be the lowest in the power hierarchy or on the periphery of the group.

A lot of those kids want to be part of, for some reason, they want to be part of that group that doesn't want them. There's this thing, they want to be part of that popular group even though it makes them miserable. (Principal 3)

They figure that that's their cost for being in the group; being close to the group, being around the group, being insulted or being pushed around, once in a while not being included, but ultimately I'm still hanging around with them. (Dorothy)

Teachers believed that bullying the weakest members in the group established the power hierarchy and reminded everyone of their place and authority within that group.

I think it's also a status. Bullying also happens within their group as well. . . . That's why it's hard to address because it's happening within their own group and it's acceptable within their own group. It's part of what goes on. (Tony)

I think there will always be victims and those victims are often the people who don't have the strength, physically or verbally, to stand up for themselves. Some of those victims will gladly partake in bullying just to get in with a group. If it means being the person involved that the rest of the group will pick on, if it means being accepted by the group to an extent, then they do that as well. (Adam)

Other teachers felt that those who were bullied within the group were not considered members. Rather, they were tolerated as "entourage" as long as they continued to serve as the brunt of jokes, the ones to be pushed around. These students ignored the bullying and seemed grateful to pay the price to belong to what they perceived as the in-group.

Sure, they don't want to be left out. They don't want to be shunned. They don't want to be ostracized, so they go along with being the brunt of jokes or the recipient of a smack or a push because they figure they ingratiate themselves to the group. You're on the periphery, wanting to be part of the group. They're not letting you in but as long as you don't say anything, then okay, they tolerate you. (Lois)

Sometimes the bullies are members of the group that is seen as . . . the group that everybody wants to be . . . the in-group. So, in order to be part of that in-group, you might ignore the snubs or the social bullying. . . . They want to be part of that group; therefore they're not going to say anything. (Mrs. G)

Profile of Bullied Students

Personal Characteristics: Difference

Participants perceived that bullies and their victims combined one or more characteristics that made them prone to engaging in such negative interactions. Becoming a target for bullying was contingent on a number of salient variables, particularly being different in some way from the mainstream. “Often times they’re physically different; like they’re wearing glasses, they attract attention, or they’re verbally aggressive themselves, kind of social misfits, the kid who is interested in reading and stamp collecting and this kind of thing.”

If you are different, you are going to be isolated from the main group. Now whether the main group is an artistic group because you are at a school that emphasizes that, or whether you’re at a downtown school where being like a rapper is in, or just a middle-class school where . . . pink is in now, the hat on the side, loose clothing, . . . that type of thing. Whether you’re different from the main group is going to determine whether you’re bullied or accepted or rejected and ultimately you end up with a group that is like you. (Franz)

I would say that students who are perceived to be weaker, who are not as assertive, who dress differently, who may be a little slower academically, kids who don’t . . . maybe have the best hygiene, kids who are smart, kids who are in the gifted program, kids who are in extended French. There are groups that, or individuals, that will pick on students for any of those reasons. (Mrs. G)

Sometimes the isolated child is picked on because you figure no one will come to their rescue and no one is going to notice because they’re marginalized. (Principal 1)

Sometimes that really popular child is targeted because you just want to take him down a notch or two. (Principal 1)

For students to avoid bullying, they would have to conform to the mainstream trends and beliefs.

You know I have a niece and she’s only five years old. She said to her dad, “You know dad, nobody bothers me because I’m just normal, my hair’s normal, my face is normal, and I can learn, I’m normal.” That whole idea of who is normal, makes kids targets . . . But God help the kid who’s different in any way, they become the prime targets; anybody who has anything different about them. It’s so subtle. (Adam)

Throughout my career at schools and my work with children with disabilities, I have witnessed students being bullied and targeted for a variety of reasons. It was quite bewildering to discover students being humiliated over minor things such as their unusual name or the kind of lunch they brought to school. Some were bullied for physical differences such as height or weight while others were targeted for their accomplishments. An irate mother once came to my office to complain about the Grade 8 students who bullied her daughter for being overweight. She came equipped with the derogatory notes and drawings of her daughter being passed around in class. The inhumane nature of this interaction was understandably beyond the mother's comprehension. In another example, for most of the school year two Grade 7 girls who were academically accomplished, socially well liked, fashionable, and good looking suffered from being bullied by a group of girls. They confided in me after several months of harassment and taunting. After a great deal of communication and investigation, I found out the group leader. She was an athletic, heavy-set girl with a tomboy attitude and a strong personality. After several counselling sessions, she was able to admit that she suffered from an eating disorder, was depressed about her weight, and wished she could look like those two girls.

Appearance

The results highlighted the importance of dressing according to the latest trends in fashion and the significance of labels and designer clothes to a young population. According to teachers, a student was often teased because he "isn't wearing the right clothes, or doesn't have the right kind of basketball or the right kind of cap." "Sometimes children who are not dressed a certain way . . . certain shoes, certain running shoes that everyone had, and if you didn't have those running shoes, then you were not part of the in-crowd." Children and youth who failed to adhere to such societal standards could be prime targets for bullying. Girls were identified to be more involved in this type of bullying than boys.

We used to have that with kids who'd say "oh you got your clothes at Value Village." I think even in the primary grades, this was a Grade 1 class where a little girl came home crying because she'd worn the same outfit twice in the one week. Even when they're little, they're focused on trends, especially the girls. I don't think the boys seem to care as much. But the girls will notice these things. (Candy)

And by association if you were not wearing what they're wearing, you're not part of their group and therefore an outsider, not one of them, a potential target somewhere down the line for being bullied because you don't conform. You're not like them. (Fiddlehead)

Weakness

Bullies often attacked the physically or emotionally weak. One teacher explained, "You need to bully somebody you know you can beat. Bullying is rarely to pick on somebody or do anything to somebody who they think they're going to be challenged by."

Sensitivity was identified as a compounding factor. "As far as I can see it's starting in Grade 1 even, it's where you see it building, and if that child is more sensitive, you can see that it upsets them. That child will become a target for them."

"Physical size and being of small stature . . . just being very much taller or shorter than the rest of the kids" were emphasized as significant indicators by these two teachers.

They'll bully somebody that they know that either won't defend themselves or doesn't have the capability to defend themselves. Because nine times out of ten, the most popular, biggest boy in Grade 8 isn't going to be bullied by somebody. They're going to bully the same boy that's been bullied every day at recess, the little guy that wears the same clothes every day that maybe weighs 50 pounds less than everybody else and is this high. It's a consistent pattern. (Candy)

Kids that are a lot bigger and are more physically mature, they tend to prey on the younger kids that are more sensitive, or are physically smaller . . . You know David and Goliath mentality starting already, as early as the primaries. (Nell)

Communication Skill

Several participants endorsed the significant benefit of communication skills. Weakness in this area was perceived to negatively influence the students' ability to defend themselves; hence, they might potentially become targets for bullying. Being a passive victim was a learned behaviour seen to be closely linked to weak verbal and communication skills. One participant

questioned, “What will the victim tolerate? When does the victim say ‘enough is enough, I’m not going to take this anymore,’ and stand up for himself or herself? ” On the other hand, provocative victims were perceived to be similarly disadvantaged but could be easily agitated to the point of making unsuccessful attempts to retaliate.

The prime targets are usually people who lack the communication skills, I would say. Because there are many times where kids get into difficult situations and some of them will use humour, some will use their level or ability to communicate extremely well to their advantage, and get out of the difficult situation. Whereas others who become frustrated and lack the skills to communicate properly will turn around and either hit or say inappropriate things, like sexual comments or racist comments. Not necessarily because that’s what they mean, but because they’re so frustrated they don’t know what to do. (Laura)

My experience as behaviour consultant at Erinoak provided much support to these concepts. Students with autism spectrum disorders were prime examples of children with poor communication and social skills. They were often targets for bullying because they had difficulty deciphering bullying interactions. Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) exemplified provocative victims. They were easily angered, unsuccessfully attempted to retaliate, lacked subtlety in communication and, hence, were often perceived by teachers and administrators as the instigators of bullying.

Self-Esteem

Participants engaged in lengthy discussions of the role played by self-esteem. Students with low self-esteem were viewed as targets who allowed others to bully them. They often lacked social support networks which further endangered them.

Students or children with low self-esteem, students that don’t have a mechanism or support system, where they can quickly and easily fall back to and say “this is what’s happening to me,” are the prime targets of bullying. (Mandley)

Students with very low self-esteem were willing to do anything that bullies demanded in the hopes that complying would enable them to be accepted by the group.

There are kids out there who perpetually become the victim because their self-esteem is low they want to be part of whatever group, and they'll give in to anything. They'll give their lunch money; they'll give the answer to a question. They'll do whatever it takes because they think that they'll become part of that group that they idolize because their self-esteem is so low, and as we all have seen in our teaching careers, there's no end to that. (Principal 5)

Conversely, high self-esteem and effective communication skills were described as significant aspects of bully prevention. Students who commanded such qualities were referred to as strong, well-adjusted students who were never bullied despite physical or other differences.

I know of a few kids in the intermediate division who I would have thought for sure . . . would be bullied. And they're not. They're actually well-liked by the other kids. . . . Yes, they are smart, and yes, they are quiet, but they're strong children and they don't do it in an aggressive way but they just don't get picked on and in fact sometimes they're protected more than anything. It's the ones that have self-esteem issues that fall into being victims. If you're weak then they prey on you. (Mrs. S1)

The well-adjusted child that can interact with everyone is probably the least likely because they're the ones that won't necessarily hang with one clique and would also be able to call the child that's trying to bully them and say, "stop it, I don't like that. If you do that, I'm going to tell somebody about you." So that's the kind of child I think isn't necessarily targeted . . . I think the less status you have, the easier you are to be picked on because you're not going to have people coming to rescue you. (Dorothy)

In my experience, self-esteem provided students with the confidence needed to be assertive which invariably resulted in the bullies curtailing their efforts or redirecting their efforts to a different target. Students with high self-esteem were also more likely to seek help and to report the perpetrators. Most importantly, self-esteem appeared to be a magical quality that contributed to the popularity of the student and the desire of others to befriend the individual. Hence, students with high self-esteem not only were less likely to be bullied, but were also usually surrounded by loyal friends which served as a protective factor.

Vulnerability

No single variable in itself—whether size, stature, poor communication skills, low self-esteem, not following trends in fashion, being sensitive, or being different in some way—could predict whether a student would be bullied. Rather, a complex interrelation of two or more

variables seemed to be at the heart of potential victimization. In this study, teachers attempted to grapple with this complexity. They explained the interrelationship of variables as *vulnerability*, and described a vulnerable student as an “easy mark” effortlessly detected by bullies.

You have some kids that don't let that first or second comment get to them and then it stops because they are able to handle it and the bully doesn't get to them. Those kids who are secure in themselves, who have a good sense of who they are, who are focused on what they're doing in the classroom, who have good relationship with friends, they don't get affected by a bully . . . Bullies aren't going to go after those kids. They are not vulnerable. Whereas they may know who the vulnerable ones are. (Diane)

Yeah, you look at someone, you say they're perfectly fine, but there's something very subtle, subtly different about them, the kids who are just a slight bit off. . . . It doesn't really take much, I think, for a bully to target the vulnerability in someone and be able to go after it. Generally a bully will never pick on somebody bigger than themselves or someone who can outsmart them. It has to be somebody that they can dominate, threaten, hurt, someone who's intimidated by them, somebody they induce some fear in. (Sandra)

Bullies seemed adept at pinpointing students who were vulnerable; they could be easily dominated and victimized based on a complex and delicate balance of several variables. In my experience, bullies seemed proficient in choosing vulnerable students. Nonverbal messages may play a role in communicating students' level of vulnerability and their lack of power. Since a crucial element in the definition of bullying was the concept of power imbalance, it follows that bullies choose their victims on this basis.

Disability

Some participants viewed children with disabilities as obvious and easy targets for bullying.

It's clear when you have DD [developmentally delayed] kids or kids with multiple handicaps. You've got kids in special ed, who are intellectually delayed. It's quite obvious that these kids cannot do it so they become the targets. (Diane)

If children notice some physical difference in others, they tend to focus on that and they start picking at that person, using words or using anything to taunt them, to make them angry, to see an outburst. When they've achieved that, you hear the snickering, the laughter, you know they've reached their goal. (Queenie)

The type and severity of the disability seems a primary influence for bullying. The teachers emphasized that students tended to be more tolerant, helpful, and protective of their peers who had severe, visible disabilities as opposed to those that were mild or invisible. The participants had witnessed many such acts of kindness and compassion by students.

I think other students would definitely frown on a student picking on another student who has a definite, visible disability. I've been in schools where we've had classes where the students are obviously very different and students, I think, are a little more protective of those students. They won't allow students to make fun of them. (Nancy)

At Erinoak, I worked as a behaviour consultant and advocate for students who had severe disabilities. Those who were medically fragile or had multiple disabilities tended to be bullied less than students who had less visible disabilities. One, however, must remember that the main premise of bullying is overpowering the victim through fear or ridicule. Students with severe disabilities often suffer complete lack of communication skills which would render such bullying interaction futile. As well, those who are consistently bullied often do not report it. An example that comes to mind is a student in Grade 11. He had a brain tumour that affected his growth, appearance, and learning but not his speech or mobility. His mother came to see me, devastated after recently finding out (through a friend) that her depressed son had been bullied for a long time. When I asked him how long he had been bullied, his answer was, "All my life." He had been teased, mocked, locked out of classrooms, and physically harassed, yet very few people knew about it.

Several severe disorders are not necessarily as visible to others. These less visible disabilities, such as mild intellectual disability or learning disabilities, increased the students' vulnerability for bullying.

Well, kids who are not developmentally delayed, who are not severely disabled, who can cope in a regular classroom, who possibly go to special education, those students though are picked on. But a student with a severe disability, I find that they're protected a little more. (Jane)

Learning-disabled kids may not know how to socialize or how to join a group and are awkward and get picked on. Learning disability kids at times don't have those very quick witted socializing mannerisms. They can easily become targets. (Mrs. D2)

Race and Ethnicity

There was some controversy over the connection of race and ethnicity to being bullied. Some teachers and principals believed that in the multiracial Toronto society, students of different races and ethnic backgrounds had learned to fully integrate.

They don't have a concept of skin colour for the most part. I'm using my own situation which tends to be inner-city multiracial. I find for the most part this amazing harmony and amazing integration. (Twofour)

I find in our school, in general, racial issues are not a major deal. They are so used to being with one another as kids, they don't see colour, they just see kids. I don't see racial status as an issue. (Sandra)

I haven't seen any of that bullying based on socioeconomic status nor have I seen it based on race. (Principal 5)

Others disagreed, perceiving race to be a major determinant of bullying interactions.

I think that race, gender are big issues in bullying. I really think when it comes down to it, if a child wants to . . . whatever it takes to empower himself over another child, physical size, . . . make fun of his shoes he's wearing, or make fun of the colour of his skin, or whatever. I really think that race is a big issue. (Dr. Bob)

You've got your racial, ethnic . . . that's there. You're in a predominantly school where most of them are Mexican, you can have the White kids picked on, you can have the black kids picked on . . . So it does also run on ethnic grounds, depending on where you live in the city. (Principal 2)

Interestingly, one principal of colour cited examples of bullying based on race amongst black students.

In this school I think we've become quite integrated. We have so many different kids. In the flags outside, we've 65 flags, kids from different countries. I think that whole racial stuff, I think, is not . . . is not as overt, the colour thing. But you know what I do see is a lot of black on black bullying. It's the kid who does a little bit better; he's a little bit smarter, or trying to break out of this. . . . There's a reprisal for that, "Who do you think you are? You think you're better than us?" (Principal 1)

Several teachers agreed. They explained that the shade of the skin colour was used as basis for bullying. Darker shades of skin were used as grounds for bullying.

I've had kids say, "Your skin is not as pretty." . . . Black little girls compare their skin colours . . . and the darker ones are never considered as popular as the lighter girls. (Theresa)

I remember teaching at a school that was predominantly black where the kids would compare colours. It would be the Caribbean kids, the children of Caribbean descent, who would say, "My skin's lighter so I'm better than the African kid," whose skin would be darker. (Cassandra)

Sexual Orientation

Participants had different perceptions about what bullying intent to assign to verbal teasing and exclusionary behaviours towards students who might appear to have different sexual orientation. Several participants, particularly those who taught at the primary level and early junior grades, said young students might use the word *gay* as a derogatory term of belittlement without understanding its full connotations.

Grade 4 students, they don't really know about the sexual orientation to be associated with being gay. They're using that term because it's a derogatory term which means power over another kid who they feel is inferior to them, so they're calling that kid *gay* because they heard it on *The OC* [a television show] the night before. (Fiddlehead)

I don't think they realize that they're referring to the person's sexual orientation. They think they're just calling them a bad name. So at this stage [primary] I don't think they quite understand that. But it's already in their language and it's not being used in a positive way, or is a positive term, it's a negative one. (Rose)

Other participants, however, reported that even at such a young age, children noticed atypical gender expression. Boys who displayed qualities, characteristics, traits, mannerisms, and other behaviours, more commonly associated with females, drew a great deal of attention from peers. The children's questioning of these behaviours might in turn set the stage for bullying.

And sometimes they'll ask the child directly, "Why do you walk like that? Why do you talk like that? Why are you using your hands like that?" So that the child now sees themselves as doing something that isn't normal because it's being pointed out . . . in a way that might start teasing. (Lola)

Others argued that children of most ages have a basic understanding of what it means to be gay which provides them with grounds for teasing and verbal bullying.

There's definitely bullying, especially teasing boys about being gay. Some of the boys that may be trying to find their identity, and there's a very good chance that they are [gay], excluding them or making fun of them. Then the odd time too, with girls over their sexuality, that they're not feminine enough. (Principal 4)

According to many teachers, feminine qualities in a boy would put him at significant risk for bullying, regardless of his actual sexual orientation. Such qualities would provoke negative reactions from other boys that might lead to bullying and exclusion, particularly in the higher grades in elementary schools.

There are kids that are more male, there are children that are more feminine looking, feminine acting, whether it's the voice or just the way they carry themselves and whether they're gay or not. . . . Other kids pick up on it and those characteristics are not looked on as being good, and children who have those . . . will be picked on and you will be bullied as a result of it. (Dr. Bob)

I have seen cases where the boys look very feminine. In all my years of teaching, yes, they are being bullied; the name calling and made to feel that they don't belong and don't have any friends, and the boys would not play with them. The young boy will play with the girls and will be at ease. (Mrs. D1)

Some teachers and principals did not react strongly to boys being excluded for having more feminine and less macho, athletic qualities. Rather, they considered exclusion to be classmates' reaction to a peer's atypical interests.

He's always the last one to get chosen for the team. . . . You know, part of it's for their physical appearance and part of it is for the fact that . . . the boy is not that masculine and athletic . . . But, it's not direct bullying. I suppose, it's kind of more subtle. But what do you do? There is no name calling per se, it's just kind of more being ignored, as opposed to being called names or teased. It's more or less as if he's not really there. (Mrs. G)

Well, this kid plays with girls so other boys are shunning him . . . but I don't know if it's bullying or if it's just they choose not to play with that particular student. (Jane)

However, some teachers expressed dismay over such social shunning. They felt these boys were missing out on socializing at school and would attempt to intervene to give them the opportunity to play with other boys. They felt that a boy's peer group might spend most of their recess time on sports, while such boys were excluded and ended up trying to spend more time around teachers.

I had a kid, a little boy, who showed very feminine tendencies. In the schoolyard he'd walk with me at recess. The boys sort of left him out because they played rougher sports. (Theresa)

Most teachers identified sexual orientation as a definite cause for bullying. Exclusion, ridicule, and verbal abuse were the chosen forms of bullying rather than physical harassment.

This happens more in Grade 7 and 8 . . . where the young man . . . has "gayish" behaviours . . . feminine, very much feminine behaviour. Definitely bullying happens. . . . The other kids really, really will pick on that and they, unfortunately, will abuse them. There's where your mental ridicule comes in at times. I haven't seen physical in any schools I've been in but I know that mentally that's where kids really become verbally cruel with someone of that sexual orientation. (P. P.)

Teachers emphasized that students who were perceived as gay were invariably bullied, but some principals denied having had experiences with this type of bullying. Two elementary school principals did not deny that this type of bullying took place but, nevertheless, seemed unaware of its presence.

No, I can't say that I've seen that. Not in my experience in elementary schools. But I'm sure that it's there. I'm sure it's there. (Principal 5)

I can't say that I've seen anything like that. I've seen kids tease because a boy, for example . . . because he has more feminine actions or more feminine voice patterns. I've seen that but that's not necessarily sexual orientation but it's a perceived sexual orientation. And that's usually in the older grades again, that would be the intermediate students. (Principal 6)

While several participants admitted not knowing what to do under such circumstances and what interventions to resort to, a few criticized some of the methods used to alleviate the effects of exclusion. One teacher explained that teachers often sought to address exclusion with further exclusion.

In the school setting, if there's a boy who seems very effeminate, then that person is excluded almost completely in all the activities and during recess or in the yard. I'm witnessing at our school so much of that, that person won't even want to go outside to interact. And they're mocked. The solution is to let that person stay in at recess and go on to the computer. I don't know how that's solving anything. But they're allowing the individuals who are being bullied or mocked to hide. (Tony)

Interestingly, most participants agreed that while feminine qualities served as a significant variable in inviting bullying for boys, masculine qualities in girls at the elementary level had little or no effect on their social relationships. Girls who were tomboys and pursued traditionally masculine interests (such as hockey) were perceived to be more accepted by their peers than were boys with feminine qualities and interests.

I haven't heard girls blatantly attacking another girl in the sense that she's a lesbian or she's gay. We sure hear boys doing it. (Nell)

If you heard it happen once with a girl, between girls, you might have heard it 50 times with guys. It's much stronger on the male side, this fear of being gay, or that somebody that you know or thought of as a buddy at one point, is gay. I don't think it's as big an issue with girls, especially in the elementary age. (Genevieve)

I had a girl last year wanted to look like a boy. She cut her hair short. I thought she was a boy when I first saw her. And everyone just assumed that she was. . . . They called her butch, this, that, whatever. Then . . . she was also cool. But always dressed like a boy, always dressed with the short hair . . . They accepted her even though she was that way. (Mrs. S2)

Boys, on the other hand, had to adhere to the traditional expectations, interests, and rules of manhood. Homophobic concepts permeated the teen boys' culture, according to the teachers. Homophobia and the fear of being perceived as gay were reported to be high only among the male students.

I think it seems to be much stronger with boys because I think a lot of times girls who are more into sports, that phrase that they're a tomboy, is sort of more socially acceptable for a girl to play hockey or whatever. Where if a guy wants to become a ballet dancer, well forget it, this guy's got to be gay, and we don't want to talk to him type of thing. . . . I think there's a big fear because they're very aware of the fact that gays are treated very differently, they're ostracized and everything like that. Amongst girls there doesn't seem to be as big an issue, I think. (Adam)

Several participants explored and questioned the teacher's role in encouraging or discouraging bullying of students with different sexual orientations. Teachers were sometimes held partially responsible due to ignoring such interactions.

Because that bullying is insidious, I think we have a big job to do with this . . . and that is one area that we ignore, we put our head in the sand. We try to think, "Oh it doesn't exist.

Don't talk about this. Don't go there." We look at the number of kids who have been harmed by that kind of behaviour. We're culpable. (Principal 3)

Others reported that some teachers were also guilty of gay-bashing students amongst colleagues in staff rooms, reflecting their own homophobia and low tolerance. Participants questioned those teachers' lack of awareness of issues of liability and ethics.

It's like teachers who gay bash students in the staff room in the public view and have no idea that that is . . . that's a criminal act. (Mango)

And then you have a whole bunch of staff who themselves have this idea [homophobia] and will say negative things to staff members or . . . by their words, are not at all tolerant so they cannot in any way help a child who is struggling with this. Teachers have to be not just educated, they have to be clearly, told clearly, that we don't care what your own political ideas at home are, but when you come across these kids, you cannot show your bias. (Principal 1)

My personal experience in schools confirms the indirect role teachers can play in encouraging bullying of gay students. I found that many teachers held views similar to the students,' particularly male teachers. They might acknowledge that unfortunate situations had been created for those students but they seemed to be rather amused by such interactions. My approaches on behalf of several boys, who were believed to be gay, were often accepted with snickering and half-hearted promises to intervene.

One principal pointed to the contribution and influence of the Catholic religion on how teachers intervened or addressed bullying when gay students are the targets. She denounced the Catholic system for discouraging class discussions, programs, and curricula addressing sexual orientation as a topic.

You know, it's difficult in Catholic schools because the whole thing is underground. The inability of teachers to bring that topic to the fore is, I think, a grave injustice to students. I think when we talk about targets we have had lots of kids who were called "gay." . . . But when teachers cannot speak about that, they don't take it on, and they don't do any education around it, you can't help a child by just saying, "Don't call him gay." By Grade 6 some students, they'll start to show signs and other kids will pick it up. They have this gaydar. Oh, they pick it up! Unless we have programs that allow students to feel good about who they are, understand what is happening to them because they themselves are extremely confused, feel politically empowered to take a stance and say, "whatever I am,

I am that,” we will not be able to help these students. Often we have gay kids who are extremely bright. I think sometimes . . . they end up doing great damage to themselves because there’s nobody there to help them. I mean Catholic schools really need to look at this. . . . I think it’s really dangerous. (Principal 1)

Socioeconomic Status

In general, less was reported by all participants with regards to the students’ socioeconomic status as a variable contributing to bullying. What mattered was how homogeneous or heterogeneous the school population was with respect to SES.

I’m trying to think of students that might be teased because they’re not wearing the right kind of clothing or their shoes are falling apart. But, I think in this particular location, it happens so much that’s more the norm. (Principal 6)

The kids that are coming to school with body odour or that have soiled clothing, that are different from the norm, they suffer, they’re humiliated and it’s a difficult one to tamper with. Because often the parents have been evicted from one place and they’re going to another place . . . (Principal 7)

Profile of Students Who Bully

Teachers and principals engaged in lively discussions about the variables that might influence a bully’s choice of behaviour, such as the quest for power, and the motivation behind those choices. These discussions produced a range of responses reflective of the principals and teachers’ complex perceptions and understanding of these seemingly cruel students.

Personal Problems

Numerous participants endorsed the belief that bullying was a sign or a manifestation of much deeper problems.

I find that most of these students who are doing the bullying are going through their own personal things and they’re just taking out their frustrations on the easiest target that they can. Usually the target they prey on is one that they find acceptable; it’s acceptable to prey on this person because they’re the weaker one. (Wendy)

It’s an easy escape route from problems, not necessarily manifesting what’s really going on internally but just an escape route to maybe other things. It’s a cover-up, maybe avoiding the problems altogether, just what the root of the problem is; their own problems. (Mango)

Some teachers suggested that bullying behaviour might be a façade, covering a variety of personal challenges: feelings of inadequacy, academic difficulties, family problems, or a need for attention. They went further, suggesting that bullying might be a cry for help, which teachers could recognize were they to take the time to attempt to figure out the real problem behind such unacceptable behaviours.

Misbehaving students are misbehaving because they're trying to mask something else; some kind of inadequacy, academically, or some kind of troublesome issues that are happening at home, either they're calling out for attention and it's up to the adult or whoever can figure out what's going on behind the scenes to address it. (Tony)

One teacher warned how easy it was to become enmeshed in confrontations with bullies. She advised teachers to step back from conflict situations and take time to analyze and ponder the student's background and the underlying cause of the bullying. She stated that bullying was often driven by the student's pain from having been bullied in the past or having difficulties in their home life. She suggested that bullies were merely scared children who were reacting frantically to their life situations.

Sometimes it's just on the surface but really . . . you can clash because you think they're trying to overpower you even as an adult. But if you take a step back and look at the whole situation, you know they're just, sometimes they're just a scared little boy or girl. It shouldn't be inexcusable, it shouldn't be excusable but sometimes if you just take that extra five minutes to look at the root of the problem, you'll see that it's stemmed from maybe past bullying experiences, what they're exposed to at home, or whatever. (Butterfly)

I was reminded of a girl who had terrorized her school throughout Grades 6 to 8. She had much potential academically, socially, and athletically but she concentrated her efforts on leading her group in bullying and tormenting others. They acted like a gang, engaging in delinquent behaviours and bullying and terrorizing others. Her teachers and the school administrators were at a loss as to how to deal with her. During counselling, however, I met a sad, bitter little girl who had grown up with a single parent who had multiple partners and five children. They lived in abject poverty and often in fear. She had witnessed her mother's

boyfriend break down their door and threaten her mother with a knife. When I said to her that she should have been playing with dolls, she retorted, “Dolls, Miss! At the age of 5, my father showed me a chunk of drugs and warned me not to eat it if I found it anywhere in the house.”

Such has been my experience with students who bullied. Some were relentless in their pursuit of bullying and appeared heartless and cruel. It did not take long, however, to connect with them; they willingly sought counselling. Most of them had experienced miserable childhoods or witnessed traumatic events at home. They appeared confident, outspoken, and quick to act but these were personal skills they had developed and employed for bullying. It seemed to me that they indulged in bullying to shut out many of their own pains. Many had busy, unhappy homes where they got very little attention. Bullying provided them with a spotlight where they became the centre of attention. Their stories were tormenting and heart wrenching but they did not confide in their teachers or friends. They preferred to appear strong and ruthless.

Teachers and principals analyzed their experiences to explain the need for control and the tough façade that a bully presents. They provided rich explanations of a variety of problems that often plagued students who engaged in bullying. Some participants explained that all individuals need some control and consistency in their life and, when these components are compromised in one setting, students may actively and aggressively seek to have control in other areas. Often, the students’ ability to have some control over their home environment was compromised to a great degree; this was reported to have served as an underlying need to bully.

It just seems that whenever something like that is happening, there’s a control issue. If something is lacking at home, something is lacking someplace, or something has been done to them, physically, emotionally, it just seems that they haven’t been able to manage something else in their life, so they need to control, and if it’s to pick on little Joey, then “that’s what I’m going to do because I don’t have it in this other situation, then I’m going to have it there.” (Laura)

I think it’s just that cycle of “I can’t control one situation; well, I have to control something else” and it’s going to come out aggressively because unfortunately a lot of the time, when we want things done in a certain way, people in general tend to get aggressive

about it and more proactive. No one is going to be waiting around for something to happen, they're just going to go out there and get it. And I think that's what these kids might be doing but it's affecting the weaker children. (Lola)

Extroversion

Not every student who has family problems resorts to bullying. Rather, extroverted students who have the skills to proactively attain their needs seem to be the ones implicated here. In my experience, quiet, introverted students reacted to negative home situations by being depressed and withdrawn. These students were more likely to be bullied than actively seeking to bully others. Thus, it appears that in addition to personal difficulties, students who were likely to bully possessed a certain skill set that allowed them to find satisfaction or compensation in bullying.

Family Cycle

Nonetheless, several teachers felt that the home environment was directly related to the controlling and difficult behaviours that students that bullied exhibited at school. They felt that students who bully may come from homes that tended to be aggressive, lack respect, and where bullying might permeate family interactions. They also suggested that family history might reveal evidence of such cyclical interactions.

People need to understand that bullies are not created at school, they're created somewhere else, but this is the place where we deal with their actions. This is the arena because they're provided with others [students]. (Mary)

Bullies are after control because they don't have any, they have none at home. They're not respected by their parents. . . . Perhaps their parents were bullied by their parents. I mean it's a cycle, it continues. They don't feel they have any power or anything at home so they're going to get it here. (Mango)

Anger

In the context of attempting to regain control, students who bully were reported to harbour a great deal of anger due to the way they are often treated at home. Such anger was perceived as one of the most powerful motivations behind bullying other students. Hence,

bullying in such cases is a release or expression of anger as well as an attempt to control some part of their environment.

If children are treated that way at home, then they will treat others the same way . . . but also if children are very repressed at home and they have all this pent up anger . . . like, you can't do this, you can't do this . . . you have to do your work . . . all night. Then they're perfect angels at home because they are so controlled, then they come to school and they bully other kids to get that anger out because they can't towards their parents. So there are two different situations but again it all stems from the home at that age and I think it probably, at any age, if you look at the child you know what's going on at home. (Wendy)

Wendy emphasized the role of anger as an underlying motive for bullying. Her example, however, implicates another type of family: one that is overprotective and overcontrolling. In this type of family, children are so restricted by rules that do result in stress and anger. Subsequent bullying might be the release of such anger. In contrast, anger can also be a reaction to the many stressors in a disorganized home where parents take no interest in their children's behaviour in school.

When they're angry, they're bullies. When they're bullies, they don't care. Kids will say "I don't care. Nobody cares. My father doesn't care. Go ahead, suspend me; he's not going to come." Then it's a whole different ball game. Then you probably need social services or psychologists. (Principal 1)

Teachers said that bullies did not necessarily come from a lower socioeconomic background. Rather, they suggested, that hostility and anger arising from family relationships were at the root of the problem.

So it's not always having to do with socioeconomic status or having to come from a hostile background, no. Let's put it this way, rich kids can be just as hostile and aggressive as poor kids. (Principal 10)

You know, it depends on how a child has been treated somewhere else. You have kids from very rich areas who end up being horrific bullies and kids who come from extreme poverty who are fantastic, fantastically generous, and kind. I think always . . . I think always it's premised on what happened to that kid. 100% of the time a bully begets a bully. If you've been bullied, the chances are you'll be a bully unless somebody does something to make sure that it doesn't happen. (Twofour)

Disappointment

Participants grounded the anger in numerous examples of negative family relationships: family breakup, separation, and divorce topped the list. Some teachers spoke of the importance of father's presence in the family unit, particularly for boys.

Some kids are extremely angry inside. There's a level of anger when you don't have a father living in the house. A boy craves some male attention. There's phenomenal anger. . . . I saw a lot of behaviour where the kids were extremely angry inside because the mother had left the dad . . . there was extreme anger in what was happening in the family . . . I think that at times home has a lot to do with how a child is reacting. (Dorothy)

They discussed the frustration of children who live with a single parent mother and their disappointment when their fathers do not keep their promises for the weekend.

These boys were so desperate. . . . There were promises that fathers made and that were not kept that caused these kids to react violently, and at times be bullies for other children. "If my father's promised me a bike on my birthday and I'm 10 years old and I don't get that bike on Sunday, on my birthday, and I get to school the next day first person looks at me the wrong way is going to get it." I've seen that. I've seen kids on Monday morning where I would be holding a child down because they were going to hurt themselves or someone else. . . . They're reacting to extreme disappointment and they react in anger. The need for a father to be there for them becomes really paramount. (Candy)

Candy clearly points to the relationship between anger and disappointment and their connection to bullying. Where the family unit is not intact, disappointment in parents can often be an underlying emotion that fuels bullying.

There are days when certain children will come to school angry. As soon as they walk in the room, they're upset, they're angry. You know that something is going to happen. And usually something does happen. Either a fight or . . . something happens. . . . I had one child last year who the father kept disappointing him, time and again. And I knew as soon as he walked in my room, I knew if he was going to have a good day or a bad day. There are times when things that happen at home impact at school. (Queenie)

Much of my experiences in counselling children and adolescents have centred on family breakups and divorce. Children attempt to be resilient, particularly in front of their own parents, but in counselling, a great deal of sadness and disappointment are often revealed. These feelings can influence academic functioning, social interaction, and mood. Many such children show

symptoms of depression;⁴ others resort to externalizing or aggressive behaviours, including bullying.

Domestic Abuse

Another significant variable that was reported to be at the root of bullying was being abused or bullied at home. Participants said that students often mirrored behaviours that they had to endure at home and reasoned that a goal of physical abuse was to maintain or gain control. In turn, these children would grow up with a need to regain control which they would satisfy at school through bullying and controlling others.

It's always a cycle. It's usually someone who is bullying who knows what it's like to be bullied. So if they can take that control and use it on someone else, then they'll do that. They might not have the control at home . . . or children who have been physically abused, or that fear of abuse at home. Well, they can't control those situations but they can control the person who doesn't do too well answering questions in class or needs to leave for an hour every day because they attend a special ed class. (Lola)

Fathers that used bullying as a method of discipline were said to role model control through overpowering their children. Boys who were abused at home were believed to release their anger by emulating their fathers through bullying their peers.

A bully often has no power at home. The father, the male figure, especially in a boy's life, is either very strong at home, won't allow any disagreement or "you do it my way or the highway" sort of thing, or else there's even physical involvement there. So when a child I think is in Grade 1 and 2, they're still too small to really gain power over somebody. They're still the victim themselves. But the anger, I think, in a bully builds and as his or her physical frame enlarges, that anger grows. And then they're in a position by the time they're in Grade 5 and 6 . . . to be as imposing to other kids as their parent was to them . . . the cycle of abuse happens. Domestic abuse, it's repeated behaviour. (Sandra)

Bullying behaviour might be learned through witnessing the father physically bullying the mother, or through being taught that the best defence is an offence.

It's really ingrained in that child for whatever reason, whether it's a safety mechanism, it's better to attack first than to be attacked so that's why I'm a bully, or perhaps it's by

⁴ One has to wonder to what extent the rise in childhood depression is linked to the concurrent rise in the breakup of the family unit.

example. I had a child who witnessed the father beating up on the mother on a regular basis. So that was the way this child dealt with all his conflicts. (Dorothy)

Learned Behaviour

To some participants, bullying in addition to being an expression of underlying troubled emotions, might also be a learned behaviour. In essence, regardless of the feelings provoked by the home environment, children were believed to learn behaviours through parents' modelling. Bullying was just one example of such behaviours. As one teacher said, behaviours that are learned in a child's formative years tend to become deeply ingrained in the child's personality and, hence, are difficult to change.

The kind person, the friendly person . . . there's the bully person. They're all learned. You were born a certain way and you learned things from your environment, your parents. . . . One person's extremely friendly, one person's more giving, and one person is a bully because of what they've seen from their home life and this is just who they are. You've got some type of learned behaviour from age 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 and now they're in Grade 5 and 6. Because this is who they've been, it's going to be hard to change. (Coach)

The more teachers talked about learned behaviours, the more they acknowledged that students mirrored a whole host of negative behaviours their parents exhibited. Lack of tolerance, patience, and forgiveness were mentioned among others.

Also when you meet the parents sometimes you realize why the child is the way he or she is. It's sort of an eye opener. (Queenie)

The tolerance level is . . . is gone. There's no more forgiveness, no more patience. "If you step on my foot while I'm playing basketball, you're going to get it." They never turn the other cheek, so to speak. But certainly I can almost say that 90% of the parents themselves are great contributors to that, great contributors to that. (Doug)

I was also acutely aware of these concepts from my own experience. It was not unusual for some parents to walk into the school with a belligerent manner and try to bully teachers and administrators alike. Their line of defence for their children's transgression was often offence and attack. The role modelling in the interaction was very clear. Nevertheless, I set out to establish collaborative relations with them. Surprisingly, they responded positively and, as I got

to know them, I sensed an inner hostility towards the school system. It seemed to me that bullying was a pattern for those parents, a weapon to fend off situations that rendered them vulnerable or intimidated. Parents can also be aggressive, just like their children, but underlying factors contributing to their behaviour need to be understood.

An Unstable Family

Teachers endorsed the importance of the traditional family structure and its contribution to a child's behaviour. A structured, stable family life was associated with maturity, problem solving, empathy, and forming successful relationships. Such students were said to have no need for bullying, because they got their needs met at home, as one teacher so eloquently expressed.

I have some students that I'm aware they have a very good, stable family life. . . . I know there's a strong family unit and these students are very mature. They know how to deal with issues and putdowns, although these are children are rarely put down because they don't bother anyone. They do their work, they're good kids, well behaved, mannerly, and they care about their classmates. . . . Just the feeling of a family unit where mom, dad, children, grandparents, that's important . . . because the children who have that security, that comfort knowing "I've got family at home that will care about me," "that make me feel good," "I don't need to behave in a way that's going to make me feel good by using bad language, making someone else feel bad." They don't need to do that because they feel secure in themselves. (Mrs. G)

Teachers believed that an intact family unit taught empathy, rights, and responsibilities; for them, problem solving, communication, and negotiation skills were learned within the structure of the family. These skills, in turn, were believed to strengthen children's self-esteem and, hence, prepared them to navigate relationships effectively.

It's the feeling of respect. It's the feeling that we're part of a unit that cares for each other and there are certain rights and responsibilities. If children with their parents can sit, can negotiate, can communicate, I think that gives that child a feeling of self-esteem. So that when you come to school, you've got better skills, you've got a better attitude, you've got negotiation skills. There's a certain give and take in all sorts of relationships. (Mrs. S1)

We're not saying that kids that come from well-structured families that have positive values are not going to have any problems with conflict, but they seem to be able to handle themselves better, because in the family home they're able to discuss, they can listen to someone's opinions and sometimes work things out a lot faster and with more of a win-win situation. (Nadia)

Conversely, teachers believed that students who were growing up in unstable family environments were underachievers; they were unable to focus on tasks or achieve their goals or potential and might bully others in response to their inner turmoil. For one teacher, an underlying reason for these students' behaviour was related to self-dislike which in turn stemmed from dissatisfaction with their lives.

I know for a fact there are students who come from unstable family units and they are the ones who are putting down, criticizing, making fun of others, not doing their work, even though some of them are quite bright, but just can't seem to focus on the moment. It's always what I can do to make myself feel better, what I can do to exercise my power over someone else. . . . I see them trying it with their classmates and I have had several discussions with some of these students and I find there is definitely a problem at home. (Lois)

Teachers explored the factors that contributed to instability within the family. Most teachers identified separation, divorce, and parents with multiple partners as major causes of students' distress and sense of loss of control.

I think it all goes back to perhaps how they've been treated or perhaps something in their own family life that they either have no control over or they find it very difficult to accept. It could be a separation, a divorce. It could be a series of male figures in the family that come and go through a revolving door and they really don't have a place in their home. (Laura)

Need for Attention

Children who were the product of unstable family environments were full of anger and frustration, lacked empathy, and often engaged in bullying and overpowering others in their craving for attention.

They come here and it's like they're taking out their frustration or the disappointment or their anger and they're manifesting it in their dealings with the other kids in the classroom. A lot of these kids we're talking about, that don't have a really stable structured family at home, they come with these attitudes and they come with this feeling, that . . ."I'm going to be the one that is the centre of attention," or "I'm going to get attention in a negative way." (Mrs. S1)

They really don't care. There's no empathy, there's no sympathy there for someone's feelings, for someone's physical space. That to me seems the real crux of it. They don't care. They don't want to care about someone else. (Marg)

Many participants indicated that some students were not able to secure attention through positive behaviours or achievement. Instead, bullying, despite its negative nature, allowed these students to achieve the attention they craved. Thus, the need for attention appeared to be a significant variable behind bullying behaviour.

That's also seeking attention; any attention, whether it's positive or negative. And some of these children are starving for that and so they will acquire it any way they can and they'll keep doing it "because I'm getting attention." (Lois)

I had a child in my Grade 8 class. . . . I asked him "why are you doing this?" . . . He said. "Because it's better than being a nobody in the class, invisible to the rest of the kids." Negative attention is better than nothing. (Dorothy)

One teacher offered insight into the need for attention by explaining its importance for all children at home or at school. When such a developmental need fails to get satisfied by socially acceptable methods, children may resort to negative behaviours to satisfy it.

Negative recognition is better than none at all. That's got to be part of it. I've seen it. "If academically I cannot become the teacher's pet, then I'm going to get attention some other way." (Jake)

An analysis of negative behaviour as satisfying the psychological need for attention is one of the fundamental theories that have guided my work as a behaviour therapist. Finding the function of the negative behaviour or the need it satisfies has always been crucial to my understanding of it. In my clinical work and in schools, the need for attention has often been at the crux of negative behaviour. When I think back to all the children who consistently bullied others, I cannot recall one who excelled in any school endeavour. Many had great potential and superior abilities, academically, athletically, or artistically, but none had in fact achieved any great success in any of these areas. Their lack of motivation, attention, and discipline may have contributed to their lack of success; nevertheless, they sought to gain attention the easiest and quickest way they could, through bullying.

According to one teacher, students felt powerless as a result of growing up in violent, disorganized homes where they felt neglected and insignificant. He contributed an insightful analysis that explained the students' desperate need for attention through bullying and negative behaviour. Bullying allowed them feelings of empowerment, self-determination, and connection with others.

I think when a child has something that affects them deeply, they come from violent households, they're neglected, they're abandoned, and what needs to be done is they need care and they don't get it. No amount of reprimand is going to make a difference because that child has learned . . . they've learned a negative way in which to get attention or to feel powerful. Because there's no place that they feel powerful. Rather than feel powerless, they know that their aggression can get them some press. They're known. Maybe other kids like them will find them. I think this is a very important factor, their need to feel connected to the world, important in their world, self-determining. (Franz)

Low Academic Achievement

Several of the participants endorsed the connection between bullying and low academic achievement. Participants reported that low achievement resulted in lack of recognition and was often the trigger behind bullying behaviours. Students who were academically frustrated by their own inability to achieve the set academic standards resorted to bullying.

I think that if you do expect or demand too much of one child and you're constantly on their back, they let out their frustration in the schoolyard, and the bullying occurs. I know when little kids are frustrated by academics or anything, something that didn't go right; you have trouble with that one for a week, a month, a day. (Jane)

Students with learning disabilities sometimes engaged in bullying and misbehaviour in order to hide their inability to meet academic expectations. They opted for getting recognition as a bully over being known for their learning difficulties.

In some cases you have the child that is covering up a learning disability, a learning problem and how best to cover up? Your behaviour becomes negative behaviour in class as well as outside of class; one negative behaviour is bullying someone else. It distracts the teacher from figuring out that you can't read and that you do not understand the level of work as well as another student. I find children with a learning disability, kids with a learning deficiency can at times not only be the people that get bullied but are some of the ones that will physically bully others to get negative attention to hide a learning problem. (Nell)

Self-Esteem

There was strong consensus with respect to all of the aforementioned variables.

Interestingly, self-esteem received mixed reviews. Some participants regarded low self-esteem as a variable that motivated bullying.

I think of a lack of self-esteem. I think of this idea of power, the bully wanting the power, and I think of it as a way to gain control when there's a lack of acceptance. (Sunshine)

It's not unusual for a bully to have low self-esteem and this is sometimes why they bully. That is because it instills fear in others and will have other people follow them and get what they want to get. So, it does give them power over others. (Principal 6)

Others felt that an important component of bullying was high self-esteem, a quality that equipped bullies with the ability to control and overpower others. Many teachers went on to describe conditions that allowed such students to maintain high self-esteem, such as learning to bully in tough neighbourhoods and having charisma that attracted peers to them. This was seen to provide them with extensive social networks that further nurtured their self-esteem.

A lot of the bullies do not lack self-esteem. Some of them do but very few. Most of them do not. Some of them come from very high-needs neighbourhoods and I guess maybe being tough is the way to survive. They will respond very aggressively and many times with very little provocation. They may tease sometimes to impress their peers. So they see that by way of a status symbol sometimes. (Principal 10)

I think that's a really important point, the whole idea that we often think that the bully has low self-esteem or poor self-esteem and yet really if you identify the kid as exhibiting bullying behaviour, most of the ones that we could identify are very confident. They're popular with other kids, they've got a huge social network, and they know it. And, because they've got that, it's like, "Whoa, I can take on the world." (Dr. Bob)

Yet other teachers seemed to see being unhappy and lacking self-esteem to be connected and to be the underlying factor behind bullying. One teacher believed that some students sought bullying as a method of making themselves feel better by making others feel miserable.

Generally to me bullies are very unhappy people, obviously, for whatever reason, home, school, themselves, they have no self-confidence, no self-esteem. In order to make themselves feel better, they somehow think that making other people feel as bad as they will make them feel better. . . . So what better way to make yourself feel better, if you're miserable, than to make somebody feel even more miserable than you. (Candy)

Thus, with regards to self-esteem, the participants seemed to be faced with a chicken or egg dilemma. Having dealt with many bullying situations and having been involved in the interventions, I have had to give much thought to the common characteristics of students who bully. In my experience, bullies who had high self-esteem and confidence were the most successful in overpowering others and gaining a reputation that instilled fear in some and an urge to belong to the entourage by others.

Some students with low self-esteem, however, have been mislabelled as bullies because of adults' inability to unravel the bullying incidents. These in my experience have mostly been the provocative type of bullying victims who were often enraged and had little control over their feelings of frustration and anger. They often set out to retaliate, openly and with much passion, and, as a result, appeared to instigate the bullying. Such was the case with many of the students with disabilities from Erinoak. They were often thought of as the bullies, when in fact they were reacting to having been bullied repeatedly by more deceptive and manipulative students.

Several teachers expressed concern that the most serious cases of bullying were probably never reported to them because of the perpetrators' skill in manipulating others as well as the environment. They acknowledged that true bullies tended to be strong in theory of mind and were able to navigate their surroundings so that the bullying would remain hidden from adults. Those who did get reported were students who bullied in public; for one Grade 8 teacher, they were attempting to defend themselves.

I find that the kind of bullying that we should be fearful of, and it's the kind that happens most often, is the kind that you never see because I find that true bullies are intelligent enough, aware of their surroundings, that they'll do it when authority figures are not around. The ones that do it when an authority figure is around, is usually somebody who is defending themselves or somebody who feels that "I finally have to take some kind of action." But for the most part, the most dangerous kind of bullying is the kind that we never see. These individuals are aware of the system, they're aware of the psychology behind bullying, that often times a lot of the truth will be lost when you're trying to investigate and extract as much information as possible. They'll turn it around to try and justify their actions because they need to continue to perpetuate their actions. It gives

them that sense of power and the only way you'll retain that power is to try and conceal your true self as much as possible. Those are the ones that are most dangerous. The kind honestly that we never see is the most dangerous and the most prevalent. (Bob)

Socioeconomic Status

When discussing personal attributes of bullies, focus group members pondered the emergence of a new type of bully. They had noticed that some students who became proficient at bullying came from a high socioeconomic background. They strongly emphasized that these students tended to be equipped with language and social skills that facilitated leadership and the ability to manipulate others. Importantly, they were perceived as very confident and empowered by their parents who tended to only support their children's perspective.

The whole misconception of bullying is a lower social status, immigrant, and ethnic problem. That certainly is not the case. You go to some of these upper-class schools where you have kids that are very empowered with the language and with their social skills and they can bloody well put anybody in their place at the age of 13 or 14 way more than most immigrants or ethnic kids can. These kids bully people more than anybody because they have the ability to do it. (Fiddlehead)

Teachers attributed the need to bully, for such bright students who grew up in stable families, to a completely novel set of factors. Teachers reported that such children could never see their role in their bullying interactions because their parents never held them accountable for their behaviour. They seemed to get their way at home and to be able to get their parents on their side with little questioning about the nature of the incidents. Their parents were reported to believe whatever their children said; for them, their children were never at fault.

I know, I can identify in my classroom who the future bullies. . . . There are a few students in my classroom now; they're from good families, two parents. Good families, financially okay, academically smart. . . . They're going to be the bullies because they get the confidence from the parents because there's no accountability. If these individuals go home and complain about something, parents will come and say, "Johnny said this," or "Suzie said that." But did Suzie say what they did, what their part in it was? "No." So you didn't take the time to ask them what their part in it was. You just come to me and confront me, aggressively, without even knowing what your child's part in it was. They just assume that their child is the innocent one. Some of the students . . . get their confidence from their parents, so they think they can conquer the world. (Butterfly)

I find their self-concepts are very much intact, the ones I see this year. And, they are popular . . . and they have parents who think that they are the centre of the universe and the only centre of the universe. (Sunshine)

Impervious Bullies

Bullying is a perpetual problem at the elementary level, despite teachers' awareness and efforts to combat it. Several participants indicated the seriousness of the problem and affirmed that bullying students required professional intervention and consistent counselling. Some participants attributed repetitive bullying to the bullies' inability to perceive the problem in the same manner as others. They explained that students who bully tended to engage in cognitive distortions and to believe that they were not at fault; rather, they tended to perceive their bullying as self-defence.

They continue to bully in spite of people's efforts and sometimes even consequences in the school because it's very deep rooted in the personality and in the dynamics of the people they interact with. It would take years and years and years of professional counselling to make the bully see the impact that they have on their victims. . . . Very often the bully is in denial that they are the cause of the problem. They perceive themselves as the victims. So there's a perception problem here. (Lois)

Others reported that bullying gives those students an overwhelming sense of power. As one teacher described it, "They feel really powerful that it overrides that consequence." Another elaborated that a bully thinks, "Fine, I'll put up with suspension or whatever but now I'm the king in the playground." Numerous participants indicated that the problem was perpetuated by consequences that were inconsistent and not severe or harsh enough to deter them from bullying.

I just don't even think that maybe the consequences are dear enough, harsh enough, so they continue bullying. (Genevieve)

Maybe it works in the same way as variable reinforcement. You know where you do five times and you never know which time you're going to get smacked and other four times you're not. Variable reinforcement is the most powerful form of behaviour mod. (Marg)

Most participants hypothesized that students who bully were highly motivated to overpower others by the payoff of their behaviour, securing attention, which far outweighed the effect of any consequences.

No amount of reprimand is going to make a difference because that child has learned a negative way in which to get attention or to feel powerful. (Nancy)

Bystanders

The role of bystanders was brought into sharp focus by teachers who questioned whether bullying would thrive if it were not for the bystanders. Teachers strongly agreed that the presence of bystanders was an integral part of the bullying dynamics. Many of them even felt that the bystanders were the target audience without whom bullying might more easily be curtailed or controlled.

The bystanders are as guilty if not more guilty than the person who is bullying or the cause of the bullying behaviour because without the bystanders, there's no power and if there's no power, then it stops. (Butterfly)

I just think that everything that's being said so far goes back to the bystanders because if there is no audience for these bullies to show off to or whatever, if the bystanders weren't just standing by, there wouldn't be a show. (Nancy)

Teachers believed that taking the bystanders out of the bullying interaction would disarm the bully since the ultimate goal of bullying was to gain peer attention and popularity.

I think if there's no one to listen to you, then you're not going to talk. If there's no one to hear how high and mighty you can be and how cool you can be because you made someone else feel like garbage the entire day, if there's no one to hear that . . . I have to have someone who is going to be able to say "that was hilarious" . . . (Lola)

If there's no one watching, it's not going to be important to do that. If we took away all the bystanders, and put those two people in the same room, they probably wouldn't say boo to each other. As soon as the crowds come, it escalates. (Kathy)

Participants expressed their concern about the apathy displayed by bystanders especially in the schoolyard. They agreed on the great need to educate bystanders on their responsibilities,

since it was clear that most bystanders contributed to the bullying process through observation and an egocentric attitude regarding safety and involvement.

These kids do not see that by being a bystander you're being part of the bullying problem. They think, "I'm not doing it." The fact that they're witnessing it and not doing anything to help the victim in any way . . . they consider themselves safe. "Hey, it has nothing to do with me." So that in itself is like an area that they have to be educated about. They have to be taught that you're there, you're part of it and you're contributing to it and you're bullying as well because you haven't put a stop to it. (Cassandra)

They don't understand the difference, that there's very little difference, between being the one that punches and being the one who encourages the punch. So they're not distinguishing. They think, "I was in the crowd so it wasn't anything bad." "Well, did you stop it, did you call a teacher? Well, that's contributing to the bullying." Well, they don't get that. (Sunshine)

Importantly, teachers were alarmed at the bystanders' thirst for witnessing violence and physical bullying.

In my class, I've had my kids come back from recess "Did you see him, what he did to . . .?" "Yes, I saw it!" "It was. . . ." They just love talking about it. (Lois)

Crowds of bystanders often acted in unison inciting the bullies by cheering and making inflammatory statements. To some teachers, the bystanders became bullies, acting as one body yet evading responsibility.

It could have just been something very small, that if there were no bystanders it could have just been resolved. But at that point the two who are fighting are somewhat being bullied at this point by all the bystanders because they are the ones who are egging them on. . . . They could have thrown a few punches, and it could have all been resolved, but now the two of them have something to prove to all of their peers. So it's all of their peers now that are the bullies in general, egging this whole situation on. (Helen)

Participants perceived that bystanders sometimes engage in gang-like behaviour to incite the bullying.

I had to break up a very violent fight outside in the schoolyard. I managed to separate the two boys. Some of the older boys were holding onto them. Then they heard the others that were surrounding them, "Go get him, go get him." They couldn't be held back. The children were encouraging the two boys to continue fighting . . . basically telling them how weak they were and, "You're a coward, you're gay." That enraged the two boys and of course they continued to fight to the point where I could no longer deal with it myself and I had to go get help from the office. (Theresa)

Analyses of Bullying Interactions

The second major social context theme that emerged from participants' discussions was analyses of bullying interactions. This is captured in two subthemes mainly gender differences in dealing with bullying and bullying past and present, which in turn contribute to participants' perceptions of bullying.

Gender Differences

When asked if teachers' gender played a role in the way they responded to bullying, many participants denied it. For example, some principals believed that gender had no bearing on the way a teacher responded to bullying and that both male and female teachers responded in similar ways as a result of education and awareness of the issue.

With all the education that goes on now, teachers are much more educated in terms of what they say. They used to say "Oh, it's just a boy thing." Teachers don't do that anymore. Or, "Girls will be girls," you don't do that anymore. They're schooled and educated and they have to be part of that whole anti-bullying movement. (Principal 1)

Other principals answered by attributing differences in responses to bullying to reasons other than gender, such as having good rapport and effective class management skills, regardless of gender.

In my honest opinion, I don't think gender makes a difference. I've seen teachers that I would consider not having great rapport or classroom management, whether they're male or female, and I've seen excellent teachers who have excellent management skills, classroom control, rapport, both males and females. (Principal 10)

A few teachers agreed that males and females dealt with bullying in similar fashion; one stated, "It depends on the teacher." Others attributed the difference in management of bullying situations to the values upheld by the individual teachers; for example, teachers who could not tolerate bullying were perceived to act on such situations rather than ignore them.

You either work from principles you feel are important and if that's important to you, then you will respond and you will respond appropriately because you're not going to go and put blinkers on when you see incidents of bullying. (Mary)

Yet the question raised controversy for some teachers and principals. Some participants found gender significantly influenced how a teacher responded under such circumstances. Differences that were related to gender were often noticed in methods of intervention, particularly in terms of empathy. One teacher felt that women had a naturally motherly, nurturing personality that was quite different from their male counterparts. She explained empathy and nurturing in relation to sex roles and believed that, unlike women, males tended to act in accordance more with power and authority, the societal expectations of the male figure.

I think it's empathy. Not to single out females versus males. But I just think a caring, motherly kind of nurturing personality is so different in women than it is in males. Like if I was dealing with a situation and a male counterpart was dealing with the situation, I don't know if it would be the same. To me it would not be the same. How I would deal with a situation or problem would be very different than say a male. I think there's almost connotation or something stuck to the male power or just that authority kind of figure of a male. It just seems different. (Genevieve)

Several female teachers agreed that the nurturing nature of females compared to the matter-of-fact nature of male teachers resulted in different methods of intervention in bullying situations.

Perhaps a female teacher may have a more nurturing side. Males might be a little bit; I guess they'd be more matter of fact and not as nurturing. (Rose)

Some, I don't want to generalize, but men teachers tend to say, "Suck it up, get on with it." (Sandra)

One principal seemed to agree with this notion. Although he did not address empathy or nurturing, he seemed to think that women explored the bullying situation more fully, whereas male teachers were more likely to just put a stop to bullying.

In all cases it's not tolerated. In all cases it's dealt with quickly. . . . But I wonder whether or not a female teacher might bring more conversation into dealing with bullying and explore the reasons for bullying . . . but whether a male teacher might simply intervene and make sure that it stopped and deal with it without exploring all the background to it and perhaps without calling home. (Principal 6)

Several male teachers agreed that while female teachers were more apt to explore the interaction, male teachers were more interested in just stopping the bullying.

I think every teacher deals with it. I don't know whether the male teachers deal with the female bullying problems the same way or as effectively as the females. I guess for male teachers . . . it's just more of a meat and potatoes kind of thing. It's cut and dry. It's more of a "stop it." I think they do deal with it differently. (Coach)

I find male teachers deal with it differently. I find that they deal with it in a quicker, more abrupt fashion. (Dr. Bob)

Male teachers were perceived to minimize bullying, which was another difference noted between males and females. A female teacher emphasized that women's attention to small details was a crucial factor in resolving issues of bullying.

You know when they say "that's not a big deal." That's my pet peeve. I find many times male teachers will look at a little thing and say "Well, it's just a little thing." Whereas women will say, "But don't you understand this little thing is indicative of a bigger thing?" . . . Sometimes the littlest things are things that are so indicative of something that needs to be addressed immediately. (Irena)

Several teachers and principals thought that males were more likely to perceive bullying as part of the experience of growing up and, to use the old adage "boys will be boys". Female counterparts, on the other hand, were perceived to be more sensitive and less accepting of bullying.

I've seen male teachers say "oh, it's just part of growing up, boys will be boys." I've seen female teachers much more sensitive to it and less accepting of it. (Principal 2)

I guess sometimes men will say, "well, boys will be boys." And all they consider is what's happening in the yard is rough play rather than perhaps bullying and it could be masked as that, whereas perhaps women might go in and stop it rather than somebody else going by, "Oh, they'll be fine." (Sandra)

Because such beliefs as "boys will be boys" are internalized by male teachers, one teacher thought that they might tend to expect all male students to show their rugged, tough nature. As a result, boys who lack such qualities might be perceived as the heart of the problem in a bullying situation, rather than the bully.

I think that male teachers, if it's a male child, a male student who is being bullied, may basically think that this boy needs to toughen up and may not take it as seriously as a female teacher. (Laura)

Another area where men were perceived to be less perceptive than women was girls' socioemotional bullying (see Types of Bullying, above). Female teachers reported that males tended to have less insight into how girls bully one another and hence might not treat it seriously, a theme supported by this female principal.

I think that women probably have a deeper insight into how other women treat each other and they know that girls bully in a different way than boys. With boys it's usually physical. My experience again, with girls, it's not physical that often. It's more the words. It's more the cold shoulder. It's more the exclusion. I think that female teachers understand that and male teachers who have been around for a while understand it but I would think that newer teachers who maybe do not have as much experience with that type of behaviour would not treat it as seriously . . . but I think that's what I've noticed in my years of teaching and as an administrator. . . . We consider that just as serious as physical bullying. (Principal 3)

Several female teachers reiterated this perception.

A male teacher dealing with girls who are talking about other girls may not deal with it as seriously as a female teacher will. (Jackie)

Some of the guys, some of the men just do not see it. They don't get it, and maybe they don't look for it. They don't understand it. (Lois)

Guys don't understand social bullying with the girls and the importance of it. It's so important. One little thing a girl says I think . . . for us could really touch your heart. And for a guy teacher might just say, "Okay I'll deal with it" or it just doesn't hit him the same way because maybe because of our experiences or our sensitivity. (Diane)

We see things in a different way whereas they don't take it seriously. It's how you interpret the problem. (Jane)

As a guidance counsellor, I have come across several situations that also supported this perception. One male teacher habitually engaged in bringing the group involved to my office and identified the problem as "girls' stuff." Another paid little attention and minimized the problems, even when it involved a high-achieving student whose mother complained that she no longer wanted to go to school. Some appeared to take it more seriously but had difficulty unravelling the situation, soon lost patience, and either ignored the problem or sent the students to me. This

led me to wonder whether such problems are ignored or left unresolved in the many elementary schools that have no guidance counsellors.

One male teacher perceived that intervention in bullying situations involving physical violence was a male domain; female teachers would require the assistance of their male colleagues. On the other hand, he believed that male teachers were capable of handling all situations without exception.

In general terms I find that female teachers dealing with aggressive males sometimes will defer to a male colleague to handle a certain situation. Whereas a male teacher basically will handle whatever confronts him at the time and won't defer. (Sam)

Several male colleagues disagreed with this. For example, particularly with regards to matters that involved sexuality, they found that male teachers turned to their female colleagues for assistance.

I think it works the other way. When something is happening that there was sexuality, I think as a male teacher I would go to a female teacher and say, "Could you please address this issue." (Adam)

I'm the only male teacher in the primary level . . . this is where a little girl was involved . . . or even a little boy . . . I have colleagues to help me out. I need help too just in case I do something wrong. (Mandley)

One particular focus group showed leadership in using each other's strengths and working collaboratively, males and females, to curb bullying. They appeared to have adopted a team approach to resolving bullying issues and supporting one another in problem solving and decision making.

I can only go by our team which is 50-50, I mean two men, two women, and it's pretty even. I think what each of us brings is some part of a perspective that I think is really important. A lot of times if it's something of a sexual nature, then my teaching partner, male teaching partner, will come and say I really need you to jump in here. I don't want to go where it's not comfortable. I think the other thing too is dealing as a team. I think we're so fortunate because any time we have a serious issue, we deal with it as a team, not individually, and I think that's important. (Nancy)

I think all of us working together is better than just me working at something. (Mandley)

One female viewed a teacher's reaction to a bullying situation as a complex phenomenon that could not be interpreted simply in terms of the teacher's gender. She believed that bullying was curbed or heightened by the student's relationships with a variety of teachers, the homeroom teacher, the teacher on yard duty, and others. As an example, she mentioned kindergarten teachers whose efforts to intervene in bullying situations were often dismissed and who were often ignored by most intermediate students.

I don't know how a teacher responds but I certainly would think that the way the bully responds to the particular teacher who's chastising them for the behaviour makes a difference in terms of gender, in the beginning. I think men are often told, "Oh it's so much easier for you because you're a man, they're just going to naturally be afraid of you," kind of thing. And then you've got women who overcompensate and are really mean and nasty to the bully so . . . I certainly think the bully responds differently to her, also, who is the homeroom teacher, who's the teacher on yard duty, and there's also a sense among intermediate students "you don't have to listen to the kindergarten teacher because they're only teaching little kids, so they're not real teachers" kind of thing. (Dorothy)

In my own experiences working in schools, I certainly found that students who bullied indeed responded to and took into account a variety of relationships at the same time. Whether they respected the teacher on yard duty made a difference in their actions, at least for that particular recess. The anticipation of potential consequences to be enforced by administrators also sometimes made a difference. Intermediate students tended to be less responsive to primary and kindergarten teachers. However, in my observation this was a dynamic process; those teachers who seemed to have less skill in interacting with older students may have even appeared intimidated by some of the students.

In my opinion, having strong, positive relations with their own homeroom teacher was the biggest deciding factor of whether students would engage in bullying situations. As an intermediate teacher, I established a class culture in which all our problems were resolved in the classroom, regardless of where they originated. The students were aware that whatever happened would be reported to me. Fear of retribution or consequences was never the motive behind their

avoidance of bullying. Rather, disappointing their class and their teacher was the underlying reason. They were well aware that their positive behaviour was acknowledged on a daily basis and collectively resulted in class privileges and special events. As a result, students were less interested in engaging in negative behaviours, including bullying, and more likely to look for opportunities to display maturity, compassion, and prosocial skills.

Reporting

Most teachers and principals agreed that, in general, most students do not report bullying. This complicates the problem and allows bullying to thrive in schools. The only type of bullying that was often reported to administrators was physical bullying when injuries were involved.

Physical bullying is usually reported by the staff or the kids. (Principal 3)

Physical bullying is usually reported because somebody gets hurt. You usually find out about it real quick. (Principal 4)

Primary children were perceived to be more likely to report bullying than older students. Older students were reported to internalize or hide the problem. According to teachers, junior and intermediate students might show the problem through self-harm or in a variety of other ways.

The younger ones will come and tell you about the bullying. As they get older, they tend not to come, to go to the teachers, they'll either internalize the pain, or they'll show it in a different way by harming themselves. (Queenie)

The older the children get, the less likely they are to tell. But the younger they are . . . a lot of them are willing to take the onus. (Lola)

Several teachers, however, argued that even young children were often too scared to report bullying and eventually reported it to their parents who in turn reported it to the teachers.

I have a kid in my class who is actually like that; when someone hurts him he will not come tell me. He'll go home and tells his mom, mom phones me. . . . He is afraid to tell me because I think he's afraid what the other kids will do to him. (Mandley)

The victim could also be afraid, especially at the primary level. In Grades 1 or 2, he or she may be afraid to do anything about it until finally they tell their parents and then their parents will come and tell the teacher. (Genevieve)

Young children may in fact be covering up for students who bully them, under the assumption that they are friends. One teacher used her son as example of a primary child who refused to report. At such an early age and in the absence of understanding what bullying is, children may feel obligated to show loyalty to their friends by not reporting their negative behaviours.

My son is in Grade 1 and he was bullied for probably six months and he would not tell me. He would not tell me anything. Every day I saw his pencils, new pencils, broken, his erasers broken, holes in erasers, etc. I knew that my son wouldn't do those things; he never did it at home, why was this happening at school. And he would never tell me who broke the pencils until his teacher had a class on bullying. (Mary)

Mary stated that learning what bullying constituted allowed her young son to understand his friend's behaviour and to interpret it correctly. Once he realized he was being bullied, he was able to report it to his mother. Perhaps it is presumptuous to expect children to report bullying when they do not have the appropriate words and vocabulary to describe certain actions. In this example, the most important fact is that the boy seemed to lack the understanding of the concept of bullying.

According to one teacher, the ability to detect, perceive, and interpret the bullying behaviour was entirely the victim's responsibility. He advised that bullying behaviours should be demonstrated and victims should be taught to acknowledge, interpret, and report such actions.

I think ultimately it comes down to the victim. Detectability has to do with the perceived behaviour, so it has to be demonstrated. If it's not demonstrated, that makes it very difficult. . . . So the problem is getting the victim to acknowledge or verbalize the fact that they are being bullied. (Twofour)

Some teachers argued that certain students did not report the bullying because of their passive nature, which is the reason for being victimized.

They're supposed to tell us and the primary or the shy ones that lack confidence, they won't tell us. They won't tell their parents. (Kathy)

They don't report because it's all related to the fact that they are a victim. It's all part and parcel and that's why they can't disclose. The victim tends to be a passive type of person . . . but also passive in verbalizing what's wrong. They don't have the skills to verbalize.

Older students were reported to be much more reluctant to disclose bullying than younger pupils. Teachers reported that girls would go to great lengths to hide the facts and deny being bullied, despite looking distraught.

When I taught intermediate Grade 8 girls, there would always be girls bawling their eyes out and to try to get to the end or bottom root of that story would be almost impossible. They lie, they cover things up, and there's no evidence or physical visual evidence to see. (Laura)

In my work experience I also found older students to be more likely to refuse to report, boys and girls alike. Perhaps girls were easier for teachers to detect, since they witnessed the girls' emotional response. Girls, however, still refused to report. Boys tended to cover things up better since many felt that "boys don't cry." Teachers were often completely unaware of their plight. In one memorable incident, a boy was threatened with a knife held to his throat in the school washroom during a school community barbecue. The following day, he was persuaded, by a group of his friends, to come to my guidance office to discuss the incident. They practically dragged him in and helped him disclose the incident. He strongly resisted reporting the event to the police until I told him that he had no choice. Had it not been for his friends, this boy would have never reported the incident at all.

One teacher stated that, in order to encourage the students to report, she had to resort to unconventional or confidential methods of reporting such as leaving anonymous notes.

And the only way you get kids to open up . . . I think a lot of times I'll have to say, "Leave me a note, don't sign it"; or, "Leave me a note, sign it, I won't tell anyone," or sometimes you bribe them and they'll talk. You know some of the girls were coming. (Mrs. D2)

Perhaps the students in Mrs. D2's example responded to her caring rather than her methods per se. I recall many teachers coming to report with or on behalf of their students. They were often just as upset by the interactions as their own students and were always attempting to look for solutions; their caring was evident. From my experience, I found that teachers who

showed their students that they cared and responded to their reports and cries of help were more likely to be given the details of the bullying.

Some students had learned from past experience that their teachers would not intervene and, hence, saw no benefit in reporting bullying. Several teachers empathically noted that students' reports of bullying were often ignored and not attended to by teachers. They attributed these teachers' behaviour to lack of time and unwillingness to find time for resolving such issues.

Some kids tell and wait around and wait around and eventually nobody deals with it. Nothing happens and the next day the kid does the same thing . . . and the next day . . . "Well, I'm not going to bother to tell this teacher because I told him yesterday. Well, I'm not going to tell him today." A lot of passing the buck seems to go around. Nobody seems to want to take the time to deal with it. A lot of the reason is that nobody has the time to deal with it. (Dr. Bob)

And the victim gets confused too . . . "Well, if I went out on a limb and complained to somebody and this is the fourth day after I complained and nothing is being done, well I'm not going to complain anymore." (Coach)

Teachers' ignoring reports and not taking action against bullying were thought to establish a negative cycle that perpetuated a code of silence. According to one teacher, even bullies came to realize that certain teachers took no action against bullying. This gave them further courage to bully and challenge the students to tell.

Adults don't listen to you because you're trying to weigh what's serious, what's not serious, what you're making up, what you're not making up. So if adults won't listen to you, the bully is getting away with it because there's no consequences to what you're doing. Then you can get to the point where the bully can say, "Go ahead and tell. Nobody will listen to you anyhow." So you don't tell. So you're bullied into silence. (Laura)

I have come across many examples of this claim. As a counsellor, I was told by many students that they had given up on reporting to their teachers due to lack of action. Taking time to unravel the situation required effort and a commitment that many teachers were not willing to expend. Some teachers, particularly in the case of social bullying, did not take the matter seriously enough. Some teachers were generally unable to maintain class control, so that reports of bullying that were clearly and easily observable by the teacher were ignored. In one dramatic

example, a mother came into my private-practice therapy office seeking help for her son. Amidst tears and sobs, she told me that she could no longer tolerate watching her Grade 5 son cry for at least an hour every day upon his arrival home from school. He had reported being severely bullied and swarmed in the schoolyard to both his mother and his teacher. When the teacher failed to take measures that would change the situation, the mother decided to intervene. She had met with the principal several times before coming to see me but to no avail.

Part of my practice was to go to the school to observe the student in the class environment and in the schoolyard. After close observation, I met with the teacher to discuss the situation. I had gone with the intention of following my traditional recommendations to the teacher and principal, such as offering a staff workshop. However, my exploration led me to realize that the class and school culture would require tremendous effort and time in order to raise awareness against bullying. It was a Kindergarten to Grade 6 school and I thought the boy would be on his way out of that school by the time any difference would have been accomplished in the school environment. To my surprise, the principal agreed with me that the best recommendation was for me to suggest to the parent to move her child to another school. Several months later, the boy was thriving in a small private school.

Teachers discussed the factors that contributed to students' reluctance to report bullying. Fear of retaliation and further bullying topped the list of reasons that had students tolerate being tormented by peers and holding back on asking for help. Students' anticipation of further, more severe bullying at the hands of their tormentors was a major reason for their refusal to report.

I think that some kids might not come to you initially because they may have a fear of what might come later. The bullying might escalate or more serious things could happen. Perhaps even away from the school, on the way home from school to home. They don't want that sense of heightened awareness that they're the ones that told and they're responsible for somebody being either hauled to the office or parents being contacted. It's a fear of the bullying escalating. (Mrs. S1)

Because they're afraid of retaliation if they're found out. . . . Someone knows that they told, then they'll get more. (Wendy)

In my experience, the fear associated with reporting the bullies was not limited to the bullied student; rather, it seemed to be shared amongst all involved, including the bystanders. Following is an account by a teacher illustrating an apprehension to report so great that, even when a teacher happened to be around, the victim refused to report. At this school, swarming was a recurring practice in the schoolyard; students made sure that teachers would not witness it. At the sight of a teacher, students would typically stop the bullying or pretend that they were playing, making the situation impenetrable to teachers.

I have also experienced instances where victims of bullying are so afraid to say anything for fear that they're going to be further bullied, that they will just keep taking it and taking it. . . . They're victims of fights outside in the schoolyard and swarms that I've witnessed out there. I actually saw who the students were and when I asked who was involved, they would not dare speak a word. Then when the crowd dispersed, I approached them . . . because I knew they would be afraid to say anything in front of everyone. And when you talk to them in private they're still not willing to say that there was a problem. So the fear that they're going to be further targeted even more is just great; some kids are just taking this every single day. (Sarah)

Principals reported similar perceptions. In the following account, a principal emphasized that fear of retaliation and further bullying seemed to be more prominent to the victim than help from school officials. As a result, he found that they spent a great deal of effort reassuring the bullied students that reporting would lead to the help they needed.

I would think that, number one, they're worried about the consequences. They're worried that the bully will get angry and come after them again. Kids have said that to us, that that's what they're worried about. We reassure them, "no, that's not going to happen. Once you've told us, we'll take care of it." But we have to take care of it, we can't forget about it. (Principal 5)

My experiences counselling students at risk in group homes under the Children's Aid Society confirm this perception. Many were adolescents who were repeatedly bullied but vehemently refused to report it to school personnel. I recall attempting to convince them to report only to be told that they would deny the bullying because they believed that "Adults just don't

know what it's like." They seemed filled with an ominous dread of what could possibly happen to them if they reported the bullying. One lanky teen who was in foster care was gradually deteriorating. His foster parent was concerned as he watched the boy display symptoms of an eating disorder. He was depressed and had very low self-esteem. In counselling, he disclosed that he was consistently being bullied but refused to report it or let his foster parent intervene. Eventually, after his peers turned the car wash hoses on him in the auto shop, we were able to intervene on his behalf.

According to the teachers and principals, another contributing factor to students' reluctance to reporting bullying was being accused of "tattletaling" by their peers. This was discussed at length by focus groups. One teacher insisted that children do not know the difference between tattletaling and reporting something like bullying.

I think there's a variety of reasons for not reporting. I think some people wouldn't do it because they don't want to be seen as tattletalers. (Principal 6)

They think it's tattletaling. I think if the teacher doesn't sort of draw the line that says, "This is tattletaling, but this is telling on someone that is doing something, like bullying, that is not appropriate" . . . There has to be clarification. I think they think it's just tattletaling incidents. (Mrs. D2)

One teacher disagreed. She thought that most children know the difference between reporting and tattletaling.

I think at that point in their life, I think they know the difference. They just choose not to report because right now in their life that's what is most important to them. (Mrs. G)

Other participants thought that students' reluctance to report went beyond the concept of tattletaling. According to participants, such reluctance, particularly among intermediate students, was better accounted for by focusing on the students' adolescent culture. Teen students tended to adhere to certain adolescent norms, one of which is the "no ratting" rule, as reflected here.

I've had a few incidents where the girl . . . would refuse to report, ratting; the whole thing of ratting. It permeates everything in Grade 8 anyway, Grade 7 probably too. I think that's a big thing. Everyone will know you're a rat. It's just deadly. (Candy)

With the older students, I would say they're afraid that their friends will think that they're babies, or that they're . . . what's the term that they use now?
 . . . it's not snitches but . . . you know, that they're basically breaking a code by coming and telling somebody that that's what's happening. (Principal 5)

The whole idea of being a stool pigeon, kids don't want that kind of reputation so they would rather keep it inside and hopefully what they believe is that it'll go away on its own. But it really doesn't. (Dr. Bob)

The concept of ratting indeed goes beyond tattletaling. Ratting implies breaking the adolescent culture rules and norms which everyone is expected to follow. Such an infraction results in lack of support by all; not only those involved, but by everyone including the victim's support group.

The law of the land, you do not snitch. If you snitch, anyone who at any point could have been on your side, all of a sudden looks at you differently. They could be your best friend but you do not snitch on your peers. Students have told me that. I just found out last week recently about an issue of bullying that's going on in my class. And I was mortified that no one came up to me to tell me. And then finally one of the students said, "Sir, you just don't tell. You don't want to be a snitch." (Franz)

Franz went on to say that the concept of ratting is actually perpetuated by bullies to protect their own self-interest. He emphasized, however, that what makes it believable and important to the students is the fact that they can often see examples of such rule-breaking in their own neighbourhoods.

Well, I think it's some myth perpetuated by those who want to be protected for being the villains. It's not good to snitch. Look at some of the things that happen in our area when you apparently hear of stories of people ratting people out. They get shot the next day or they send some of their friends to shoot that person. It happens often in this community. (Franz)

For adolescents, appearing tough and able to defend themselves was another factor that participants thought was at the heart of students' reluctance to report. Teachers and principals spoke of the values and norms of the adolescent culture. To fit, in the adolescent culture, they believed that students strived to appear capable of coping with bullying and looking after their own problems.

They also want to show that they have strength of their own and that they can handle problems by themselves. (Principal 8)

Reporting is looked at as a weakness. They don't want to seem weak. It's the perception that if you report, you're a sissy. You can deal with it yourself. (Doug)

Regardless of teachers' expectations and instructions, adolescents seemed to follow their peers in dealing with social situations, including bullying.

I think as the children get older, peer acceptance and the peer group is so strong. You do not want to be different in any way from your peers. . . . I had a case when I was teaching Grade 7 and again I was just totally shocked that in the classroom, in the school, everything was perfectly fine and then I find out in May that they had all been victims from this one person on the way home from school. It's like, "Why didn't you say something? Do something?" . . . And since you know so-and-so was able to put up with it, you don't want to be the kid who couldn't put up with it because all your other peers were able to get over it. (Dorothy)

Some teachers were perceived to contribute to the lack of reporting of bullying situations in schools. One principal pointed that some teachers often tell students to "grow up" and learn to "handle" situations. This, he believed, led students to avoid reporting for fear of being thought of as a "wimp" or a "suck."

At times the teachers will say "deal with it, grow up." So therefore the child says, "I'm going to complain to the teacher, she's going to think I'm a suck," so it doesn't get reported in that way. I guess you need to have an atmosphere in the school that encourages it without making the child feel that they are a wimp, they are a suck, and it should be reported to the level of seriousness that it actually is. (Principal 2)

Another principal emphasized that teachers often do not listen to reports made by students who have a reputation for having behavioural problems. Since they are perceived in a negative light, teachers have difficulty believing them.

Sometimes teachers do not believe the child because that child perhaps has a reputation. So it's always that child's fault. That can cause the teacher not to address bullying because they know that Child X gets in trouble all the time and if he comes and tells me that somebody else has kicked him, I don't believe him. Because he's a troublemaker, so, reputation sometimes plays a major role. (Principal 9)

In addition, parents have also been perceived to inadvertently contribute to children's unwillingness to report. Parents may be too busy and have no time to listen to their children's concerns. Parents, who emphasize qualities such as strength and ability to deal with negative

social situations independently, may even unwittingly set their children up to keep bullying a secret.

To me that's the biggest one, . . . when some parents will tell the kids "deal with it," "walk away," "ignore it," etc. That's difficult to do. Some parents do not have the time to listen to the kids' complaints when they get home. "So my parents aren't going to listen to me anyway, so I'm not going to report it." (Principal 7)

Probably past experience could be one where they reported it and it's fallen on deaf ears so they realize that now it's something that they have to handle on their own. A lot of kids are afraid to bring it home because they're fearful of the fact that they may be judged by parents as being weak. (Larsson)

Interestingly, one teacher thought that reporting bullying was in essence equivalent to admitting personal failure, similar to disclosing being an alcoholic. It would require courage and self-confidence to admit being bullied.

Then to go and acknowledge this is like stepping up, . . . like saying I'm an alcoholic, . . . everybody's picking on me, nobody likes me. . . . Yet, it's sometimes very hard. Having enough self-esteem to go and say that and have the guts to actually verbalize that. (P. P.)

Moreover, one cannot ignore the importance of being cool in the adolescent culture.

Reporting in general may not be considered cool by peers and this may serve to discourage students from reporting. Students who are bullied may still strive to belong to the very same group that is victimizing them; therefore, they refrain from reporting that they are bullied.

It's not cool to let somebody know that this [bullying] is going on. (Mrs. D2)

They would be worried more about what the other students think of them. They want to fit in and with the older students, sometimes the bullies are members of kind of a . . . the group that everybody wants to be . . . the in-group. So, in order to be part of that in-group, you might ignore the snubs or the social bullying . . . At that age group, the Grades 6, 7, and 8 . . . they want to be part of that group; therefore they're not going to say anything. (Principal 4)

According to some teachers and principals, the school culture makes a big difference in whether students reported bullying or declined to disclose. An anti-bullying school culture was perceived to empower students to report to teachers and principals who are interested in

listening. In such schools, students were believed to know the difference between reporting bullying and tattletaling.

Reporting depends as well on the culture of the school. (Jane)

When the kids are more empowered by the teachers and the principal, they're more empowered to report things and they can tell the difference between tattletaling and somebody who is hurting them and that is really serious and it's really important. (Diane)

We try to give them the message that you keep telling somebody until somebody does something about it. (Principal 9)

Bullying Past Versus Present

Teachers and principals who have been in education for longer than five years discussed how their perceptions of bullying had changed over time. They compared how they perceived bullying at the time of data collection to bullying they witnessed at the beginning of their careers. Of note was the fact that 70% of the participants, principals and teachers, had 15 or more years of experience as educators in the school system.

Several participants emphasized that educators were currently more aware of bullying because it has now been defined and consequences have been determined by policies and laws. As a result, educators are in a better position to identify, analyze, and deal with bullying.

I don't think it's changed very much. I think we are aware of it more. We're analyzing it, we're studying it, we're trying to minimize it, reduce it, eliminate it. (Fiddlehead)

I think bullying hasn't changed. . . . It has a name, it has a face. It has a set of criteria that tells you this is bullying. If you do this, this is called bullying. It has a set of consequences that go with bullying and some of them are quite strict, which could mean expulsion. (Principal 1)

Once the public recognized the severe negative effects that could result from bullying, one principal said, people reacted to it differently as they had done in the past when child abuse first came into their awareness.

Bullying now has a clout of law, the law . . . not just the school board policies but the law of the land doesn't allow you to bully people. I think that all of that in place gives the administrator a lot more bargaining power. . . . I think in the earlier days, it didn't have a

name and you wanted kids to just stop being mean to each other . . . But once it got this very scary face, I think everybody became quite aware, just like child abuse, I think people became more aware of it and the consequences of it. (Principal 10)

Many participants indicated that several aspects of bullying had changed over time, the most prominent being its meaning and the feelings it invokes. The very word *bullying* now raised concerns. Two male teachers compared perceptions of bullying today to its acceptance in the past as part of play or as a rite of passage.

It was part of growing up and that's probably why there wasn't a lot of research done before that. That's just because we accepted it instead of saying, "Hey, wait a minute, what's going on here, why are we letting this happen?" (Doug)

We're able to define a lot of the activities now so we're able to kind of pinpoint exactly what a particular action stands for and we're able to address I think a little more clearly, whereas before, it was something that was accepted and part of the school and the neighbourhood. It was a growing experience . . . a learning experience. (Bob)

For one teacher, media attention to examples of violence and suicide as results of bullying increased the public's attention and changed people's perceptions.

I think it's not just defining the bullying behaviours but it's also the effect that it's having on the victims that are being bullied. . . . We hear a lot more about children committing suicide because they were victims of bullying behaviour. We hear about children taking guns and shooting people at school because they're victims of bullies. I think this is also something that's a lot more prominent . . . the information is disseminating a lot more than it used to. We never used to hear about someone committing suicide because he was being bullied at school. Or someone was murdered because it was during the time that he was being bullied. (Tony)

Two principals noted how the different perceptions of bullying and increased awareness of its effects resulted in different responses to bullying by educators.

In terms of how we respond to bullying, there's a big difference now from when I first started teaching. We're more aware, I think, of the harm that bullying causes kids now, so we deal with it very seriously. I think back even as a teacher, I may not have dealt with it as seriously as I should have in many cases. But we certainly do now. (Principal 3)

Because administrators and teachers were not as aware of bullying, they didn't take it as seriously, I don't think, as they do now. (Principal 5)

Several participants suggested that despite bullying being better defined, acknowledged, and dealt with today, it seemed more subtle and harder to detect than in the past. In the past, bullying was perceived as blatant and easy to detect. It was physical in nature, in contrast to the more covert, possibly more dangerous, social exclusion and emotional manipulation of today.

Now it has become more subtle. When I first started teaching, it was fairly blatant. Kids would pick on other kids. . . . It's more subtle; we get a lot of kids talking about one another. We get a lot of groups excluding other groups now, which I don't recall when I first started teaching, as much. I think in those days it was more physical. Now it is exclusion. It is "you're not wearing the right clothing," so they exclude that person from their group. (Principal 5)

In the past it was innocent, you took somebody's hat but now it's much more sophisticated. It's much more dangerous because there's much more manipulation that goes on, mind games. (Sandra)

One woman who had been teaching for 30 years discussed how, when she started teaching, the bully was expected to look tough and malicious and engage in stealing or physical violence.

Today by contrast, a bully is conniving and may start the bullying through play.

When I started teaching, I think you would have thought a bully is somebody who is very rough and roguish and they want to steal something from you or they want to hurt you, but they're not playing with you. Now there's sort of a wicked cat and mouse game can be seen as bullying. So bullying has entered into the world of play. I've become more aware of the fact that it's more subtle than just an assault. (Irena)

Another discussed how bullies today were proficient at theory of mind and, hence, could cover up their actions leaving teachers unable to hold them responsible. Girls were identified as being strong in this area, choosing more subtle types of bullying which are more difficult to distinguish as bullying.

I know that the smarter bullies bully in a way that if they're confronted by the teachers in the schoolyard, that they are able to right away, to justify and defend or hide it. I think girls, in particular, have gotten better at it. They don't use physical bullying . . . well, not that they won't use it but they use other techniques of bullying that are more difficult to decipher as to what's going on. Now the boys are doing the same thing. (Adam)

One teacher commented that, in the past, most bullies observed some kind of code of honour that kept them away from passive victims. Bullies today seem more fixated on power and control for their own sake.

The other big change is that the bullying now, I think actually, is more vicious than it was before. Before it's almost like there was an honour code of some sort in which they didn't pick innocent people to pick on. . . . They're going out of their way to find an innocent victim that offers them nothing. Whereas, when I grew up they wouldn't go after an innocent person, they'd go after someone that's not so innocent but they would get something out of it. (Sam)

The most alarming difference reported by principals and teachers was the incidence of bullying; they reported that the severity, seriousness, and frequency of bullying had tremendously increased from the past. One teacher believed that the degree of severity of bullying had increased tenfold.

Right now it is more frequent, it's more blatant and I think the severity or the seriousness of what we see going on has increased tenfold. I cannot imagine that we have that many kids that we all know within our two divisions sitting here that are exhibiting that kind of behaviour. As we've all pointed out, it seems to be the accepted norm. This is what they have seen or they've learned or they may have witnessed. (Mrs. S1)

In my own experience in the elementary system, I saw a gradual increase in the incidence, degree, and frequency of bullying. In my first two to three years of teaching, 25 years ago, I witnessed behavioural problems and peer conflict but bullying was not as prominent as it became years later. Bullying progressed, from minor to severe, over a span of 15 years. As a guidance counsellor, the majority of my days were consumed resolving bullying incidents, meeting with parents, and having case conferences with social workers and board officials regarding students who bullied their peers.

Several participants discussed the difference in the level of violence. In the past physical violence invariably meant fighting, but today's violence may also involve the use of weapons or other arms, inside or outside of school.

I think it's a culture, it's the area of the city, but in certain areas the extreme of the response has escalated over time. They used to fight it out and beat each other bloody and now they take out a gun and shoot each other. It's certainly not happening in the elementary yet but we do have kids who bring knives to school, even with the best of efforts. (Dorothy)

The only danger now is that if that happens now, you worry about whether the kid's going to come back with a baseball bat or with a knife. But back when I was growing up, you dealt with it, you might have had a fight, and then it was over. (Principal 2)

The mention of weapons and guns brought strong responses from teachers who clearly had difficulty contending with the drastic change in the level of violence over time. The use of guns and the extension of violence outside of school were abhorred by teachers.

Well, what we hear in the news. You know, guns, knives, rarely did you hear an incident a gun being used even 15 years ago. Maybe a BB gun, something like that, not a real gun. (Sarah)

I think it's more vicious now and there are other things that are coming into play, which means weapons, threats on the outside of school. I think it's becoming a big fear factor as well. Whereas I don't think I saw that maybe 20 years ago. It was at school, it would stay in school. (Laura)

A few participants discussed membership in gangs as a contributing factor to the violence and use of weapons in schools. Two principals expressed their concern regarding the extension of bullying from the school to the street level.

I'm sure some of the kids that I've dealt with over the last few years are in gangs. One of the schools I was at, in the local area, there were something like 23 street gangs. Now some of them would be as small as four or five kids in some cases but some of them were quite large. (Principal 10)

This is spanning three decades so I would say the one thing that really stands out is the gang membership and I have seen it in several of my schools. Very pronounced in one and even in my last assignment . . . and the intimidation of an older gang member or their brother is a gang member or whatever . . . is scary. We're talking real serious weapons and quite incredible organization. In certain cases, warfare. I would say that would be the most significant part of it from what I see over a 30-year span. (Principal 3)

A number of teachers indicated that the increase in incidence of bullying was somewhat related to the age at which bullying starts. They maintained that bullying in the past was mostly seen in middle and older grades while now it is often observed as early as Grades 1 and 2.

I find changes. Number one, I think that bullying has gotten younger, so now you can find them in Grade 2 and Grade 1. (Sam)

One of my students said her worst year ever was Grade 5. I'm noticing it's going down, like lower from Grade 8 to Grade 5. What we had in Grade 8, it's in Grade 5 now. That's a big drop. (Marg)

Bullying was also reported to be rampant in the schoolyard. A number of participants reported witnessing bullying consistently.

I think it's more overt than it used to be. I'm not saying that it didn't happen in my first years but nothing really comes to mind about it. . . . It would not have necessarily come to the attention of the teaching staff or the principal. Now what I see, the actions are more overt. A child doesn't hesitate to give somebody a push or call out a name, or to criticize or ridicule out in the yard. It's easier to see, it's easier to see as you walk through the yard. (Nancy)

I think the bullying that does happen is more physical and it's . . . it can be more hurtful. Someone might not hesitate to give somebody a push because they won't share a basketball. And because we're in a yard with very little soft surfaces, it's almost all paved, . . . the number of injuries has increased. (Principal 8)

Another aspect of bullying that had changed over time was the duration of bullying. Participants in the study appeared astounded by the bullies' relentless pursuit of their victims. Students who bullied tended to use their power and control to consistently pursue their victims over time. According to this teacher:

It seems to linger, I find. A long time ago you went through it and you dealt with it, you got over it. . . . Whereas now it's more of a grudge and for some reason the kids want to hang on to that little bit of authority or that little bit of power for a little bit longer to the point where it gets more violent. (Lois)

Teachers identified cyber bullying as one of the new methods used by bullies to extend bullying outside of school and pursue their victims over time.

They're kind of . . . awful things that happen on MSN. . . . There's a lot of bullying, exclusions, that sort of thing. Really, kids really can become very distressed about those things. Those things come to your attention as well. They're happening outside of the classroom. (Principal 7)

There's always girls fighting and it's always what you wrote on MSN, and I wasn't writing, she used my MSN . . . and it's a different kind of bullying that never existed before. (Sarah)

Cyber bullying stimulated discussions amongst teachers about the influence of the Internet on modifying and initiating new and severe forms of bullying. Several participants were concerned regarding websites that prompted bullying.

I know we have entire classes of students both at this school and at neighbouring schools, that go onto cyber space sites that are not allowed, they are enticed into these sites and huge amounts of assault goes on these sites. Verbal assault, sexual harassment, intimidation, threats. (Irena)

Likewise, teachers were passionate in their discussion of the influx of violence in the media and entertainment and its direct effect on the incidence of bullying. Several teachers seemed appalled by the lyrics in rap music and foul language in films and videos. The violence witnessed by students on television shows, videos, and video games was reported to have glamorized antisocial behaviour and guns. The situation was viewed as further complicated by the lack of censorship by authorities and parents alike.

Well, the rap music they're listening to, I mean, I don't remember ever hearing that kind of language in songs that we listened to even 20 years ago. . . . But now, every CD has a parental advisory on it, every single one that the kids want and listen to. And video games are very violent. (Sarah)

I think too the way movies and videos and video games and Much Music and things like that have made aggressive behaviour and murder and guns glamorous. They play whatever video games. . . . You get extra points if you kill someone, or you rob a bank, or do a drug deal. Even my Grade 1 students, the TV shows they watch and the movies they see, there's no censorship. There are very few TV shows they're not allowed to watch. . . so everything bad is suddenly glamorous. It's okay, life is disposable. (Theresa)

The liberal use of coarse language in the media was thought to be equivalent to the increase in students' use of inappropriate language.

I find the language of the students is a lot more coarse than it was 15 years ago. You know. It's around everywhere . . . it's the same in the newspapers, they wouldn't print, or TV, and now it's everywhere. (Nell)

One teacher explained that, while children used creativity to make up their own games in the past, children today rely on mimicking and reflecting the power and violence they see on television, Internet, and video games.

I think that bullying reflects that kids don't know how to play properly these days. Years ago we had to make up our own games and these days there's more violence. You're seeing it on TV, on their computers, on their Game Boys, Nintendo and I think they're reflecting that power of those games they see all the time because they don't know how to make their own games. (Mandley)

Students were perceived as lacking in empathy and compassion compared to children 25 years ago. Teachers believed that students in the past were more friendly, caring, and cooperative than students today. In addition, students today were said to lack respect for authority compared to students in the past.

I think it's gotten worse. Not better. The children of 25 years ago were more compassionate, more caring, more friendly with each other, they were more respectful of authority, and no, no, it has gotten really worse. (Mrs. D1)

I concur. I really concur. Thirty years ago, you could have said something to another child once. If you caught that child in the act of hitting somebody, or tripping somebody, all it took was usually one, one comment "stop it, stand over there, and I better not see that again." You know what, most of the time the kids were compliant. Now, it takes you two or three tries to get their attention because they're still smacking somebody or pushing or shoving. (Mrs. S1)

The lack of empathy and compassion were generally related to more adverse effects of bullying in the present compared to the past. A young teacher illustrated the difference by comparing her own feelings when she was bullied to the level of despair expressed by students today. She described how school has become an aversive experience for bullied students today.

I would even say that, I have not been teaching long, I've only been teaching three years. But from what I see my students have gone through in the last three years and my incidents with bullies or being bullied as a child in the same grade level. I have never been afraid of going to school. I knew that they made fun of me today and they may have called me names but two weeks later, a week later, a day later, it was all over and it was gone and I didn't feel any less of a person because of it. But you see kids even in the elementary levels say "I don't want to go to school" or "I'm never going to come back here, I'd rather die." (Lola)

Girl bullies. According to participants' observations, perhaps the most significant difference between bullying in the past and bullying in the present was with regard to girls' bullying. Teachers emphasized that, in the past, boys had a monopoly in the field of bullying,

while presently girls predominated this area. Girls now were more likely than boys to engage in bullying behaviours, tended to be more vicious, and resorted to socioemotional and subtle methods of bullying.

I would say we probably have more female bullies than we do males. I've seen that change over the years. It used to be that the bullying behaviour was very often the boys in the class but that's not so any more. I think females are more subtle and a lot more socioemotional for sure. They go for the jugular. (Nancy)

Girls have become more predominant than ever before as well now. Girls can be even more vicious at times bullying. . . . But now girls bullying girls is a big thing. (Diane)

Several teachers explained that girls had become more diversified in the methods they chose to bully others. They emphasized that in addition to social and emotional bullying, girls now resorted to physical bullying in a similar manner to their male counterparts. This was reportedly quite different in contrast to 15 to 20 years ago when girls may have engaged in yelling but rarely resorted to physical bullying.

The psychological bullying that girls have always tended to do more than boys, I think is still there and always has been but I think a lot of the girls now are also starting to get into the more physical violence aspect of it. I think that's a big change. I think in years gone by girls just didn't fight. There might have been yelling but you very rarely saw the physical. . . . But I also think that girls nowadays are starting to adopt more of the male modes of bullying. . . . I've had experience where girls were physically beating on other children. That was something you didn't see 15, 20 years ago. (Mandley)

One teacher explained that, although girls continued to excel in the use of social and emotional bullying, some girls had found that physical bullying got faster results.

I still think there is the psychological bullying that girls do much better than boys do. I think that's still there but I think for some girls there are kind of . . . maybe they're not getting results as quickly as they want with the psychological bullying so they're going into the violent type. This makes it a little bit more abrupt as far as trying to get the result they want. They're not willing to wait. I really think that that's happened over the years. Girls I think, not all, but I think certain girls their attitudes about how they go about it is becoming much more the way guys were doing it for years. (Dr. Bob)

Teachers added that the use of violence by girls had also extended to include swarming and physical bullying, similar to the gang type of behaviour typical of the male gender.

I had a situation where three or four girls were beating up on one other child. Just the way you'd sometimes see the guys do it. Or sometimes you see girls around in a circle and two in the middle going at it. That type of thing you didn't see 15, 20 years ago. There's a real difference in that. (Mrs. G)

One of the differences observed by teachers in girl bullies' behaviour over the last several years was their reactions and justifications when questioned. While girls in the past would typically break into tears when questioned regarding their bullying behaviour, they now tended to respond in a more macho style. Often they tended to try to justify their behaviour by deflecting the blame.

In years gone by, if you brought a girl down to the office and started questioning about things a lot of times you'd get tears where a lot of times nowadays, you don't. (Laura)

I think that is a real aberration to typical girls. . . . I think, in the past, as soon as I sort of got them apart they were both in tears. There was no macho stuff to it at all. But I think nowadays I can see a couple of situations in the last couple of years where it was dealing with the girls after the situation was over, it was more like dealing with the guys. It was very sort of macho and also "it wasn't me" this type of thing. Trying to deflect the blame all the time . . . it was scary. (Nancy)

The tendency to use physical bullying, the reduced tearful reactions and the macho image were explained by one teacher in terms of the changing image of woman in the modern society. He elaborated that in general women today were viewed as stronger than in the past. In the media, and often in action movies, females use violence and guns to achieve their goals. He surmised that girls were reflecting such images and learned behaviours.

I think that the macho image is becoming more prevalent amongst the girls too. They're more willing to fight and you don't get the tears as much. I guess maybe it also relates to some of the way society views women nowadays too. When you watch the movies if you see an action movie, there are just as many females shooting guns and kicking people with their karate and everything else. I guess to a certain extent girls are learning to be somewhat the same as guys. (Bob)

In my capacity as a guidance counsellor I have also witnessed all of the above changes in girls' bullying over the years. I had to deal with mounting numbers of girls who were severely bullying others. Those who were victimized were often excluded and made to feel miserable in

school. Many parents suffered along with their children who refused to come to school or suffered unexplained pains. The level of cruelty and creativity of methods used was quite surprising. These girls were often very defensive and used cognitive distortions to reassign the blame to their victims. What I found most astounding was their resilience in the face of consequences and authority. Some of these girls did not hesitate to swear at the principal in the middle of meetings. They were tough, oppositional girls that did not back down in the face of any challenge.

Such girls used physical bullying, threats, verbal bullying, and social exclusion. Several of them formed their own small gangs and managed to terrify even physically big male students in the intermediate grades. It was difficult to convince students to share the stories they reported to me with administrators, social workers, or police for fear of these girls' retaliation. At least two of these girls were discovered to have carried knives to school. Suspension, for these girls, was not only a laughing matter but also a badge of honour.

Their methods were so hurtful and vicious that I found it difficult to imagine that they were reflecting the image of the modern woman in the society. I learned a great deal about their lives in working with these students. What was most striking was the contrast between the power and control they wielded on peers they bullied and the powerlessness and lack of security and control they felt in their disorganized homes. What they all had in common was that bullying was their response to other pressures and stressors in their lives.

Several of these girls, as a result of their extreme behaviours, were referred for psychological assessments with their parents' consent. I was present with the board psychiatrist on several of those assessments to support these girls and to help them share their feelings and thoughts openly. A few were diagnosed with conduct disorder while others were diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder. This indicated that they were deemed exceptional students under

the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Special Education Act*. They were labelled *behaviourally exceptional*, a label which allows students to receive a program that accommodates their special needs. In those cases, the board psychiatrist recommended a behavioural class placement and, on a few occasions, a residential placement setting. Unfortunately, this was not always followed up as such a decision was always pending parental consent which was often declined. Interestingly, during the same span of time, I witnessed far fewer boys go through this process.

CHAPTER 5: CONDITIONS

In this chapter, I describe the overarching theme of conditions, focusing on conditions that contribute positively or negatively to teachers' sense of self-efficacy in dealing with bullying. These conditions are discussed under the following major themes: situational obstacles that impact efficacy of interventions; current solutions and consequences; policies; school culture; and social trends in the modern society (see Figure 4).

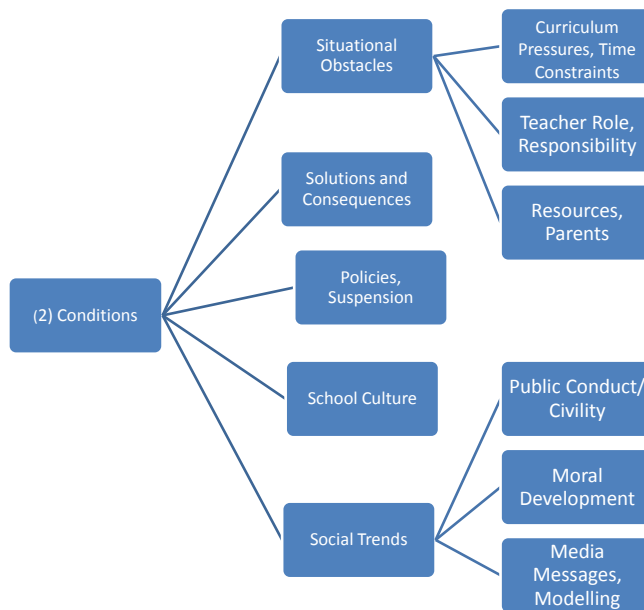


Figure 4. Conditions contributing to teachers' sense of self-efficacy in dealing with bullying.

Situational Obstacles That Affect Intervention

The teachers engaged in a lively discussion of situational obstacles that interfered with efficiently intervening and resolving bullying situations, including teaching students acceptable behaviour. Several obstacles were cited by teachers and principals alike.

Curriculum Pressures

A prominent obstacle was curriculum pressures. According to teachers, it took time to effectively evaluate a bullying situation; but meanwhile, curriculum demands made it very difficult to find that time.

It's just trying in a regular classroom to fit in [interventions for bullying] is really difficult, there's no time. Curriculum demands are incredible. (Laura)

The curricular expectations now the teachers have! The targets that we are setting for student learning bring more pressure on them. They can't just stop and say, "I'm going to spend an hour to talk to this whole class on this incident that happened and how should we have handled it differently." I encourage my teachers to deal with these issues as part of their religious program . . . but how much time do we have when there is so many other administrative paperwork, curricular pressures from the Ministry, from school boards, from parents? (Principal 2)

Several teachers agreed that the Fully Alive (n.d.) religion program, designed for all grade levels in TCDSB schools, addressed such topics as friendship, stress, family interaction, decision making, and identity. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the program's potential for preventing bullying, they hastened to add that their efforts were invariably thwarted due to curriculum pressures.

I find the Fully Alive program, which is mainly about friendships, stresses, family interactions, decisions, identity, . . . the kids really enjoy it. So the program is really good. . . . It's just that we have no time to squeeze it in. That's the problem. And they need more of that but there's just no time, I find. I'm always putting that on the back burner. (Diane)

In the quality circle, every day giving people compliments about their work or trying to build them up . . . it's all a kind of roundabout part of building respectful, gospel values and community. But you're trying to do all this and teach math and language and social studies and science too. (Sandra)

As a teacher, I used an informal system similar to the quality circle which I called carpet time. We sat on the carpet to solve problems, teach values, and celebrate successes. Everyone enjoyed it even the Grade 8 students. I recall the curriculum stress and the difficulty fitting it in but the students loved it and were disappointed whenever we missed it. Sometimes we were only

able to fit in 5 or 10 minutes but even that helped maintain class spirit, establish camaraderie, and reinforce a sense of family.

One teacher speculated that because parents were too busy to teach moral values, they sent their children to Catholic schools to learn them. She explained that teachers, like parents, had little time and, since religion was not mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, it often got ignored.

I think it also comes down to the values that are instilled while growing up as a Catholic. We would go to church together and kids don't have time for that. But then you know the parents send them to a Catholic school. What's the subject that's lacking the most? We don't have time for religion. Well, there's no mark for it so . . . you know if something's got to suffer, religion will slide. And that's where we should be teaching them those values of acceptance, understanding, and truthfulness and all that. I guess as teachers we're as guilty as the parents. (Sunshine)

The mandated curriculum was subjected to great criticism by teachers. Several scoffed at the great emphasis on academic subjects for students as young as 4 and 5 and the lack of emphasis on socializing and developing the appropriate communication skills. The educational system seemed to have assumed that children would have developed the necessary social skills before coming to school. Its policy for dealing with students with behavioural problems was to place them in special education classes.

You're teaching Grade 2 kids all of this . . . math curriculum and science and everything else. And in the end they've got to learn how to behave and get along with each other and there's obviously no emphasis on that in schools. It's like "Well if he misbehaves to a point, we'll stick him in some special classroom." You can't just dump math and language and social studies and science on 6- or 7-year-olds when they don't have the ability to deal socially with each other. Curriculum is a primary, serious, big issue. There's not enough emphasis on social skills. (Dr. Bob)

So [though] our academics are stronger, socially [students are] weaker because we don't have time to sit there and teach them the social skills. (Sunshine)

In my first class in an inner-city school, I realized almost immediately that my students had a substantial lack of social skills. I learned that at home they had little or no direction on appropriate behaviour and social cues. The positive class culture I wanted seemed very difficult

to attain. Frustrated, I sought appropriate resources to teach the students values and modify their behaviour while keeping them interested and motivated. Eventually, I borrowed a program from a treatment centre which focused on teaching values through games and drama. It turned out to be invaluable. The time that was spent on it saved much time that otherwise would have been spent resolving conflicts and listening to complaints.

In addition to lack of social skills building in the curriculum, teachers seemed bewildered at the great emphasis placed on the standardized mathematics and literacy tests administered by the EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2012) which had to be completed by all students in Grade 3 and Grade 6. The results of these tests are made public, are considered indicative of the school's achievement level and indirectly reflect on teachers' performance and proficiency. The teachers strongly criticized the purpose of the EQAO and the precedence it took over all other school matters, including addressing bullying and teaching social skills.

There are way more pressing problems because learning is such a social thing. When you have the entire school and staff focusing on just administering a test, and making sure that yes, the results go up so it looks good publicly . . . there are so many other issues that fall by the wayside that should be dealt with. These behavioural and bullying kids aren't even part of this process. They're exempt from it. It's all about EQAO, it's all about teacher accountability. (Dr. Bob)

Teachers pointed out that the tests took too long to administer and also interfered with the school's normal functioning so that they could not attend to serious socialization issues amongst students.

I've just recalled to mind when we had CAT III testing a couple of weeks ago and we had some incidents happen in the yard that we had to deal with right away. Sure enough, we couldn't, because we had to test in a certain area coming back in from recess. We needed to deal with the issue right away, we couldn't let it wait, but time constraints didn't allow us. (Franz)

Teachers in one focus group challenged the norm of putting curriculum ahead of taking the time to resolve bullying incidents.

It takes a lot of time to problem solve or to talk with kids. We've spent some days where it's been 2.5 hours with the classes working away. . . . It takes a lot of time to do it right. So many people now are so worried about "I've got to do this" and "I've got to do my math" and "I don't have time." They don't take the time to talk about these things.
(Candy)

Several other teachers agreed that the only solution was to take matters into their own hands and decide what was more important, dealing with bullying situations or dealing with curriculum pressures. They said they often ignored the curriculum and looked after situations that had potentially grave consequences even at the expense of curriculum. One teacher said priority should always be given to social matters which have a more lasting influence on the child. She advised that there were ways of covering or pretending to cover the curriculum. Teachers thus emphasized the importance of educating the whole child rather than solely concentrating on academic progress.

I remember, many moons ago, I had a prof that said never, ever forget you are teaching children, not subjects. And I thought, "Oh my God, that is so true." Give the image of compliance: that should be in bold print. You can make anything fit, curriculum-wise, so that you can really do it all in one day and then spend the time doing the stuff that's important. (Nancy)

Sometimes you've just got to throw the curriculum out . . . because in the end it's still just curriculum. Those kids in front of you have to go out that door and deal with some of these situations, including bullying. (Mrs. G)

That's called a teachable moment. The lesson be damned, this is more important. (Mrs. S2)

Those discussions reminded me of my teaching days in inner-city schools, where bullying was rampant. Curriculum pressures were not quite as prominent in those days. I recall changing my daily plans on the spot to accommodate discussing an important issue with students. The most important thing for me was the students' development as healthy, productive, and empathic citizens. This necessitated teaching them social skills, decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Those were the principles upon which my "family" system was based; much guidance to shape their progress was necessary on a daily basis. The students

enjoyed such discussions and looked forward to family sessions and the interruptions that dealt with relationships and prosocial skills. As the year progressed, I invariably observed social and emotional progress which in turn led to increased motivation and higher academic achievement.

Time Constraints

In physical bullying, evidence of harm allows more clarity into the situation; but the majority of bullying interactions are convoluted and difficult to unravel. Several teachers spoke of their responsibility to meet the needs of the children who were bullied and to teach students in general social skills and appropriate behaviour.

And they're learning all the time, addressing situations and issues. Sometimes we just have to take the time and really go through it with them because there's nobody else to do it. You have to bring it to their attention. (Mrs. D2)

It's like Mrs. D1 was saying, you have to take that time. You can't just not care. . . . You have to be there. They're children, they need you. (Mrs. S2)

However, deciphering the interaction and getting clear details of what had transpired was found to be extremely time consuming. The problem was often exacerbated by teachers' busy schedules and students' lack of expressive language skills.

Nobody seems to want to take the time to deal with it. A lot of the reason is that nobody has the time to deal with it. (Dr. Bob)

It becomes very complex when somebody reports something . . . because it calls for very time-consuming investigating or talking to people or trying to figure out what went on and the kids involved are often not very articulate, not verbally adept. Sometimes it's difficult to try and decipher exactly what happened or who was doing what. It's rarely that you can get a clear outline of exactly what happened. You know, people are very busy. They don't want to spend two or three hours sitting with one kid trying to figure something out. Bang, bang, bang. That's what they're looking for and with the physical situation, that's usually very clear cut, very simple. The other stuff is not as simple. (Principal 7)

It takes so long to sit there and identify [what happened]. . . . They're good at being able to lay blame, but that's not problem solving. That's just blaming the whole world for what happened. . . . [Meanwhile] you've got to do 4,000 IEPs [individual education plans]. . . . There isn't the time in the day to do, really, what probably matters more than that math class or whatever. (Nancy)

The complexity of unravelling a bullying interaction could be further compounded by students' reluctance to report which could add to the time needed by teachers to effectively resolve bullying problems.

And you don't have time to stop everything to figure out who did what because then they start lying: they didn't do anything, no one did anything, no one saw anything. (Mrs. S1)

The other obstacle I found is getting to the bottom of it. It's getting the story straight. I've tried to intervene many times but the stories keep going around and around. So-and-so accusing someone, and they someone else, and before you know it you can have 10 or 15 people with different stories. Meanwhile the bullying is continuing while you're trying to figure out what the real story is. You also have a class of students there in front of you. (Sandra)

The logistics of dealing with bullying, while simultaneously carrying out expected duties and schedules, seemed insurmountable to many teachers. A prime example of this was resolving bullying issues that occurred in the schoolyard. Teachers complained that detecting bullying incidents during the short recess time resulted in having to take the students with them in order not to leave their classes unattended which is mandated by policy. As a result, teachers ended up trying to deal with two major tasks at the same time: attending to their class and attempting to resolve the bullying problem in the hall outside the classroom.

You're dealing with issues that have happened in the schoolyard and you have maybe two minutes before the class have to work on their next subject. You've [got a] group out in the hall but you can't leave the children alone in the room. (Mary)

These incompatible but important responsibilities presented teachers with the dilemma of how and what to attend to first. Principals and special education seemed better situated to resolve issues that arise at recess due to the flexibility of their schedule but the task most often fell to teachers.

The majority of the people I've encountered, and I'm saying the vast majority . . . are sensitive to kids. They do try very hard to deal with it and take some time to deal with it. . . . When an incident happens outside at recess time, you've got 15 minutes to deal with it or you might have the last two minutes of recess to deal with it. . . . When are you going to deal with an incident of bullying and take 20 minutes, a half an hour, or an hour? I as an administrator have a bit more freedom to be able to bring kids together . . . but I don't

think the teachers have the time to deal with it because they have other responsibilities. A special ed teacher may have a few more minutes than a regular. But what's a teacher of 25 or 30 kids going to do? Abandon the 25 or 30 kids to talk to two, and sometimes these kids are in different grades? Sometimes they're not even in their own class. They are very, very limited. (Principal 2)

It was not unusual, in my experience, for an elementary school teacher on yard duty to have to resolve a bullying incident as the school bell rang to end the 15-minute recess. As teachers scrambled to get back to their classrooms before the students, they often made hurried decisions. Some sent the students to the office to be looked after by administrators, while others took the students with them to their classes and attempted to resolve the problem in the hallway. Yet others said closing words and sent the students away with no resolution, justifying their lack of action with the duty to be back in their classes.

Yet another demand on teachers' time was the requirement from some schools to document bullying interactions. One teacher commented on having to complete such documentation after school which in itself was considered a deterrent from dealing with bullying.

Most people who deal with these things find themselves in school at 6:30, 7:00 o'clock [at night] typing up statements. They walk down the corridor between classes and bang, somebody's smacked somebody in the head or verbally abuses somebody. To take the time to deal with that, you end up spending another three hours after school trying to type up the documents. . . . And nobody wants to do that. But that's one of the reasons for not dealing with it. (Coach)

Because of time constraints, teachers admitted to feeling guilty whenever they took time to deal with nonacademic issues.

It's the old "There's no more time in a day to do what we have to do." So, people are under this enormous pressure . . . that they feel guilty . . . you feel guilty if you take time out of your day to do something that doesn't seem academic. (Nancy)

The teachers discussed ways of helping the students without interrupting classes and academic endeavours. One teacher asked her students to write their problems down in order to discuss them at a more appropriate time.

Sometimes I'll tell them "I don't have time right now, write it down." So you don't forget and then we'll try to talk about it later. (Mrs. G)

One principal reported that being very busy in the classroom often interfered with the teacher's ability to evaluate the seriousness of a bullying situation. As a result, he believed that some teachers did not attend to subtle forms of bullying when they were reported.

Sometimes teachers are extremely busy in the classroom and sometimes a student will come up at the wrong time to tell them something and they just say, "We'll take care of that later," or "That's nothing." . . . But, again, some teachers are not aware of the subtle types of bullying, in my experience. (Principal 3)

Some expressed frustration that their very short breaks were often interrupted or followed by complaints about bullying. After a 10-minute break in the staff room, a teacher may be faced with students, and the teacher who was on yard duty, waiting to report a bullying incident.

The other thing is the wear and tear. I mean after a long day, after a long week, you know when I come back upstairs from a 10-minute break in the staff room, I don't want to see 15 students outside my door with two of the teachers that have been out on yard duty saying, "Oh boy, you'll never know what happened while you were downstairs." It wears you down, that's for sure. (Franz)

Moreover, teachers complained of the limited support, resources, and follow-up to bullying incidents that also contributed to inadequate interventions. One focus group highlighted the need for other professionals to be part of the solution. They complained that small schools had no guidance counsellors, no vice-principals and a teacher might only rarely see a social worker.

There's no support system. Like a teacher in a classroom full of kids, an incident arises, who do you call? A social worker that you've seen maybe once in your whole year teaching? There's no guidance counsellors. . . . In a school like ours there's no VP [vice-principal] even. Who do you turn to? You kind of deal with it halfway and that's it. (Sarah)

Interestingly, despite the obstacles, most teachers felt that they needed and wanted to take the time to resolve bullying interactions because they considered looking after bullying to be important for students' well-being.

Bullying has to be decoded. You have to take the time and let children become aware of becoming accountable for their actions. There's no accountability, even in Grade 2.
(Butterfly)

We'll have to make time because these children are hurting so we need to make time . . .
We have to make time if they come forward whether we have it or not. We'll do it.
(Mary)

One principal thought that the logistics of time limitations, curriculum pressures, and the numbers of students in classes made it difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to address individual cases. Instead, he believed that teaching about bullying should be made part of the curriculum.

When you're talking about dealing with individual cases, the specific incidents that happen, that may require half an hour, an hour for two, three, or four kids. They (teachers) don't have that kind of time. To deal with the class, to implement a program for the class, yes, that should be in the curriculum. (Principal 2)

The Evolving Role of the Teacher

Discussing curriculum pressures and time constraints gave way to a discussion about the ever-evolving role of the teacher. Teachers and principals alike emphasized that the role now encompassed multiple roles and went beyond the academic training of a teacher. One principal attributed this complex evolution to changes in society, curriculum, and cutbacks of other resource personnel.

After 37 and a half years I'm still waiting for the day when teachers are allowed to do what they've been trained for: teaching. They're bombarded by changes in society, by changes in the curriculum, by the demands made by cutbacks. (Principal 9)

The multiple roles some teachers felt they were called upon to play included parent, psychiatrist, and social worker in addition to being a teacher.

The teachers are so overloaded with the new curriculum and doing this and doing that . . . and 30 students . . . but at the same time you have to be mom, dad, psychiatrist, social worker, everything, and lo and behold little Johnny or little Susie is still doing the bullying. It's impossible to play all those roles. (Coach)

In addition, a typical classroom now contained a spectrum of intelligence and academic abilities, ranging from the gifted to the intellectually challenged. The diversity of academic abilities within one class was now so broad that a teacher had to work very hard to accommodate them all.

We're faced with the situation where you have an average size class now of 30+ kids. That is an inclusive model, so you're talking a range of intelligence here. You can have gifted kids in your class; you can have kids that have intellectual disabilities in your class. The magic number I would say of kids in your class in any given year that have no adaptation [accommodations] would probably number 20 . . . that is the number of kids that are not identified (as exceptional) . . . You're already overwhelmed by the amount of work . . . not only paperwork but also dealing with all these numbers of students that you have. . . . You have to play social worker and guidance counsellor and mother and father to all of these. (Fiddlehead)

I am familiar with the wide-ranging diversity of abilities and skills within the contemporary elementary school classroom. I have taught classes where half of the students were identified as exceptional and eligible for special education. For part of the school day, those students attended the regular class and it was my duty to present material in subjects such as science or geography at a level suitable for each student. Accommodating their needs required a great deal of organization and often meant that I would administer tests to those students orally, or acted as their scribe.

Several teachers attributed the evolution and complexity of teacher's role in the last few decades to the breakdown of the family. They felt that single-parent families now operated with huge financial challenges and demands. Having to work to provide for their children, they had no time to direct or teach their children important social and communication skills. Teachers complained that many parenting and social work issues were now often left to them although their training was strictly academic.

The family unit has changed. . . . That has quite an impact on everything that is happening in the schools. (Jackie)

A teacher has been trained to teach. But you have to look and see if the child comes well fed. When the child goes home, is there somebody waiting for that child? (Rose)

It's a major problem. I think that we've got way more issues and problems than we did 20 or 30 years ago with the way society's gone, in particular single-parent families, breakdown of family. As a teacher now you're the fellow holding the ball to not just teach but to do parenting as well. It's not coming from the families like it did years ago. I really think that breakdown of families changed society a lot and money's been an issue . . . and there's lot more on the plate of the teacher than there ever was. (Dr. Bob)

As a guidance counsellor and school consultant, I often made the observation that teachers' academic training was not in keeping with the fast-changing society and family unit. Students endured many stresses such as having a single parent, witnessing intense abuse, having parents who were substance addicts or parents who were incarcerated. Much of what was happening in the lives of such students was very shocking for teachers who came from predominantly white, middle-class, relatively stable homes. Recognizing the need, I changed the guidance model in my schools to better support the students and families. Once in effect, teachers there were relieved to have this support to tap into particularly when dealing with bullying. I became convinced that additional supports were required in all schools to help students and families. Moreover, I was convinced that teachers required additional or different training to allow them to understand the challenges faced by today's students and their families.

Cultural diversity was also highlighted as another contributor to the changing complexity of the teacher's role. Teachers pointed out that what was assumed to be right in the more homogeneous society of the past needed to be questioned to fit today's multicultural society.

You know Toronto is changing culturally. The values have changed from even 10 years ago. What is acceptable today was not acceptable back then. (Jackie)

My experience as a teacher in a multicultural school led me to realize that perceptions of respect, cooperation, and work ethics varied from one culture to another. To ensure a positive class culture, I worked to establish our own class values and expectations. The students contributed their ideas in democratic class meetings which sparked their interest in maintaining

the common group values. Participants questioned whether school expectations needed to be modified based on the school community.

I think you're speaking of being perceptive and of being also self-reflective as a teacher. Are these good methods or do I need to just forget about the traditional standards of how a classroom is set up? Maybe that's going to work better for my class or for those types of students. (Jane)

Despite the aforementioned challenges, teachers expressed their dedication to their profession and their desire to do the best they could under the given circumstances.

You're always watching, always listening. I'm in there, that's my classroom. I am responsible for what happens in here. I have to be watching, I have to be listening constantly. (Mrs. S1)

Diffused Responsibility: "Passing the Buck"

The responsibility for intervening in a bullying situation usually lies with the adult who happens to observe it. Teachers reported that their many responsibilities meant they had little time for additional duties, a factor that discouraged them from dealing with bullying situations. Passing the buck was a way some teachers were perceived to shift this responsibility from themselves, particularly when the bullying took place in the schoolyard. Teachers on yard duty often told students to report to their homeroom teacher after recess. This, however, complicated matters further as the homeroom teacher, who had not witnessed anything, attempted to get the details of the incident and might eventually give up without resolving the issue. Passing the buck was perceived to be a major contributor to unresolved bullying situations.

I think some teachers will pass the buck. Your students will come to you and say, "So-and-so was bothering me at recess. They were doing this and that." I said did you tell the teacher on duty. They told me to tell you when I got inside. So I think it's sometimes easier for some people to pass the buck. (Theresa)

Well, sometimes you're trying to say teach a lesson or something, you want to continue or you're on duty and kids are running up to you. It's hard to get to all these kids. They all have these problems so you sometimes say, "Tell your teacher." It happens. They come to me and say, "They told me to tell you." Then, you're not out there so you really don't know what happened and you try your best but then it gets pushed under the rug. (Mrs. D2)

Some teachers admitted being overwhelmed by the number of complaints they got while on yard duty. Social bullying was rampant, particularly amongst the girls, so that keeping up with the demands was impossible. Some teachers admitted to ignoring or minimizing such complaints as a way out of dealing with the situation.

With girls, they tend to use exclusion as the main way of bullying the child. . . . Sometimes as teachers we're out in the schoolyard and we hear students come to us and say, "So-and-so said this to me," "So-and-so won't be my friend," and we pass it off sometimes because we have so many kids out in the yard and some kids just . . . oh, my goodness, they're always saying that. (Sandra)

Teachers are busy and that's a huge thing. Sometimes the little one that complains is told, "Oh, go back to your seat and we'll talk about it" or "You'll be fine." (Franz)

Administrators were as overwhelmed as teachers by an abundance of duties. This often resulted in inadequate resolution to bullying incidents or simply returning the students back to teachers to solve their problems.

You go to the office and you dump it on the administration and then they've got to deal with it. Well, they've got a whole pile of other kids . . . these kids pass around and pass around and eventually nobody deals with it. (Dr. Bob)

Even maybe administration, there's so much paperwork involved with it, it's just as easy to say to the teacher, "You deal with it yourself, you can do it." I've had principals in the past say, "Take care of your own discipline problems." (Franz)

One teacher said she often told her students to notify their parents about the bullying and have them look after it themselves or by calling the police.

Lately I say, "Tell your mother and have your mother call her mother," or "If it's that bad, call the police." (Mrs. G)

In the end, teachers concluded that passing the buck not only resulted in inconsistent responses and lack of appropriate solutions for bullying, but also contributed to students' reluctance to report bullying.

Nothing happens and the next day the kid does the same thing . . . and the next day, "Well, I'm not going to bother to tell this teacher because I told him yesterday. Well I'm not going to tell him today." (Larsson)

If you don't have the energy to do it, if you don't have the time to do it, . . . then it doesn't get the attention that it should. And when that happens, I'm sure you're giving the students the wrong message. (Tony)

Buck-passing was seen to backfire, especially when students continued to bully. One teacher felt that teachers must take the time to deal with each complaint, treating all students who bully as if they are their own students; this way, consequences and resolution could be guaranteed.

Yeah, the passing the buck does backfire . . . I think given all the schools I've been to, one of the best philosophies is that you deal with every child as if he or she were in your classroom. (Dorothy)

Limited Resources

Limited human resources and support personnel has impeded the progress schools might have made in dealing with bullying. Guidance counsellors and social workers have been lost to cutbacks in school boards' budgets. As a result, in addition to teaching, teachers must now deal with social and other issues. Part-time services of guidance counsellors could only be effective in a limited way.

It's not the way it used to be and I really think that from a teacher's perspective we've lost a lot of staff, a lot of support, guidance counsellors, social workers, that we had and no longer have. As a teacher now, you're the fellow holding the ball to not just teach but to do parenting as well. (Diane)

The cutbacks in education and guidance counsellors and social workers and so on. These are the people that would help out with regards to helping with problem-solving techniques or whatever. (Coach)

We have a guidance counsellor who is so overworked she can only be here a certain period of time and has so many students on her list. She's very good but she's here half a day a week. (Ms S2)

Inevitably kids are not getting the proper counselling and not the proper social work that they need because there's no money. (Dr. Bob)

Some teachers felt professionals were needed to deal with bullying problems in their classrooms. Such professionals would have the training and the skills necessary to unravel the details of social bullying.

There needs to be something maybe in place or somebody with the skills to get to the bottom of things. You know, get the truth out . . . I find that a major obstacle; just getting the truth out of them. (Sandra)

I wish there was someone I could call upon to come and help deal with the situation. I know there isn't anyone I can just call. So, I really wish there was backup for this kind of problem. (Mary)

One principal noted how special professionals had been assigned to schools with strong needs.

When we got the social worker and the psychologist coming in two and a half days each, my first thing was, "Wow, this is going to be great because we can set up some sort of outreach programs or parenting skills." (Principal 4)

However, these psychologists and social workers did not meet the principal's expectations. The psychologists mainly assessed and identified students with special needs; they did not engage in community outreach programs or offer workshops for parents. Their need to catch up with the waiting list for assessments and identification seemed to have taken precedence over teaching parenting and prosocial skills.

They're supposed to be in the school two and a half days a week but they're not. They come for one and a half to two hours, test the kid, and they leave. The good that these people could have been doing with some of these outreach programs with parents and even getting out there and maybe having a parents' night to talk about mental illness, to talk about whatever, doesn't happen. (Principal 4)

Instead, people that are employed as psychologists are testing, diagnosing, assessing. (Principal 3)

Parents' Resistance

Teachers and principals attributed bullying to underlying reasons (as discussed in Chapter 4). Two principals passionately expressed concern about how some parents themselves presented obstacles to getting their children the support they needed; they would block or sometimes

blatantly refuse the intervention and support needed by their children who bullied. According to these principals, some students engaged in challenging behaviours, such as bullying, to camouflage their frustration with their inability to keep up with the academic program. In order to offer such students the special program they needed, a formal process of assessment by the board psychologist is required. This, in turn, requires consent from parents. Some parents, however, deny the need to place their children in a special education class or refuse the assessment process; hence, depriving their children of programs that could lower their stress levels and improve their behaviour. The principals' frustration is clear in the following quote.

You can't do any type of testing on a child unless the parents totally agree with it. Some of the kids who are your biggest behavioural problems in some cases are the children who are so frustrated because they're sitting in a regular classroom doing "the regular work with some modifications" where they should be in a language-impaired class, or they should be in a learning-disabled class, or whatever. Parents totally refuse to let you do any type of testing on the child. Even if you do, they won't allow them to be placed in special programs that would actually allow the child to lower their stress level. I don't know how you change the law. (Principal 4)

Regardless of the nature or severity of children's behavioural problems, parental consent is required by law in order for a social worker to be allowed to work with them. Additional social workers were sometimes assigned to communities that tended to have many challenges and insufficient resources. To the principals' disappointment, however, they witnessed parents who needed help the most, refuse the social worker's support. Hence, children who needed the most help tended to have parents who denied them such services by refusing to give their consent. One principal questioned this need for parental consent; in her opinion, there should be a way to circumvent this need if the parents were not acting in favour of the child's general well-being.

The government came up with these law grants where you could get a social worker and a psychologist in your school. . . . Social workers were assigned to the schools, two and a half days a week. I found it really interesting that the law [mandated] that in order for the social worker to speak to the child, you had to get the parents' permission. So here you have a child who is having major behavioural issues and there's absolutely nothing you can do . . . [the social worker] can't deal with him unless mommy and daddy signed the

paper saying it's okay. In many cases the kids who need it the most have parents who resent or resist it the most. (Principal 4)

To me there's got to be some way of saying to the parents, "Sorry, you can say whatever you want, but this . . . child needs help, we're going to give it to him whether you agree or not." I don't know . . . where you draw the line about type of control parents have and what they don't have. It's amazing how parents can refuse help. (Principal 3)

Additional Obstacles to Intervention

Obstacles identified by principals. Principals identified additional situational obstacles to handling bullying. In some communities, language barriers were a major obstacle to communication between schools and parents. In the past, schools were able to get interpreters to communicate with parents in their languages but shortages of funding now only allows for the interpretation of letters.

Principals will do what is necessary to keep the students safe. That message must be passed on and the community must be convinced that at least the effort is being made to do that. In some communities, unfortunately, many times it's difficult. There's a language barrier in many cases. I remember many years ago at the board we had interpreters and translators for all kinds of issues. You needed any language and you were able to avail yourself of one of these interpreters or translators. Today it's nonexistent basically. (Principal 10)

Getting the facts and details about incidents of social and emotional bullying was another major obstacle. Lack of reporting and the complexity of bullying interactions, particularly cyber bullying, interfered with the clarity of consequences and intervention.

Well, I think that when it's a case of physical aggression that's probably fairly simple to deal with. Because normally we contact the parents, we could give a suspension, and then we deal with the guidance counsellor, social worker in the school. The obstacles dealing with bullying in some of the older grades is once you start investigating, it's almost, it's almost like an endless loop and it's really difficult to find the answer. (Principal 5)

(The biggest challenge is) Not having the facts; people not wanting to speak up to give me the facts. (Principal 9)

Another principal maintained that a supportive, strong staff was essential to handling, minimizing, and refusing to tolerate bullying. Conversely, he believed that a weak, unsupportive staff could be an obstacle in attempting to tackle bullying. They might hinder attempts to address

bullying by resisting new programs and ideas or they might blame parents rather than engage in finding solutions to the problem.

I think if one did not have a strong and supportive staff that could be an obstacle. I think if we didn't have a strong staff, I think that would certainly handcuff a person as an administrator in dealing with it. Resistance by staff and a negative culture in school, I guess blaming or finger pointing by the staff at parents or at others, rather than trying to do something about it in the real life situation. (Principal 7)

As a guidance counsellor, I was asked by two principals to conduct anti-bullying programs. This involved forming a committee, surveying students and staff, training the staff, and running the program. The staff reaction, cooperation, and level of involvement varied dramatically between the two schools. In one of them, where a negative culture permeated the staff environment, I was met with resistance by some teachers and a reluctance to participate in the program. Several of those teachers had a tendency to blame the bullied child for being "at fault" or the parents of the bullies for being the "source of the problem." As far as they were concerned, neither of those perceived causes required intervention.

Solutions and Consequences

The incidence and insidious nature of bullying fuelled the discussions about its consequences in schools. As a researcher, I was interested in exploring the policies and processes followed by different schools in cases of bullying. Principals and teachers contributed information on policies, processes, and consequences used in classrooms and schools following bullying incidents.

Different levels of consequences were followed depending on the type of offence. Teachers expressed frustration with the limited consequences they were able to employ. They could use simple consequences such as writing a note of apology. If bullying took place in their presence, they could try to defuse it. More serious cases, repeat offenders, and cases that involved resistance from parents would usually be sent to school administrators.

They're very simple consequences because our hands are tied. . . . If there is some bullying in the class, I'll have the child write an apology letter to the child that they bullied . . . or we'll keep them in at recess or we'll have them write out rules. These are little things that we do. Apart from these things . . . really our hands are tied, we can't do much else. (Queenie)

I think it's addressed on many levels. The first level is if it's happening in the classroom or the schoolyard and you tend to be the teacher on duty. I know myself I feel the one to be responsible to deal with the issue. If I don't get anywhere, if I have resistance from the parents and the student, then I refer to administration for support. But for the most part, the way I deal with it is that if it's in my class or in the yard when I'm out there, then I'm the first to deal with it and hopefully it stops there. (Franz)

Teachers emphasized that following two or three offences, they resorted to sending the bullies to the principal or vice-principal for a more serious consequence.

Bigger things go to the principal, depending on the number of situations that that particular student has had this problem. If there's a situation that arises I try to defuse it in the classroom and they know I will. But I will tell the administrator, "Just so you know, if this parent calls, this is what happened; this is how I handled it" . . . And then the second time, it might be "Okay you know what, we talked about it and now it's time to go downstairs." (Lois)

So it's time to go downstairs because obviously what I did wasn't enough to defuse so we're going downstairs and then the office takes over and they do whatever their step is. And usually it's like a strike three. By strike three they're out usually. (Marg)

Several teachers, however, scoffed at the idea that sending students to the principal solved the problem. In fact, administrators gave students the consequence of helping out in the pleasant adult environment of the office, thus reinforcing the bullying behaviour.

I know a couple of incidences where the child was sent to the office and at the office they would give him busywork like stamping received envelopes and things like that. Or they reinforce that . . . "If you do something bad, you'll be sent to the office," where you get to be around adults and see the comings and goings and be privy to things that the other kids aren't. (Dorothy)

One teacher believed that ambiguous understanding of what constitutes a bully, what types of behaviours were considered bullying, and what consequences should follow made a significant contribution to the incidence of bullying in schools. In her experience, bullies engaged in a process of weighing the potential consequences before they engaged in the

behaviours. She felt that the consequences given by administrators were not severe enough and as a result, the benefits of bullying outweighed the cost of consequences for such students.

I find it's the consequence that causes their behaviour. . . . I've had this bully for two years. I've seen him bullying and it's been brought up, I've spoken to the parents about it, I've spoken to the office about it and yet we don't have clear, clear outlines as to what a bully is . . . like "this is a bully, a bully is someone who . . . and if you do these things, this is what's going to happen." Well, if the consequence isn't there for that behaviour, then, "I got off this time, I'll get off next time. Oh well, all I have to do is sit in the office. Or, oh well, all I had to do is stay in for recess for a day or a few days." The consequence is what encourages the behaviour. (Lola)

As Lola mentioned, students' bullying and other negative behaviours are maintained by the consequences. One teacher indicated that many teachers had lost faith in the interventions given by administrators and learned to apply their own consequences with varying results. One teacher stated that students take more liberties in bullying others when they are supervised by teachers who are known to be ineffective in their consequences.

I'm just laughing because we just deal with it . . . I deal with my own bullying because it's more effective I think. Or with anyone else's because the kids do know who is going to deal with the problem that happened outside. And you know that when a little kid comes knocking at the door, "Miss, someone from your class took a ball from our class at recess," and they know you're going to do something about it, then that's something you've established. They're not going knocking at someone else's door to tell them because it's not going to be dealt with. So there's a few teachers who get all the little complaints and everything and we deal with it. And then there's the other teachers who are doing their duty at recess time and it's the wild recess. (Jane)

At one school where I worked, as a guidance counsellor, a group of bullies was terrorizing the intermediate division. There were numerous incidents of bullying and several terrified students did not feel safe in the school environment. The consequences to the bullying were not severe enough which encouraged the bullies to continue harassing others. One day both the principal and vice-principal were out of the school building. During the lunch hour, the teacher in charge asked for my assistance in dealing with an emergency in the library. That group of bullies were verbally and physical harassing another group of students. The situation was out of control. I immediately called the police. After an investigation and parent calls, the students

were suspended for 20 days (the maximum number of suspension days possible) and they were banned from attending the Grade 8 graduation. I believe that, if they had been dealt with more seriously on several earlier occasions, such an incident might not have taken place.

Administrators often delayed consequences so that the consequences' effectiveness was lost. Immediate consequences are significant from a developmental point of view. For young children to refrain from repeating negative behaviours in the future, they must understand the connection between the behaviour and the consequence. In addition, delayed responses could allow some students the opportunity to cover up their behaviour.

Let's say a three-year-old trashes something. You have to deal with it immediately. If you try to deal with the problem two days later, they're not going to remember what they did. Or they have that much longer to cover it up. (Butterfly)

You're in the classroom and somebody is out of order and you address that situation, recess time comes and you ask that person to stop and they stop. That's the consequence; you are addressing that situation at that point in time. But when the consequence gets extended over two and three and four days or five days, it doesn't mean anything to the person. The person that is supposed to be disciplined doesn't understand the connection between the discipline and what they did to cause a discipline in the first place. (Twofour)

Several members of one focus group discussed using positive consequences in the intermediate division in their school. For them, the best way to deal with bullying was to have students who bully contemplate their behaviour and give them the opportunity to engage in alternative, prosocial behaviour in the hope that they would find satisfaction in positive contributions to the student body.

With the intermediates one of things we do is if they act out in our yard, and they're not using their recess time properly, playing cooperatively, being socially positive. Well, what we get them to do is . . . get them to go back and think about what they've done. To reinforce the way in which they should be acting out in the yard towards each other, we have them do volunteer work in the primary yard where they lead activities at recess time, soccer, cooperative basketball game, they pull out the parachute. To reinforce in their minds the proper way in which they can spend their time out in the yard and not to be bullies but by facilitating good fun, fair play. (Franz)

In my experience, physical bullying was invariably dealt with by administrators and had more defined consequences, while most socioemotional bullying ended up in the guidance counsellor's office. Although counselling and long-term interventions were a good idea, additional consequences by the principal would have been helpful in some cases in order to deter the bullies and highlight the seriousness of socioemotional bullying. Several teachers expressed concerns about whether socioemotional bullying merited consequences. Providing credible proof of socioemotional bullying was very difficult. Although they believed that this type of bullying could be more harmful than physical bullying, they maintained that, under the present policies and conventions such bullying might not even reach the principal's attention.

Another notable thing is how do you give a consequence for something that is as aggressive as hitting but passive, like dirty looks or gossiping and spreading rumours. (Lola)

The physical, that's obvious happen because of the blood but . . . I don't know whether you go down to the principal and say, "Well these boys are bullying and they're emotionally doing this" and how do you prove this? So that would take a long time for something like that to get to the office. (Rose)

But legally, like there isn't any proof . . . how do you call a parent and say, "I see your child giving dirty looks . . . or gossiping constantly." Well it doesn't sound as serious as it is! And it doesn't sound as bad as throwing a punch. (Lola)

One principal admitted that he dealt with physical bullying resulting in personal injury more severely than he did with cases of gossiping or emotional bullying.

I'll be honest with you, I don't believe that they're all the same. You can't deal with them all the same. Some of the things that happen were far more severe resulting in personal injury and you're not going to deal with that the same way as the girls that are nattering at one another and it's been going on for a couple of weeks. You know what I mean? It's not consistent in that regard at all, I know that. (Principal 7)

I think the results of a physical bullying are easily seen. So, we're looking at someone who is perhaps bruised or pushed down or scraped because they haven't been cooperating. It's easier to bring that to that person's attention and the attention of their parents. So it's very easy to say to a parent, "Your child was involved in this altercation. This child we've had to send home with a bandage or with something." (Principal 6)

Principals were asked to discuss the process they followed in dealing with bullying incidents. Some said they followed no such comprehensive process while others outlined established processes. Principal 7 expressed candid views on how he dealt with bullying incidents. He described his role as “putting out fires”; he had no established process. Although he invested in Second Step (Committee for Children, 2010) as a prevention program to be used by the child and youth worker (CYW), he stated that much of the CYW’s time was also consumed in “putting out fires.” Ideally, he said, principals’ responses to bullying should be more proactive and preventive; this would minimize the necessity for reactive responses.

It’s like putting out fires. Oh, there’s no comprehensive plan. Once we find out about it, we deal with it and when it crops up, it’s brought to our attention and dealt with . . . Our CYWs started to do Second Step with some of the kids. Again, he very often was putting out fires too. I think we were very reactive versus proactive. That’s my thing and I don’t think that’s right. I think it should have been more proactive and then the reactive part would have been secondary. (Principal 7)

Other principals used a process comprising a variety of interventions and prevention strategies. One principal’s process included teaching about bullying in the religion program and in assemblies. She indicated that she spent a great deal of time walking around the schoolyard herself to establish good parameters of behaviour. She stated that meeting the parents was sometimes necessary but her greatest emphasis was on teaching empathy and prosocial skills to students in order to curb future bullying.

One of the big things that I do try to do in the school setting, is to try and build some respect and empathy in the child that is doing it for the other child . . . very often [as a result] they’ll say, “Well, I really should write a note.” I try and make that something the child comes up with, not “Now, you two both shake hands and be friends,” because that’s not going to work. It’s just going to build more opportunities for revenge. (Principal 3)

Other principals’ school processes had mainly been established by the administrators of the school. They spoke of progressive consequences which increase in severity depending on the seriousness of the incident and whether the bully is a repeat offender. Consequences could range

from writing reflection papers to loss of privileges, parent consultation, guidance counsellor or social worker interventions, and even to suspension.

Well, there is a process in many schools. We do have a process and a Code of Conduct and consequences of a progressive nature. They're actually written down in the student Code of Conduct. It all depends on the issue and who is going to be dealing with it. Usually it's the principal or vice-principal who's approached and depending on the severity of the incident, there could be a variety of things that would be in place. Usually we try and make it progressive so the students are spoken to, they may write their reflection paper and exactly what took place and what they could have done to prevent it. There may be loss of privileges, there may be consultation with parents, there may be guidance counsellor involvement, there may be suspension of privileges for certain things, and so on. There may be suspension, but again we try to make it progressive, depending basically on the severity and also if it's repeated behaviour. So the first time they may lose their recess, the second time there may be parent involvement and so on. The third time there would be a suspension then social work involvement if necessary and so on. (Principal 10)

Although there were similarities, each principal described a different process. One principal described a graded system using contracts between the victim and the bully among other approaches. In this school, victims' rights were upheld; the victim was allowed to choose the consequence. A byproduct of this process was that both bully and victim gained empathy and understanding of the other's perspective. Suspension was used as a last resort.

We have good documentation to begin with. We have a graded system, where . . . we'll talk to the kids first. We have things like behaviour contracts, where they have a contract with each other not to do it. We have an escalating scale; if it continues we have the parent in. We make sure we've done this, we've done this and this child continues to that or has picked some other victim, we use suspension as the last resort. We do suspend the kids for three days. We have a situation where the victim gets to tell what they like for a consequence and that is considered a victim's right. That's very, very powerful because you'll have a time where the victim will say, "I want to forgive him but if he does it again, then I'm going to say suspend him." That's a shockingly amazing thing for kids to hear and then they're in tears and they're crying and they're hugging, "Thank you, thank you," and it takes on a whole different complexion. We will suspend but we do go on a graded scale. (Principal 1)

A few principals spoke of elaborate processes followed in their schools. One principal outlined one such detailed plan of responsibilities and consequences. As in most schools, the supervising teacher was the first one expected to deal with the bullying incident. The CYW, who

taught prosocial skills, was considered part of the process. Paperwork and documentation included a discipline report that described the incident and recorded the solution chosen by the bully and signed by the parents. Those reports were filed in the office but were to be destroyed at the end of the school year. According to Principal 9, three reports resulted in suspension and a permanent record in the Ontario Student Record. Police were called for extreme cases that required medical intervention.

It depends on the incident. The incident can be solved on the spot by the person that witnessed the incident. If it happens in the classroom, obviously you expect the classroom teacher. . . . We do have a child and youth worker that works with social skills and that's another way that we tend to address fair play and whatnot, by having the child and youth worker going to, especially the primary classrooms, and talking about skill development and cooperative games and right ways to deal with situations. There is a think paper that we do. What is the incident? There is a discipline report that the teacher can deal with himself or herself whereby the teacher identifies the problem and then the student has to work out a solution and the parents would have to sign for it and the discipline reports are filed in a binder and at the end of year are destroyed. They're destroyed, however there is a one-two-three and once you reach three, there is a good possibility of suspension and then it becomes, obviously, a permanent record. . . . There are also times when you have to call the police . . . if you have to provide medical help. So it depends on the incident. (Principal 9)

Despite the processes and consequences outlined by principals, many teachers expressed disillusionment over the way most schools and administrators dealt with bullying. Many felt that more work needed to be done on the initial stages; namely, on acknowledging and defining bullying. One teacher who had 20 years' experience, and had worked in different schools, vehemently emphasized that, for her, the biggest problem was that many school principals denied the existence of bullying.

I think the first step is acknowledging that bullying exists in the school and that you need to do something for it because, as we've talked, there are school that say, "It doesn't happen." (Dorothy)

Other teachers felt that the biggest problems related to different consequences due to the different teachers' personalities, how strict they were in their discipline and what they considered acceptable or unacceptable. These teachers strongly believed that there was a need for a

consistent definition of bullying in order to arrive at similar interpretations of behaviour and, hence, consistent consequences.

There are different styles. . . . It's the same way you have a parent who is strict and less strict. You have some teachers who would think something was totally unacceptable and some are so, "Oh well." I don't know how to ensure consistency when people might have different methods. (Wendy)

I think we need everyone on the same page in terms of what the definition of bullying is so that everyone also responds to it in a similar fashion. So if this is what's going on, this, this, and this, steps are followed through. Again it's the consistency. (Cassandra)

Policies

The Safe Schools Act

The basis for all the foregoing practices, varied as they are, is the *Safe Schools Act* (2000), in which rights and responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, and principals are described. Unacceptable behaviour is laid out, together with the potential consequences of mandatory suspension or expulsion. Certain mitigating circumstances and discretionary practices are allowed by the Act to protect students who may not be aware of the impact of their behaviour on others or who may not realize the inappropriateness of their behaviour.

The *Safe Schools Act* basically lays it out quite clearly. . . . For school expectations, behaviour expectations, academic expectations, responsibility of students, responsibility of parents, responsibility of teachers, responsibility of principals. . . . There's also the rights that a child has and the parent has but also the responsibility that they have. What's unacceptable as behaviour and the consequences that it can lead to . . . The [Act's] discretionary clause [gives me] a bit of discretion over whether I will or will not suspend, given certain circumstances that exist, given certain students and their capabilities. Because you're not going to take a child who doesn't quite understand and give them the same punishment as the kid that is quite bright and did something very deliberate and calculating. (Principal 2)

Under the *Safe Schools Act*, all Ontario school boards are mandated to make recommendations to their schools on how to follow the Act's safe schools policy. School boards' individual policies are then implemented in school practices and processes.

I mean it always comes as policy and as a report to the board and then after some time studying it, the staff studying it as well as trustees looking at it, then it's turned into board

policy. I believe boards were mandated to make policy out of it when it first came out from the Ministry as the *Safe Schools Act* and then that Act is turned into policy at board level and then it's turned into what we have as school policy but I suppose it's really school practice. (Principal 6)

The Act addresses bullying directly and makes it punishable. The consequence for bullying is mandatory suspension, the length of which, at the principal's discretion, can be up to 20 days.

Expulsion is another possible consequence.

Well, the *Safe Schools Act* certainly tackles the issue of safe schools which would include bullying. (Principal 10)

Well, the *Safe Schools Act* that targets bullying in a big way and in fact in our board under the *Safe Schools Act*, under the suspensions, mandatory suspensions, bullying is a cause for immediate mandatory suspension. We have . . . in terms of the number of days, depending on the situation, it can be 1 to 20 days. (Principal 5)

It deals with physical bullying, yeah. The *Safe Schools Act* talks about criminal harassment, threatening to kill somebody with a weapon or whatever the case may be, a weapons offence, a drug offence. So these are very specific and certain agencies have to be involved and there could be suspension of up to 20 days or there could be expulsion, limited or full expulsion, depending on the circumstances and the severity and so on. (Principal 6)

The Act lists a number of reasons for suspending someone, several of which could be applicable in cases of bullying. For example, one principal explained that, if a student persisted in bullying despite teacher intervention, this could be considered opposition to authority, which is punishable under the Act. That is, the action could be interpreted to fit the policy, in order to suspend the student who bullied. If a bullied student became too fearful to attend school, and his or her learning was affected then the bully could be suspended under the category of "conduct injurious to the moral tone of the school."

Yeah, in the six reasons for suspension, okay, you could interpret three or four of them under bullying. If a child persists in opposition to authority, authority being the teacher, but if a teacher is telling a child to leave someone else alone, you're not listening to the authority figure. You're not listening to the principal. So persistent opposition to the authority could be persistent opposition . . . If a child is coming to school fearful then they're not maximizing their learning. Well if you look at the six reasons for suspension, there's one that's . . . the moral and . . . something to the effect that it's detrimental to the moral atmosphere of the school. (Principal 2)

One teacher disagreed that the decision to suspend is entirely determined by the principal. He suggested that “politics from above” often dictated parameters of suspension to the principal particularly in cases where racial profiling was in question. In such cases, principals could clearly be told not to suspend in order to avoid accusations of racial profiling.

Unfortunately, most administrators, their hands are tied. . . . Whether it be race, whether it be particular families. That’s a definite thing that’s happening and as a result . . . they avoid things like [suspension]. If you have a school that has some racial profiling or the notion that you can be accused of racial profiling because a certain race of students are being suspended on a consistent basis, politics above are going to tell the administrators “Stop it,” and that’s what’s happening. (Sam)

Several teachers and principals criticized the *Safe Schools Act* for being easily applicable to physical bullying but ignoring emotional bullying.

You’re supposed to suspend if it’s physical. If it’s a physical, like if you draw blood, you’re downstairs. You’re down in the office. (Lois)

It addresses mostly physical. You might have group bullying that is taunting, that kind of behaviour, but mostly it’s obvious harassment, physical aggression. It ignores emotional bullying altogether. (Dorothy)

I think because the results of a physical bullying are easily seen. So, we’re looking at someone who is perhaps bruised or pushed down or scraped down because they haven’t been cooperating. It’s easier to bring to that person’s attention, their attention and the attention of their parents. So it’s very easy to say to a parent, “Your child was involved in this altercation. This child we’ve had to send home with a bandage or with something.” (Principal 6)

Despite what the Act mandates, teachers strongly stated that, in their experience, students often got away with bullying with no major consequences. They attributed this to a variety of reasons including lack of clear definition of bullying in the schools and in the legislation, combined with principals’ reluctance to suspend students. In-school suspensions, which tend to be favoured by principals, were ridiculed.

I think that bullying is . . . the way it is and has been for so long because there’s nothing to say “By law, this is a bully,” “This is what could happen to you legally if you behave this way.” (Lola)

The teacher would think that a consequence for physically assaulting a student in the yard, punching them, kicking them, giving them a nosebleed, would be something like a suspension at home. And, often times that's not the case. That doesn't happen. The student might be given a couple of detentions at school . . . I mean school suspension. I don't know what that is. (Franz)

However, several principals found the *Safe Schools Act* helpful in legitimizing suspension to parents; it eliminated any doubts regarding the suspension as an arbitrary decision. The Act was also helpful to principals in explaining bullying consequences to the student body.

I think the *Safe Schools Act* helps schools because in dealing with parents and children, we can say that this isn't an arbitrary decision that a school has come to, that it's actually based in law. (Principal 7)

Up until now I've found it helpful and quite often throughout the course of the year will refer to the Safe Schools policy and will bring it to the attention of the children and the way that it's written up in terms of what a school can and cannot do to cope with those sorts of things. (Principal 8)

Under the Act, Ontario schools must establish a Code of Conduct, which sets out parameters of acceptable conduct, expectations, and potential consequences.

The board follows the Ministry policy that there has to be a Code of Conduct in the school. The board leaves it up to the individual schools to come up with a code. (Principal 7)

Some schools formed Codes of Conduct through a committee of parents, students, and teachers. The Codes of Conduct tended to warn students about consequences for bullying but did not specify the type of consequence deemed appropriate for certain behaviours. Consequences were determined on individual basis.

The *Safe Schools Act* I think is more looking at physical aggression than [consequences for social and emotional bullying]. That would be internal. I think our board does a good job interpreting Ministry guidelines. . . . In the school Code of Conduct, we talk about the repercussions of that type of behaviour but we don't say that a child is going to be suspended for that behaviour. We just say there will be consequences for that behaviour. But, the consequences could be spending time in at recess talking to our child and youth care worker, or it could be having the parents come in for a meeting, or having the parents request social work intervention, but then I do think it varies on a school-to-school basis. (Principal 5)

First of all there is a Code of Conduct and there is one very simple rule. Do nothing that hurts you or somebody else, respect each other's feelings, respect each other's space. (Principal 9)

Codes of Conduct were often placed at the front of the students' agendas to serve as a constant reminder of expectations to them and their parents. Several principals indicated that follow-up by teachers and consistent reminders by principals were also necessary to maintain awareness of consequences for negative behaviours in general.

This Code of Conduct is placed in the students' agenda so every student has an agenda and it's taken home so the parents are quite aware of it. As a matter of fact the Code of Conduct was developed by a committee of parents, students, and staff. (Principal 9)

I've always let parents know my expectations of kids. If everyone knows the parameters that they're dealing with, then it simplifies things. (Principal 2)

As part of the opening exercises, teachers were asked to go over those policies that are at the front of the book. It's also brought to the attention of the parents during curriculum night as school opens. (Principal 6)

Different schools might have different policies in their Code of Conduct depending on the needs of the community. Also, different schools followed different practices in disseminating the Code of Conduct to the parents and the student body. Not all schools reviewed the policies in the student agenda with students and their parents.

I think depending on the needs of the school, the needs of the students, I've seen Codes of Conduct from schools of some of my colleagues and they're quite different than my own in many cases. Ours is very specific because first of all, it's a large population, it's a high-needs area, so we have issues that we have to deal with that maybe other areas may not have to deal with. (Principal 7)

Like at the beginning of the year when we have our meet the teacher night, we are given school planners with school guidelines, Code of Conduct. We need to make the parents know and the students know that there is a reason why we have a Code of Conduct. (Franz)

Schools are expected to rewrite their Code of Conduct annually. However, as one principal complained, some schools might not have the expertise amongst the staff to write an effective policy. He reasoned that although communities can be different and may require

different policies, there are nevertheless many similarities among communities which could facilitate the sharing of ideas. Boards could provide models from which schools could choose.

As principal of the school, to redo your behaviour code every year, that's difficult to do. I don't know why every school has to create their own behaviour code. I realize communities can be somewhat unique but I'm sure there's a lot of communities that are very similar. The board could have five or six examples of behaviour codes maybe pick and choose a couple of things from them. Maybe that would make it easier. I'm sure there's some schools that come up with good ones and I know when I was a teacher I was asked to chair a committee to create a behaviour code. The first thing I did was I phoned about 15 different schools and asked them to send me a copy of their behaviour code. . . . Why reinvent the wheel if something is already there that they're perfectly willing to share with us? (Principal 4)

Principals perceived benefits in the Codes of Conduct but most teachers seemed to perceive them as bogus and ineffective. For example, students are asked to read and sign the Code of Conduct although some students are unable to read. They also saw inconsistencies in how the policies were applied from one student to another.

There's a paper in the planner that kids are supposed to read and they don't because some of them can't read, and they're supposed to sign and comply and it's bogus. It's all paper. (Sunshine)

It's also inconsistent. It all depends on who you are. It's applied to some, it's not applied to others. Since you're not consistent, you've lost it anyway. (Nancy)

Because of such inconsistencies, students learn that they can get away with certain behaviour.

Importantly, the lack of consistency between schools can send a message to students and parents who are shopping for schools where the consequences are not so severe.

Until you have a consistent approach that is followed from JK straight to Grade 8 or 12, the inconsistencies end up being so unfair and then it's watered down and so what we see is that we have a series of punishments that are never consistent. So, what does the student learn? That you might get a little teeny punishment or at another school you may be walloped with a great big punishment. Well, why not come to this school where there's a little teeny punishment. The inconsistency is very unjust. It's systemic. And the Safe Schools [Act] does not really address what kind of bullying receives what kind of response, whether it's going to be a discretionary or mandatory suspension, two weeks, two days, two hours, or two months. (Irena)

Consistency in following up on bullying behaviour was, once again, closely related to the lack of clear definition. The practice of bullying thrives, according to many teachers, through a combination of ambiguous descriptions of what constitutes bullying, lack of severe consequences, and inconsistent application of policy.

Well, if the consequence isn't there for that behaviour, then, "I got off this time, I'll get off next time. Oh well, all I have to do I sit in the office. Or, oh well, all I had to do is stay in for recess for a day or a few days." Their consequence is what encourages the behaviour. (Lola)

You have to start with the young ones. If these are the things that happen, then these are some of the consequences. But . . . every teacher has to be on board, every student has to be on board, and administration has to be on board. It has to be something where if you cross that line, then bang you're gone. . . . They've been raised knowing that there are certain things that they can get in huge trouble for. Bullying needs to be one of those things they could get into huge trouble for. (Queenie)

One teacher said that these inconsistencies originated in the *Safe Schools Act* itself. It provides principals with the options of discretionary or mandatory consequences based on mitigating circumstances. For her, the Act creates opportunities for personal and arbitrary decision making which often result in drastically different consequences.

[The Act] divides a lot of the punishment into discretionary or mandatory and then there's a component that asks, "Is the child capable of understanding that their action has been unsafe?" And if there are mitigating circumstances the child is unable to take responsibility for their action, you dilute the punishment. But basically, it is so arbitrary and so personal that you could have a situation where the same infringement is punished in two ridiculously different ways. It's not clear to administrators how to create the consistency. (Irena)

Suspensions

Generally ineffective as a means to end bullying. Suspension as a measure to control and minimize bullying was strongly criticized by all participants in my study.

But now we're talking about consequences, you suspend the student. Do they come back suddenly enlightened because they've had an out of school suspension? I mean that's not what happens. (Jackie)

Most participants saw suspension as a temporary measure; it alleviated the pressure of a bullying situation, but was entirely ineffective in helping to change the behaviour of students who bully.

They also maintained that suspension was a superficial way of addressing a much deeper problem. In their view, students who bullied require social work and counselling help.

I think there's just a lot of issues that we should be looking at in bullying. We're not looking at why the person is bullying. Suspending a child for bullying is not going to help. We need to fix why the child is bullying so we need to go back and fix that first. These are all just superficial things that we're doing. (Kathy)

I think you have to do a lot more than just suspending someone. It's not going to stop the problem at all. . . . You need to do more. You have to get guidance involved, social work involved, whatever resources you can get involved, to help the child, and I'm talking about both of them, the bully and the victim because the bully will continue to do that unless he's assisted. (Principal 5)

Suspension alone was regarded as an inadequate means of curbing bullying. Teachers might see it as a necessary start but considered follow-up after suspension as more significant in decreasing bullying behaviours. The lack of follow-up helped create a setting where bullying was rampant.

If we know there's a bullying issue in the school setting and not enough measures are being taken to address the issues, then it's going to continue. We've created a venue for those bullies to continue bullying. We need to address the situation. Sometimes a suspension is not just the answer. What comes after the suspension, that's important as well. (Tony)

The *Safe Schools Act* doesn't make it clear as to how you should address the individual situation. It says, "If this happens, this is the consequence, this is the major consequence." But the follow-up is not there at all. . . . There should be after a suspension if the suspension takes place. (Bob)

Inconsistently applied. Suspension was criticized for its inconsistent consequences for similar bullying behaviours. Because suspension is left to the discretion of the principal, individual differences in levels of tolerance and problem solving result in inconsistent rates of suspension. Rather than finding solutions to modify bullies' behaviour, some principals overused suspension as a solution, particularly for those who are repeat offenders. On the whole, the

principals indicated that suspension did not remedy the problem; they saw it as detrimental.

Furthermore, it was seen as having negative effects on the bully.

I've seen it happen. I've seen principals who's just had enough with the kid or can't stand the kid and you nail them every time. I've also seen other principals where you have this gradation where you have the tolerance for what they've done and you've done things far beyond that suspension point. (Principal 1)

I think if you're suspending the same kid repeatedly, it's obviously not working. So you try and move on to something else. . . . Sometimes I think that principals kind of overuse the suspension routine. They think that's going to cure the bullying. It doesn't. It creates a very negative, punitive kind of atmosphere in the school as well. (Principal 7)

Some teachers also highlighted the differences amongst administrators as reflected in their inconsistent suspension practices. As a result, some students were perceived to take advantage of such situations to continue bullying.

It isn't consistent. You don't have all the administrators thinking the same way, doing what is required to be done. It's not just done enough for what's happening and as a result kids get away with it and they know it. (Adam)

Principals noted the *Safe Schools Act's* emphasis on mitigating circumstances, the main focus of which is to take into account students with special needs; that is, those who do not understand the impact of their behaviour on others and those who are intellectually compromised.

The *Safe Schools Act* outlines what you must do if this child bullies. But they've put in mitigating circumstances and [that] allows the administrator to use the common sense factor. And that's a good thing. . . . You have to be in some ways compassionate but in some ways you have to be able to savvy enough to be able to figure out what you've got in front of you. Only the person who's dealing with the situation can know. Only the person who is seeing the pattern can know. (Principal 1)

Well if you have a kid who doesn't know what they're doing, if you have a kid who's severely . . . intellectually compromised, it doesn't mean you won't punish the kid. It just means you can't hold them responsible in the same way. You can also suspend the child so that you can get the parents' support. (Principal 10)

Alternative measures. Several principals agreed that the Ministry's policy to suspend was not necessarily the best way to intervene and find solutions. They spoke of many possible

measures that could be used as consequences to bullying before resorting to suspension such as community service within the school. They also said that getting social workers and psychologists involved would be far more beneficial than suspension.

There are many other things to do before you give a suspension. If you asked me whether I could get permission for my social worker to get involved with the kid or a suspension, well the Ministry says suspend. That's fine, we can do that, but that in itself will not stop the bullying. So what are you going to do? To me that piece is a lot more interesting. (Principal 9)

Maybe part of the consequence is teaching them as opposed to just throwing them out of the schools because a suspension, from my perspective, is the last thing that you want to do. From my perspective, it's one of the last things that you want to do in a long list of other alternatives. I think that there are so many other ways that we can teach children what the proper thing is. . . . We have assigned psychologists and social workers that are available to us on an ongoing basis. I think those are the sort of interventions that I would like to use prior to getting to something like a suspension or an expulsion. That's sort of at the end of the list. (Principal 6)

Teachers confirmed the above ideas. For them too, bullying was a serious and complex problem that required professional exploration and attention.

There are other interventions; social workers, guidance counsellors, to try and get to the root of the problem. That's the crux of intervention. (Bob)

A popular alternative to suspension from school was the complete loss of school privileges, preferred by some principals, often referred to as an in-school suspension. This method is not based on policy and was criticized by some teachers.

I do a house arrest or an in-school suspension. It's just not a lot of fun. They're working either in another classroom or working . . . you know, no recesses, no lunch with people. (Principal 3)

I just wanted to say that part of it is again is lack of information that is disseminated through our board. The *Safe Schools Act* that was brought in 2001 clearly states in our board what is something that can be suspended, what is an expulsion in our case, but very few people know that there is no such thing as an in-school suspension. That's just something we do to keep the kid around kind of deal. (Dorothy)

One teacher protested that many children engage in bullying and negative behaviours but are still allowed to participate in school activities. She believed that losing such privileges would be far more effective than suspension in controlling bullying.

Sometimes children will misbehave and then are still allowed to be on a team, or still allowed to go on a trip. I think if you take those things away, it probably will mean more to them than staying at home. (Wendy)

Another teacher seemed to have insight into the reason principals refrained from depriving students who bully from the right to be on a school team and resorted to suspension. She suggested that parents would fight such decisions far more strongly than if their child was suspended for a few days. She added that the in-school suspensions, which vary from suspensions and expulsions legislated by the *Safe School Act*, were devised by principals possibly for the same reason.

But it is so hard to figure out a way to deal with the bullying because the parents will come back. If the child does something in the classroom and then you threaten to take them off the basketball team or something like that, most parents will fight that harder than they will if their child had to stay home for a day. (Dorothy)

Complicating factors. Several logistics such as working parents, so that no one was at home to act as caregiver, were cited as complicating factors for using suspension as a consequence. In essence, school personnel were considered the caregivers for the children in the absence of their parents, particularly in elementary schools. When a child is suspended and the parent is not at home, the school is unable to send the student home; thus, the student may spend the rest of the day with the school secretary or at the principal's office.

I mean the child has infringed on a rule and for every broken rule there has to be a consequence. But by the same token, you have to worry as to what happens to this child. Parents work so who's going to look after that kid when that child is suspended? There are so many issues that need to be addressed when you suspend a child. In some instances you suspend a child and then you find out that that child has been abused. Do you want to send them home? (Principal 9)

So a child gets into trouble and they're suspended. There's nobody at home. So what do you do with them? They're still stuck staying in the school, say the principal's office or

in the secretary's office, because you can't send them home that day. So you know you put up with them until you can get hold of the parents and say look, this child has to be gone for three days or whatever, or five days, or whatever. By the next day it's kind of lost its effect because they should have gone. (Diane)

Taking mitigating circumstances into account, particularly when a family member is not available to look after the student, can unwittingly contribute to encouraging bullying.

One of our bullies who was here for a little while needed to be suspended every day for the benefit of the other 29 in the class. . . . Because the mother's in the hospital with the little one, he had nowhere to go. And so you're kind of a bit sympathetic and you keep him here . . . but yet what message are you getting across here? So, literally at that point you become a babysitter of someone who is still in the school and potentially can still continue bullying from wherever he's sitting because he can't be sent home. Our tolerance level is up here because . . . of course you feel sorry, the mother's in hospital with the little one. But the bullying was constant. (Butterfly)

They should serve their thing at whoever's inconvenience, if the parents have to stay home because they're at home or if they have to deal with a babysitter or . . . that's what they should be doing. A lot of the times they shouldn't be here but they are because there's nobody at home. (Irena)

A spirit of forgiveness tends to prevail and students are given many opportunities before any serious consequence takes place. In some schools, athletic students tend to have special status and get away with more bullying behaviours than other students.

We have a policy for bullying but I have yet to see that enforced anywhere. Like we might give you 15 chances and then maybe there'll be a consequence for it. And in some schools, certain groups of students are more equal than others. Like if you're an athlete, you just get free rein; you get to do a lot more things than other students. (Larsson)

Several teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the decision to suspend bullies is often kept from the victims and their families. Hence, the victim's parents are often kept in the dark, not only about the suspension of the bully but also about the incident itself. These parents are thereby denied the chance of reporting the incident to the police and charging the bully.

A lot of times it's not the bully that's being punished but the kids that are victims; their parents really never find out that they're victims. So it really doesn't even give those parents a chance to come back and investigate or charge the kid if that's the case. So maybe more of that should be done. (Marg)

As a behavioural consultant advocating for students with disabilities, I recall several occasions where students who were bullied felt that the school had not reacted to their situation and that the bully got away with the negative behaviour. Upon meeting with the principal, I was invariably told that the school had responded with consequences to the bully and that information about the bullying was considered confidential. I failed to capture the logic behind withholding the consequences from the victims and their parents. It would be similar to the law withholding the verdict on a crime from the victim and the public. If the victim was already aware of the identity of the offender, why should the consequences be confidential?

In order to avoid lawsuits, some school boards take pains not to offend any parents. Hence, policies may be in place but they are not necessarily followed. Administrators in general were perceived to be more interested in their school's reputation than in pursuing consequences for bullying. Bullying and its consequences might serve to tarnish a school's reputation. Only teachers, who are in the front lines, seemed to recognize such politics.

I think it's a political thing. We don't want to offend anybody because we're afraid that the next time we offend somebody, we've got a lawsuit in our face and we don't want to do that. So, we pay lip service to policies but we don't enforce them. (Larsson)

You have a good photo op and you make sure that's up front . . . and it looks good and you might get a reporter come out to the school and they say, "Boy, look how good you are!" But then the people in the trenches, the teachers, actually see what's going on, day in and day out, and they shake their heads. (Franz)

Teachers are empowered by Ministry policy to suspend for one day a student who behaves in a negative or unsafe manner. However, teachers have been advised by their unions not to do this, for fear of repercussions.

Teachers are empowered to suspend for one day anyone for any behaviour that is negative, is unsafe to the student or other students. Teachers are empowered, although their unions I think asked them not to follow that. (P. P.)

Benefits of suspension. Most participants thought that the benefits of suspension were limited to giving other students, teachers, and principals a break from the bullying behaviours.

For that period of time you've removed the bad apple from the basket. So the kids get a break for that period of time. (Franz)

Suspension does not solve anything. It does give the teacher, the school, and the principal, and the other students in the school a break. It doesn't help the person that's suspended, doesn't solve an anger problem, doesn't solve an emotional problem. Yes, you are giving the teacher a break, you're giving the students in that classroom a break from the disruption, you're giving the school a break outside at recess time, you're giving the principal a break. (Principal 2)

Suspension was not seen as a corrective measure but an encouragement and reinforcement of the bullying behaviour. It was perceived as a welcome break from school for the bully and an opportunity to stay home and play video games.

I think that what Franz said is true. There are things that happen and then they get a suspension. For these children sometimes they want to be at home. You're doing them a favour. (Wendy)

To know that I can continue to bully somebody and, "Oh, I'll get a two-day suspension," "Oh, good, I can stay at home and watch video games." That's not a consequence as far as I'm concerned. (Sandra)

For the others, they do need a calming effect. But the majority of cases the student that is suspended will reoffend because most of the students look at suspension as a holiday. (Mrs. D1)

Yet despite how suspension was believed to have failed as a corrective measure, it was hailed for its immediacy which was thought to send a strong message to the student body and to the victim.

It helps the teacher. It gives us a break but I think it gives the child a nice break too and, "I get to go home and play." It's not always the best solution but it's an immediate solution. (Diane)

For the kids to see that something's being done. I think that's all. And you need that sometimes. So it's a good, immediate response but usually other things need to be done. (Mary)

Parents and suspension. When a student is suspended, a form with the reason for the suspension is sent to the parents requesting them to attend a meeting with the principal after the suspension is over. Because suspension is inconvenient for parents, particularly if they are working, they may more easily be persuaded to work in partnership with the school. Parents' involvement and awareness was perceived as a positive outcome to suspension.

I find that the beneficial aspects are with the parent and the dialogue you have with the parent afterwards. Not the kids. Kids are often glad to be away from school for a day or two. If you can get the parents' attention, sometimes it works. It doesn't usually have any impact on the kid. But if you can kind of use it to leverage some, some involvement, by the parent, it can have a positive impact. (Principal 7)

The parents have to come and we have to have a discussion. So, again, raising the awareness that this is what's going on and it needs to be addressed at home. I think if you harp long enough on the fact that there's got to be that partnership between the home and the school for these types of problems to be addressed and then hopefully rectified, then that's why we have the meetings afterwards. (Bob)

One principal admitted that the suspension was a break from school and was of no value to the student but stated that he indicated in his letters to parents that their child's return to school was predicated on their meeting with him. His ultimate hope was to provide the parents with the necessary resources and connect them with social services when necessary.

One of my qualifiers is if I suspended a child I want the parent in here the morning that they start school again. . . . That's where the benefits hopefully begin. It's not in being away from school for two days. That's detrimental to the child. But does it force the parent to come in and talk to the principal? Yes. Does it force the parent to talk to a social worker? Possibly, yes. Hopefully the social worker may be connecting them to an outside agency, connecting them to a professional outside the school. That's where I see the benefit of the suspension. Not in the child missing two days of education but by forcing the parent to come into the school with the child after suspension, by trying to make them understand what's going on and possibly by trying to get help, be it social work help in the school or outside professionals. (Principal 2)

Suspension of students who bully was viewed by some teachers as a method to put the onus back where it belongs, on parents. The parent's decision, whether to become part of the solution or to do nothing to help rectify the situation, was thought to establish a future pattern for the student's behaviour.

So what's happening is that as the consequence of the negative behaviours, kids are being suspended. But that really is a wakeup call to the parents: "What are you going to do about it?" "Because we're going to suspend your kid for one, two, three, five, or 20 days." As an administrator, you have the power to do that. So the kid is out of school, out of the schoolyard, out of the school environment. . . . And what the parents choose to do will impact on what the kid brings back to the school. (Fiddlehead)

It is often difficult to get the parents' support. Some were perceived not to care while others were thought to be in denial. As a result, many participants felt that the lack of support from parents created challenges and presented the system with major obstacles. With parents such as these, suspension was only used in cases of physical bullying and teachers tended to give up on the student.

After suspension, there is a meeting. Sometimes the meeting doesn't occur because the parent doesn't show up. (Principal 9)

The consequences aren't serious enough. The intervention we're choosing isn't working. Parents aren't supportive so they know that whatever happens at school there's not going to be repercussions at home. They get away with it. (Theresa)

Some of the obstacles that would interfere would be, as we mentioned, when we don't have parental support and you bring up the issue of their children and they continue not to support it and they're in denial. It's difficult to proceed in helping that child when they don't want to help their own children. So you could reach a point where you turn it over, perhaps to the office, and they may reach that same conclusion and that child is just disregarded unless there is a physical situation. If it's emotional [bullying], we try to deal with it but when the parents have no support that makes it challenging. That is an obstacle. (Rose)

One teacher in a behavioural program stated flatly that parents directly influence the success or failure of any intervention; no amount of effort on the professionals' side could match the parents' influence. In his special education program, teamwork among the many professionals, including psychologists and social workers, was seen as key to finding the best way of dealing with students who have "major bullying problems." Yet although parents were invited to participate in regular meetings as part of the team, their commitment to the process was regarded as dismal which eventually led to the failure of all efforts.

But it still comes back to the parents. . . . I deal with kids in a behavioural program who have major bullying problems. Once they arrive in my class, we have a team of social workers, psychologists, and we do whatever we can with these kids and we deal with them in a small setting. . . . But in the end we want to bring everybody on board which means bring the parents on board. That's often where the system seems to break down. Most of these kids that I deal with that are behavioural and are bullies do not have the support at home. As a result, you do call the parents but it falls by the wayside and the

parents don't give a crap about the kid . . . well, you know, it just escalates. So I really think that's the big problem. (Dr. Bob)

While some parents gave little attention to suspension measures, others reacted very strongly; they sometimes exerted considerable legal pressure on principals to challenge suspensions. As such, teachers said, principals treated well-educated, influential parents differently. The threat of possible legal action was said to dissuade principals from suspending students who bullied.

I think one other influence is obviously the parents. There is no doubt that in certain schools you have . . . let's call them power parents, parents that are visible, quite influential. . . . Certainly they are treated differently than some other parents. That certainly plays into it. Of course I think it plays into it whether the situation can be legally challenged. If the parents are well educated and may pursue a legal avenue. In the back of someone's mind that might change how you've got to handle the situation. (Sam)

One principal admitted that some parents could be litigious and said that good record keeping helped him overcome this obstacle, particularly in the cases of socioemotional bullying. For him, proving to the parents that their child was a repeat offender gave him grounds for suspension.

Yeah, you're going to get denial and if they decide to appeal the suspension, it's more difficult. But you don't do it on a specific incident. You do it over time. If you have enough of a record-keeping system, you can then back yourself up and say, "Excuse me, I've dealt with this and this and this and this. They were all verbal but they're there." (Principal 3)

One teacher alleged that some principals refrained from suspending African Canadian students despite behaviours that fell under the suspension mandate for fear of being accused of racial profiling. Having sometimes been made to question their own motives and biases by parents who accused them of racial discrimination, such principals might refrain from taking action.

There is definitely this fear of getting labelled as a racial profiler. And perception is more important sometimes than reality. (Sam)

Other teachers heatedly debated this issue. They felt that principals should only be accused of racial profiling when proven to have treated two identical cases in different ways.

The only time I think it's really a question is if you have two similar situations and on one you impose a certain consequence that's more severe than the other. The only way you question it is if in a similar situation but you acted differently. (Bob)

Ultimately, there is a legal process for parents to appeal suspension. Numerous appeals have resulted in the dismissal of decisions to suspend.

We've had numerous parents appeal suspensions. Numerous! They don't want it on the OSR [Ontario Student Record]. And they often get a procedure just to dismiss it. As soon as one does it, it's easy for everyone else to do it. (Dorothy)

And if you are suspended, you have a right as a parent to appeal it. And that's happened a lot of times. And once the appeal goes in, you're allowed to stay at school until . . . two months later the parents win the case and nothing's been done except, "Ha, ha, I didn't get suspended." That's a known fact. (Jane)

And by then everyone's forgotten what the problem was. (Lois)

Students who bully and suspension. Several teachers felt strongly that existing policies neither addressed the real problem nor met the needs of students who bully. In their experience, students who were suspended for bullying tended to go back to school only to repeat the same behaviour. A teacher of a behavioural class explained that, after several suspensions, repeat offenders would be given temporary additional support through the guidance counsellor and the board social worker. Such students might go through psychological testing and be deemed behaviourally exceptional which would qualify them to be placed in a behavioural class.

Aggression and violence could necessitate police intervention.

In my experience, board policy allows principals to suspend. There's no quick solution in board policy that I see for these kids. So if a kid punches a guy in the yard, you know what, he gets suspended, comes back a few weeks later, he may get suspended again. Eventually the kid may be taken out and gets some guidance counselling, gets some social work, maybe have people deal with him in a special class and have psychological reports on him and stuff like that. That's sort of the process but with regards to a board policy, I mean I think we have a policy on violent behaviours, aggressive violent behaviours where they're automatically suspended and the police are involved. But other than that, I think each school deals with it separately depending on the nature of the principal, of the staff, and where the school is located, environmentally, culturally. I don't think there's a standard policy across that deals with them all equally. (Dr. Bob)

I don't think the board really deals with it properly. A lot of these bullies get bumped around or moved around. They come from needy homes. They do have serious needs that aren't met and the only place that they get a bit of love, or care, or respect often is in the schoolyard. (Nell)

Repeat offenders often come from difficult backgrounds and bullying allowed them the power and control that they needed in their life. Their presence in the school was often considered risky for the rest of the student body. Thus, schools would often minimize such students' school hours, increasing them as the students proved capable of refraining from antagonizing and harassing others; in essence, giving them a probationary period. Such practice meets the needs of the school, the staff, and the student body but not necessarily the needs of the bully.

We have lots of situations where students couldn't function in school. That was their background, that was where they thrived and bullied other students and that's where their needs were met. They have the need for power and they have the need to bully other students. So what we will do in the end and it was for the good of the whole student body was that we would say, "All right, we can't allow you come to school for a full day. We'll allow you to come next week for an hour. You come in and demonstrate in an hour that you can survive in the classroom without intimidating or bullying or antagonizing or harassing another student, then we'll up it to two hours next week." That's the only mechanism but it met the needs of our school and it met the needs of the students. I'm not sure it met the needs of the student bully. But it was a survival mechanism from the school's perspective. (Laura)

For some principals, suspension was based on the zero tolerance principle¹ which absolved teachers and principals from the responsibility of rehabilitating such students. In their perception, the main premise of such a philosophy is that such students are not worth the effort.

Yeah, I think that what suspension does is, it absolves people from dealing with the issue. We've got a zero tolerance policy, so we'll kind of toss the kid away. The kid isn't worth saving. The kid isn't worth it. We won't bother trying to change this kid. Which I think is a wrong policy. Somebody has to do it. (Principal 7)

This business of zero tolerance has been very deleterious to a lot of kids. We've still got to deal with those kids. (Principal 1)

¹ In zero tolerance, penalties are applied automatically to even minor infringements of a rule or policy, to emphasize the stance that certain offences will not be tolerated ("Zero Tolerance (Schools)", n.d.).

Another principal agreed: suspension was simply giving up on bullies. It did not teach them prosocial behaviours. He speculated that bullying was part of a child's developmental process and emphasized that part of an elementary school's mandate is to teach socialization and to ensure the appropriate social development of all students. In his opinion, students who bully needed to be taught why their behaviour was inappropriate and to learn alternative behaviours within the school environment.

Part of our job in elementary school is teaching children how to behave properly in social situations. Bullying and other behaviours, other unacceptable behaviours, will happen. It's part of growing up. It's our job to teach them how that can't happen in the school. It simply means that we have to take the time to take a child aside, explain to them what the action was, and why it is unacceptable, and to offer them an alternative. So, if that's unacceptable, what is the proper thing to do? (Principal 6)

Merely recognizing bullying, whether positively through bystander support or negatively through consequences such as suspension, only served to reinforce the bullying behaviour.

Here's the deal, really in any recognition, whether it be positive or negative, it's worth having. As a bully, it doesn't matter if it's positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement. It's reinforcement of some degree. Therefore your behaviour is being recognized. Being reinforced as a result, whether that reinforcement is positive or negative, you are being singled out as being an individual who is causing a reaction from other people. (Fiddlehead)

For that child it still may be rewarding. I go back to the child who despite being kicked out of class, he spent his entire career in the hallway. It was still better to get all of that negative attention from the teachers, the principal, the other kids than to just be there. (Dorothy)

In their discussions, the teachers tried to analyze and understand what would make a bully a repeat offender despite such drastic consequences as suspension. Most of the teachers seemed to rely on understanding the function of the negative behaviour. They believed that bullies were mainly seeking a reaction that acknowledged their presence and importance. Some of them reasoned that bullies gain more reward from bullying than from stopping the behaviour. Others seemed baffled by this theory. What did bullies get out of such behaviour?

Unless there's something psychologically [wrong] with them, in which case we have to deal with the issue in a totally different matter, it's very unusual for someone to repeatedly continue in a course of action that will bring them pain and not pleasure. (Franz)

Continuing the action still gives that child the reward that they want, which is still greater than what is stopping the behaviour. So they're still getting something out of it. (Helen)

One teacher went so far as to say that repeat offenders had been exposed to so much pain that they were not easily affected by consequences. For her, suspension paled in comparison to their life experiences.

Or they have so much pain and they've been hurt so much themselves that "Go ahead, this doesn't hurt at all." Who knows what they've gone through? "Go ahead, I can take it. I've already been hurt more than this. What else can you do?" (Wendy)

Other teachers disagreed with such notions. In their opinion, if a behaviour was repeated, that would be a clear indication that the consequences were either inappropriate or not severe enough.

My point would be that those consequences weren't appropriate because if they had been, then you might have seen some sort of change in the child instead of continuing in that behavioural. (Mandley)

For the most part I think [that for] the ones that we have to deal with in the school environment . . . we haven't gotten the stove hot enough for them to touch it again and really get burned. (Franz)

One principal lamented a system that had failed to understand the plight of students who are neglected and come from violent, disorganized homes and had thereby failed to focus on the appropriate needs and methods to tackle the problem. In her perception, such students had learned to get attention and feel powerful through bullying. Reprimand, regardless of its type or degree, would be futile in trying to reach them.

I think when a child has . . . something that affects them deeply, they come from violent households, they're neglected, they're abandoned and what needs to be done is they need care and they don't get it. No amount of reprimand is going to make a difference because that child has learned . . . they've learned a negative way in which to get attention or to feel powerful. Because there's no place that they feel powerful. Rather than feel powerless, they know that their aggression can get them some press. They're known.

Maybe other kids like them will find them. I think to me this is a very important factor. They need to feel connected to the world, important in their world, self-determining. (Principal 1)

One teacher agreed. Teachers, he said, should not feel guilty for failing to solve this problem because they had little power to decide what to do. He blamed the system for its traditional hierarchical arrangement of power; solutions were dictated by the Ministry of Education with little regard to what teachers, who worked on the front lines, thought was needed. Such failed educational ideas and models as the open area concept confirmed how far removed officials at the Ministry could be. He suggested that teachers needed to be prime contributors to policy and solutions for bullying. In addition, increased funding and reinstatement of adequate numbers of guidance counsellors were necessary.

Do you blame the teacher? Bottom line it's the system. The system isn't working. You have to redefine the system. Infuse the system with cash funding, reinstitute guidance teachers; it's all part and parcel of the whole solution. The fact that teachers feel guilty because they never solved this problem; it has nothing to do with them. It has to do with the system. There's something wrong with the system. The guy at the top has all the power. How can the people on the bottom line have no power? They're told what to do but they're the ones who know all the information. They should be at the top line not the bottom. From the Ministry on down, it's like "we're going to tell you what to do." (Coach)

Coach went on to refer to Volvo's success in the business world through enlisting the efforts of those on the assembly line in solving problems.

Volvo . . . was the first major automaker to ask on the assembly line, "What are we going to do to solve this problem?" Volvo was the first one to do that. Input from the bottom up. But they also put it in cash incentives. You're also going to get 20 percent back in terms of the increase in wages. So it worked. They are the quintessential model for how to democratize the workplace. You've got to get input from the bottom. Not like some guy telling us what to do. That's substandard . . . not another open area. Here we go again, another educational experiment! This doesn't work. (Coach)

Behavioural programs for chronic bullies. The final possible destination for a chronic bully is a behavioural program which involves going through the very formal process of assessment and identification. Typically the process would begin when a committee met to

recommend interventions at the school level. If these failed, then parental consent for psychiatric assessment would be obtained. This would be followed by a meeting of the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) as mandated by Bill 82 for special education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1980) regarding the identification of the student as behaviourally exceptional and determining the appropriate behavioural program.

In these programs, students learn social skills and new behavioural strategies as well as continuing their academic work. The focus is to help students improve in order to return to their community school. Principals explained that some students are back in a year or two, while others remain in the program for several years.

They need to be IPRC'd into a behaviour class. So a student needs to go through the process where they've tried different strategies in the classroom. They've gone to the school-based support team to recommend strategies in the classroom and then joint team. They went to joint team and the joint team would be the social worker, psychologist, and the assessment programming teacher and our school-based support teacher and the principal, vice-principal. They would recommend strategies if they felt the child wasn't a candidate for a behaviour program, or they would recommend that the child be tested. So the child will be tested; with a behaviour student sometimes, the psychiatrist actually sees the student. The psychiatrist would recommend that the child go into the behavioural program. Once they're in there, our goal is to get them out of there. They work on the education of the child because often the child is below grade level. So the teacher in the program works on that, the child and youth care worker in the program works on the social skills, and then the children integrate for half a day. So, with a lot of support, we've had success, we've had students demitted after Grade 6. (Principal 5)

Parents of many students with bullying and behavioural problems are also tired of their children's challenging behaviour at home and, therefore, they tend to agree with the decision of the IPRC.

Most of the time the parents are having difficulty with the children at home and so they're fairly agreeable to having the child in the behaviour program. In my experience, I would say that 60 percent to 70 percent of parents are in favour of it, of the intervention, of the help. (Principal 5)

The School Culture

Teachers pointed out the importance and influence of the school culture on the incidence of bullying and the interventions used. In turn, school culture is influenced by the vast differences in cultural, social, and environmental backgrounds that prevail in today's schools.

Here in Toronto . . . we have . . . 200 different elementary schools and there's a lot of range there and what may be accepted in one school is not accepted in another. We do have our top inner-city schools, we also have our high academic schools. Perceptions change according to cultural, social, and environmental backgrounds. (Dr. Bob)

Teachers cited several factors that contributed to school culture.

Role of staff and colleagues. One teacher mentioned that schools vary in the support staff they have and in expectations and duties assigned to such personnel. The administration might decide to use support staff as office help; a CYW might be asked to photocopy papers instead of running an anti-bullying program. In the end, expertise in the area of bullying is often overlooked and minimized.

I know a lot of other schools now have more support people and it's also the case of whether the administration will let them do their job or not. Because I know there are some schools where the CYWs are photocopying or doing other things and they're not being utilized the way they could be. They also need to stand up and say, "Look, this is what I trained in, what I'm equipped to do, this is what I'm prepared to do for your school." (Cassandra)

In terms of relationships with colleagues, a team approach and a supportive environment were regarded to facilitate consultation and problem solving. A sympathetic, informed principal was an important component of a team approach. A principal who knew about bullying incidents was in a much better position to explain the circumstances as well as the consequences when called by a parent.

I think as staff, most of the time we support each other and I think we are lucky to have an administrator that supports us, especially if you keep them informed. I think we support each, so that helps. (Lois)

Conversely, independence and a lack of team approach were believed to result in teachers regarding their students as their sole responsibility and the exclusion of colleagues' intervention.

Other teachers might have a way of dealing with the student. Let's assume that for the students in their class, they would rather be the one who deals with any incidents that happen out in the yard or with another student. Your response to the incident might not be similar to what they would want to do and at times they might pull rank and say, "Well, he or she is in my class, let me deal with it, thanks for letting me know." (Franz)

Sometimes I think people feel like they're stepping on other people's toes if they reprimand someone. . . . If you were to reprimand someone in their class, they'd feel like you are stepping on their toes and take it as a personal offence. (Wendy)

Some of our colleagues prefer to be islands, not villages. Different strokes for different folks. If we were all on the same page, we would definitely do better. (Theresa)

Regardless of the differences in attitudes, participants took their responsibilities to students seriously. They felt that a teacher should be expected to intervene in any bullying situation no matter to which class the student belonged.

If I'm doing the intermediate yard duty and there's a student in another class then that's my problem to deal with. (Franz)

But I think given all the schools I've been to, having one of the best philosophies going out there is that you deal with every child as if he or she were in your classroom and it's not your child, it's everybody's. (Cassandra)

As mentioned above, lack of consistency in the definition of bullying was thought to encourage bullying and contributed to a school culture where students could take advantage of teachers with lower behavioural expectations.

I have to agree with the notion that you have to have consensus amongst the staff as to what exactly is bullying. Because children will very quickly pick up, "I can do this with this teacher, but oops, this one's coming, no way" and they can easily shift their behaviour according to who they think they can get away with things and with who they can't. And I think it has to be reinforced by everyone that this is not allowed. (Dorothy)

Several principals believed that their role entailed establishing a school culture that was bent on tackling bullying. They felt they could have a significant impact on students' safety by making bullying intervention a consistent priority in the school. Essential components for

minimizing bullying in the school culture would include clear policies that are reviewed frequently with the students, visibility of the principal in classrooms and schoolyard, and frequent school assemblies that address bullying.

I know that if you come into a school that has bullying and you go after it in a very determined way, you can have significant impact on the frequency of the act, on the perpetrators, on the culture of the school in general. I think that's a primary responsibility of the school, is to make sure that kids are safe. Deal with [bullying] head on. Deal with it consistently and don't let anybody get away with it. Make it a priority in your school so everybody knows that. (Principal 1)

So if you don't have a definitively stated policy and that policy is reiterated and the children are reminded of it, if you don't have that, if you don't have a principal who is willing to go in and talk to individual classes, and talk to assemblies, if that's not there, the incidence of bullying is going to go up. (Principal 2)

One principal complained that the principal's role had become more of an office manager. Now more than ever, principals were expected to answer emails and complete extensive forms and paperwork, activities that required sitting at a desk rather than communicating with students.

Sometimes the educational system of today I think is taking away from the principal's and the VP's ability to be seen because we're getting so much more paperwork. It's almost like we're becoming more like an office manager. I'm there because I'm supposed to be doing the things that make it easier for the teachers to teach. . . . Getting the kids calmed down, helping out with various things. (Principal 4)

Bullying intervention programs. Bullying intervention programs as a component of school culture came under a great deal of scrutiny and criticism from principals and teachers.

One focus group noted that a program was used in their school to focus on how to deal with conflict and anger management. Theoretically, the program was well designed but they maintained that it was heavily paper based and lacked tangible, practical examples. As a result, students could memorize the program components but would not necessarily apply them.

We have a program at our school. It's dealing with anger management, dealing with conflict, how to deal with it. It's a great program but it's all paper based. They know them, they can recite, "I care, care with your hands and your answer for helping" and all that. But yeah they can recite it to you. Will they do it outside? . . . bringing real life

situations into the classroom or presentations, or something more tangible as opposed to the paper. They get enough of the paper from us. So if there are programs in place to make them more updated, to make them more tangible. (Diane)

Similar criticisms were offered about the repetitive, predictable presentations delivered to students by police officers. Several teachers doubted students' ability to retain the values and morals inherent in those presentations beyond being able to regurgitate the required answers to questions. Retaining the information was no indication of how well they would follow those lessons or apply such knowledge.

But we've had bullying programs when the officer comes and shows the tape. They all see it, they all know what it is, they all give him the proper answers and you will think they've learned but bullying goes on. So those programs are totally ineffective because they know all the answers already. (Diane)

Several teachers and principals criticized inconsistency in the use intervention programs. One principal explained that, in his school, a program was coordinated by a teacher who had her own class and was not able to devote the time required by the program due to her classroom obligations.

I don't think programs are delivered consistently in every school. We had a teacher coordinating it for my school but that teacher has her own class and cannot go around to every classroom to implement a program, so we're relying on the teachers to actually implement a program. We bought a program called Peace Works at one of the schools I was in. The teachers then had to deliver that program but the teachers without being trained basically I don't think delivered it effectively. (Principal 5)

Personnel often moved from one school to another creating a lack of consistency in delivering intervention programs. This was mentioned repeatedly.

The detriment of any of those programs comes into who initiates them and who takes ownership of them. If it is the administrator, the principal, he could be gone in two years, three years, five years. Once the person that really has the ownership of it goes, the program goes with him. If it is a VP, that usually leaves in two years, when he or she goes, who is really adamant about the program, the program dies. (Principal 2)

Like anything else, you need to make sure that [the bullying program] is being done and followed properly. That doesn't always happen because many times there's transition, teachers change, and so forth. You lose your guidance counsellor and then you get somebody else who knows nothing about the program. (Principal 10)

High-needs schools. Most participants recognized that schools differed so drastically in their cultures and their needs that common rules and policies would not work everywhere.

I think there are different schools that need different things. One school is so different from another and applying everything the same causes a lot of problems. (Marg)

Dissatisfaction with funding and resources in general appeared to prevail. Most participants pointed out the strong need for guidance counsellors and CYWs. The need for guidance counsellors and CYWs was the most prominent outcry by the majority of participants.

It's a very high-need area and kids come to school with all kinds of needs. Unfortunately, this day and age, human resources are lacking. (Principal 8)

Anger management, in my view, is probably one of the issues that should be tackled head on. That would mean more CYWs, more counsellors readily available to the schools. (Principal 3)

It's the human resources where you need someone to be trained in bullying. You need a CYW, with training. You need a social worker, with specific training and the flexibility of time. (Principal 2)

Lack of guidance counsellors' services was identified as a major factor influencing how bullying was handled in many schools. Principals sarcastically noted that guidance counsellors were expected to resolve bullying issues in two hours, or a quarter of a day, a week.

I think often times we try to maybe get that person involved with the guidance counsellor. But then again when you get a guidance counsellor for two hours a week it sometimes makes it a little difficult to get things rectified. (Principal 4)

You have a guidance teacher that comes to the school for half a day a week. What good does that do? "Kids, don't get into trouble because the guidance teacher cannot deal with you now. You have to wait until Tuesday afternoon." Things like that. I feel that every school, especially a school with so many needs as mine. I get half a day a week of guidance, just like a school close by to me that has three times fewer students than I do. (Principal 9)

Guidance counsellors have been cut down drastically so we don't have that. We have a large school with 660 students and we have a guidance counsellor available for a half-day a week but we share that half-day with another school. So really it's a quarter-day per week that's available. (Principal 5)

An overwhelming outcry about the lack of human resources, particularly guidance counsellors and social workers, dominated the focus groups. Such lack of resources was regarded as a main contributor to a school culture that failed to address bullying problems adequately.

We have no guidance in a place like this. (Sarah)

Well, I know that with, for example, guidance, now it's once a week. I don't think it's enough to be able to address social work. I think the resources right now are being depleted. Unfortunately, this is a time when I think we need them the most. (Bob)

We do have a guidance counsellor here but she's here one morning, on a Thursday morning, and it is definitely not enough. She's given the kids at least different skills that they can discuss but again we don't have all that much time and that's the problem. She's not here often. It is really, really important. (Mrs. S)

Social Trends in Modern Society

Participants discussed how lowered standards of public behaviour and media portrayal of new images and expectations had resulted in substantial changes of social trends, values and mores which might directly or indirectly relate to bullying behaviours. They felt that our society is fraught with examples of bullying that served to model this as acceptable behaviour.

Public Conduct and Civility

One principal expressed her disappointment in the decline she had observed in public conduct and levels of civility over the last 50 years. She mentioned table manners, customer service, behaviour in public places, and simple, courteous gestures and phrases.

There used to be far more rigid standards of public conduct. . . . If we were in a theatre or at a hockey game, [we stood] for Oh Canada, . . . and we also [dressed up] to go downtown. Again, there seemed to be consensus on how shopkeepers should speak, how you should go in and ask for something and just the simple Please and Thank You and basic manners and table etiquette. I know I'm sounding so old, like an old fogey, but there was the idea of waiting in line, giving an older person your seat on the bus. As a society we have really got away from an agreement on how we behave in public. There was something that was seen more as the right way and there is a very great need for manners in our society today. (Principal 3)

Moreover, she added that the civilized approach of the past was lacking today as evidenced in the poor quality of customer service in retail and business. She cited having to train employees in

saying “Please” and “Thank You” as a sign of a society that had lost courteous methods of communication.

Just in general society there isn't this nice veneer of making nice or a more civilized approach. . . . You have to train staffing to do say Please and Thank You. That's very interesting. Even if you look at retail, the idea of not so much personal service at the big buck stores, or more the warehouse concept or even the department stores where you go and get the things. You're pretty much on your own if you're clothes shopping. (Principal 3)

She pointed out that cell phones' intruding on others' peace and space had become part of this society on a daily basis. There seemed to be more delineation between private and public domains in the past. People now discussed their most private businesses on their cell phone in public with no regard to others' rights for privacy and quiet.

Take just the cell phone and the intrusion on space when you are there and somebody is walking around talking on the cell phone, all their personal business. There seemed much more of delineation between what was private and what was public. I remember well an experience at the spa, where they've got the quiet room. People did speak in almost like church or library tones. Then this woman came in with her cell phone. She just took over the space, was talking . . . she didn't get the subtle looks we were giving her. (Principal 3)

Language

The change in standards of language was noted by several teachers. Vulgar language was widespread and considered acceptable among students. Street language had become the norm, making it difficult for teachers to discourage it. Teachers attributed the changes in language standards to rap songs and the use of street language in the media.

It's vulgar. It's also become acceptable. Sometimes if you listen to the newscasters, they're not speaking correctly. They're using some street language and when you hear it, as a child, you think well I can say this word because the grownup said it. You know, and especially if they said it on TV, in a realistic situation, like the news or something like that. They don't know the difference. Street language has become too common and too acceptable that's it hard to fight. (Lois)

Another teacher elaborated that offensive and vulgar language spreads via CDs, videos, and television. Such language further spreads as students heard their peers use it.

It is hard to fight. Well, the rap music they're listening to. I don't remember ever hearing that kind of language in songs that we listened to even at 20 years compared to what the kids are listening to. But now, every CD has a parental advisory on it, every single one that the kids want and listen to. And video games are very violent. They are bombarded with it and not really taught how to deal with it. (Sarah)

And then you see all your friends starting to use the same lines you do and they just keep going. Because now they're seeing it on TV, they're listening to it on music, and they're not distinguishing between the reality of life and what's not true about the music and the videos, etc., whatever they're watching. (Queenie)

Moral Development

Teachers questioned moral values amongst students today as they did not seem to know the parameters of appropriate behaviour.

But if I knew I was insulting him, I wouldn't continue it. I'd know the parameters. Kids don't know the parameters. They see somebody falling, it's funny. (Adam)

You said that when you were young you wouldn't have done that. You would have known not to laugh. What we need today is an education. That makes me wonder, were you educated in that? (Bob)

Students laughed at others' injury, pain, or even demise, and tended to exaggerate or sensationalize their response to someone's injury. One teacher described this phenomenon as a "twisted mentality."

I even find as a simple thing where a student trips another student and they laugh about it. They laugh at a person's demise. They laugh at a person's injury. Or any kind of even minor suffering, they think it's a big joke. If a person falls down, they laugh at it. If a person falls down and he actually hurts himself, they laugh more. It's really a twisted mentality. (Bob)

If someone gets hurt seriously, they exaggerate their reaction to it. For example, they go, "Wow, you should have seen what happened, oh man"—that kind of thing. As some kind of . . . they saw it with so much pride. The bigger the accident, the bigger the response to it rather than the horrifying aspect of it. (Sam)

Several teachers commented on students' reduced compassion and increased cruelty towards individuals with disabilities. Mocking those with visible disabilities was noted by teachers as was finding humour in pretending to have visible disabilities in order to obtain certain privileges. One teacher reflected on the difference between students today and his own

generation. He concluded that such differences were largely due to a difference in the moral upbringing and the past impact of religion on moral development.

I think there's less compassion especially for the visible, the visibly disabled, and nonvisible than before. I've seen older kids making fun of handicapped people that are visible. I think they're more cruel when they do that. They find it's a laugh. I see it even in stores, that somebody fakes that they're handicapped so they can get a cart, one of those mobile carts so they can ride around. They think that's a hilarious thing to do. I think as kids we were different. It's funny, perhaps we had a different moral upbringing, and as a result you wouldn't want to joke about someone who was visibly handicapped, thinking the fear of God that it'll come around. (Sam)

Another teacher noted the lack of respect for the elderly as another sign of changed moral values among students. He also believed that students were less tolerant and less compassionate than in his youth.

They make fun of the elderly much more now, less respect for them, whether they're in their way or . . . that kind of thing. Certainly I think they're less tolerant now than we were as we grew up. They're much more cruel. (Doug)

In one teacher's experience, some students seemed genuinely unaware of what behaviours were considered inappropriate as well as what was considered right and wrong. He reasoned that lack of awareness of what was morally acceptable was at the heart of such inappropriate acts.

Lack of education about what's morally acceptable and what's not. I remember dealing with a student saying, "Don't say that, it's not nice," and he would ask "Why not? Why isn't it nice? What's the big deal?" I stopped and I thought, this kid doesn't know what's nice and what's not, what's wrong and what's right. (Tony)

Laughing at inappropriate events was connected to the influence of television, which was seen to have influenced social responses by encouraging laughter at someone else's expense.

One teacher defended the young; he highlighted the need for teaching rather than blaming them.

We take for granted that they know that they shouldn't be laughing at somebody. You watch these just-for-laugh shows, and it's funny. When somebody falls, it's funny. However, it's not polite to laugh. They don't know that it's wrong to laugh. We take it for granted that they do. When some of those people fall down, it is funny, it is funny. If somebody falls down in front of me on the street, my instinct is to laugh. I don't because it's not polite. We should be teaching those kids the same thing. (Adam)

It's not like Beaver Cleaver.² On Bart Simpson, you make fun of people because they're different and it's okay to joke. Being mean and hurtful gets a lot of laughs so the kids think that's okay. (Theresa)

The teachers felt that a paradigm shift had occurred in moral values and standards of behaviour in general. Media had set different standards which permeated society and the young culture of today. Teachers perceived that some parents show similar problems and difficulties in social interactions as children and youth today, hence, leaving media, the Internet, and reality TV shows to guide youngsters' behaviour and thinking.

Some of their parents don't know how to interact socially either. I'm afraid the media has a lot to do with it, the music they're listening to, the programs they're watching, the Internet. They don't know how to discern what is moral and what is offensive. (Mrs. G)

It's a whole shift in culture. I think of these reality TV shows now. I think it totally changes the way they think and the way they should act. (Miss S2)

The situation is further exacerbated by parents' lack of censorship of television programs that children watch.

Even my Grade 1 students, the TV shows they watch and the movies they see, there's no censorship. There are very few TV shows they're not allowed to watch. One kid said I can't go above the 90s on the TV channels. "We can watch the Simpsons," one or two kids can't, and the others said, "We can." So everything bad is suddenly glamorous. (Theresa)

Media Messages

Teachers discussed children's need to belong and their tendency to conform to group norms, often evident in the way they dress. Children's fear of standing out as different allowed them to fall prey to fashion trends established and reinforced by the media. Students chose their friends based on how cool they were which was governed by how well they conformed to fashion trends. Those who did not keep up with media images and trends were shunned and considered outsiders. They became targets for social exclusion and, possibly, for emotional bullying.

² A TV show from the 1960s.

Well I think all this type of thing stems or comes from the fact that people, children, are afraid to be different or individuals for fear that they might stand out and be something other than what everyone else is saying you should be like. You know the ads on TV saying you should all start to wear these colours and these types of running shoes because these are the cool things to wear. And students pick up on that very quickly. . . . And by association if you were not wearing what they're wearing, you're not part of their group and therefore an outsider; a potential target somewhere down the line for being bullied because you don't conform. You're not like them. (Franz)

In one teacher's observations of students and their families, an imbalance in family activities was implicated, one that ultimately resulted in a great influence of media messages on children. She observed that, in today's society, children did not spend sufficient time playing and sharing sports and other activities with parents. Instead, they were bombarded with games and programs that condoned sex and violence. As a result, she hypothesized; they had become desensitized to acts of violence. Movies, videos, television, and video games had glamorized aggressive behaviour, murder, and guns.

I find if kids don't have balance in their lives, some time with mom and dad, maybe playing a sport, going swimming, playing music, playing outside. There's so much out there they're bombarded with. Kids are bombarded with sex, violence, to the point they've been desensitized to all of that. If that's all they see in their lives, they have no other influences but that and that's how big an influence it will be. I see it all the time. (Irena)

I think too the way movies and videos and video games and Much Music and things like that have made aggressive behaviour and murder and guns glamorous. They play whatever video games. I can't even think of the names of the ones, but you get extra points if you kill someone, or you rob a bank, or do a drug deal. (Theresa)

Several principals also discussed the role modelling provided by the violence portrayed in television, music, and video games which left children and youth with a desire to imitate such behaviours. Violent media messages were seen to underlie students' desire to belong to gangs, whose main edict is bullying, with no true understanding of the purpose or ramifications of their behaviours. Some parents reinforced bullying and violence through the way they treated others or by being gang members themselves.

You've got the mass media as well; the TV. After a wrestling match the kids do body slams in the schoolyard in some areas. But definitely what they see on TV affects it, no question. And they mimic that and they do watch a lot of TV. They also watch their parents' attitudes to bullying. Kids are very observant. (Principal 2)

Kids are subjected to so much in terms of video games, music videos, there's a lot of gangsterism, hooliganism going on. They try to mimic it. You've got gangs in the area so they want to be the young Bloods or the young Crips. They don't really understand what it is but they wannabe. They think it's glamorous. They want to feel what it's all about. So they mimic behaviour that they see but they haven't got the understanding to go with it. Parents who are not aware or parents who themselves are members of gangs. We have that. If the parent is the member of a gang, then you can be sure the kids are indoctrinated in the philosophy of the gang edicts. Its foothold is entrenched in bullying. (Principal 1)

Many teachers were appalled by the violence shown on reality TV and questioned the rationale behind such shows.

Some of those reality shows, the stunts and that, somebody is going to be seriously injured or dead. Is that what they're going for? (Mary)

Several teachers argued that the main focus of reality TV shows was human degradation and painted a dismal picture of what could happen in the future. One teacher compared it to the Roman Coliseum with its progress from amusing people with sporting events to using violence for entertainment. She questioned what would happen when degrading people on reality shows would not be enough to satisfy an audience.

Isn't it also amazing that they call that *reality* TV? Like this is our reality. It means we need to degrade other people. I think most of those reality TV shows, if you look at them, it's a form of degradation. How can you humiliate somebody more than somebody else and they call it reality TV. It's almost like we're spelling it right out. This is the way we are. (Dorothy)

But they're watching the reality shows which are all about the degradation of human beings. I always think of it in the sense when the Roman Coliseum was built, it was for sporting events, and that was okay. But then people got kind of tired of it. We're kind of starting to go down that road to a certain extent. We're just degrading people now but maybe 10, 20, or 30 years from now that won't sell on TV, so now we've got to something a little bit more severe. It just sort of makes you wonder. (Sunshine)

One principal who agreed attributed the whole notion of human degradation and humiliation to a modern phenomenon in entertainment which she termed the *cult of nastiness*. Many shows highlighted being nasty and treating others poorly, including family.

It's interesting, the trends in television. There's the cult of nastiness with some of the shows, okay the most obvious would be Married With Children, where the people in the family were real nasty to each other. They had very nasty ways, acting a very cruel type of humour. Then when you think of all the surrealist TV, it seems to be . . . I especially think of fear factor, it's like trying to get people to do the most disgusting things, humiliating things. And that does seem to be the thing, the more humiliating and degrading, the more entertaining. (Principal 3)

Reality TV shows came under severe attack by teachers and principals in several other ways. They believed that they had caused a societal shift by challenging and changing the way individuals think and act. Watching such distorted images in the media created a lack of empathy. They had made it fun to watch the pain and suffering of others. In essence, participants believed that children and youth today had largely become desensitized to the distress and misery of others.

The reality shows I think really are distorting students' images. It's fun to watch people that are in pain, or something's wrong in their life. All of a sudden, their feelings, they're detached from someone being sad. (Mrs. S2)

Another area of distortion that seemed to be of great concern to participants was the value placed on achieving goals regardless of the means. Competing and achieving power over others seemed to be at the heart of many shows that encouraged individuals to be conniving, manipulative, and hurtful to achieve their goals. Teachers lamented the disappearance of nice shows and sitcoms.

I think of these reality TV shows now as a whole shift in culture. I think it totally changes the way [students] think and the way they should act. The people on these shows, what do they do? They have to be conniving, manipulative in order to win or get what they want. Like the Bachelor or the Bachelorette; they're stepping on each other's toes to get the main prize. So, they're watching that and what registers in their mind is: that is how you should be if you want to win. Even the Apprentice, all those shows, in the end you see these people being vicious. And these shows, there's just more and more and more of

them. That's all you really see. You don't see these nice TV shows, the sitcoms, all that's gone. (Mrs. S2)

Some teachers indicated that students' behaviour at school reflected many of the media messages. It was obvious in how winning at any expense had become a main preoccupation for students. Students could no longer enjoy a game for its fun value; now, it was only about who won.

Everything out there is about a winner. Everybody's a winner. You've got to compete and be on top. American Idol, you vote for the best one and the best guy is going to be on top. So these kids, it's hard for them. They're getting all these screwy messages everywhere they go. (Mango)

Out in the schoolyard it's the winning and the losing and they come in arguing, fighting, about who won and lost. I keep saying there's no medal. There's not, it's a game at recess. They don't understand the game. I think that's very difficult. (Rose)

The tendency of students' music or sports idols to engage in negative behaviours did not seem to interfere with their success, reinforcing students in their beliefs. Success was no longer associated with hard work and determination. Moreover, aspiring to achieve the same status and financial success as their idols had become the students' dream rather than choosing a career based on helping others.

They figure that's the key to success like all the rappers, all the violence that goes with it, all the things that you see, the negatives. They perceive that as positive and cool. That's the road to success. It's not hard work and it's not determination, it's how do I get the fast buck and how do I get from point A to point B with the least amount of work. (Mrs. D2)

I was just thinking that part of the problem stems from our society. The media portrays how to get ahead at all costs. So if it means physical, social bullying, whatever you want, to obtain the means that you want, you're entitled to do that. And because of that, I think a lot of that is being transferred to the kids in our school. They don't see anything wrong with doing any of these things because the person they look up to, he was a kid dealing drugs to 14-year-olds. But he's an idol to them now. It's okay. Or basketball players who go out and they can cause damage but they make 50 million dollars. "That's what I want to be when I grow up, a basketball player." "I don't want to do anything in society that's going to do any good for anybody." So when we see kids in the yard when whatever they're doing, they don't see anything wrong with it because this is the message that they're getting from our society. (Larsson)

Media were also held responsible for modelling social bullying to the young generation. Gossiping and spreading rumours were rampant in the media. Political campaigns and elections were believed to hinge on rumours spread about candidates' personal lives in the media. It was not surprising to find students learning and reflecting such behaviours.

I think that it would be really nice to have, let's say a political campaign, where all they talked about was the policies and not about the fact that so-and-so slept with 75 different women, his son's gay, his nanny smokes dope in the bathroom. This is all the stuff you hear. And then we're supposed to vote accordingly. They just find out all the negative things and that's how you make your decisions. So why do we expect the kids not to engage in social bullying, they're just learning how to do it. (Principal 3)

Teachers concluded that the importance placed on others' personal lives in the media had replaced the traditional respect of an individual's right to privacy. Nowadays, the media claimed that the public had a right to know the secret lives and private affairs of politicians and stars. The media now focused on sensational and embarrassing news. Hence, as a society, we had come to believe that we had a right to such information.

Nowadays the public has a right to know. I don't know whether we do have a right to know. . . . Just because the guy's the president of the United States or chair or CEO of a company, doesn't necessarily mean I have a right to his private life. There seems to be the attitude that we do have that right to know everything about everybody . . . we tend to focus really on the sensational. It just seems to be that every time you turn around, someone's looking to find out something that they can use to either embarrass you or whatever. Why do we have those shows on TV? Hollywood Confidential, all these types of shows. All they do is talk trash about the stars. You never heard trash talk about the Hollywood stars of 50 years ago and I'm sure they weren't much different than the ones there are out there today. I think that as a society we have this idea that that's our right. (Nancy)

One principal adamantly declared that intrusion was a form of psychological bullying; it stripped people of their right to privacy and placed their faults in the public domain. Ironically, we want to stop bullying in the schools but society is rampant with examples of bullying. The legislature was one prime example of verbal bullying and intrusion.

But intrusion is really a form of bullying because it takes away your privacy. It strips you bare and all your faults become public domain. Isn't that psychological bullying? If we want to stop bullying in our schools, then I think you can't expect kids to stop doing

things that adults are doing constantly to each other. If you want to stop bullying in the schools, maybe we need to go into the legislature and say, "Stop bullying each other in the house. You can't heckle people, that's bullying." Kids see this stuff. Every kid's got a computer, every kid's got a TV, and they watch all those adults. (Principal 3)

Several principals and teachers suggested that bullying is entrenched in our society. One principal postulated that bullying has always been pivotal in achieving power and success in society at large. She explained that, to a great extent, our society has been organized based on levels of power attained at the expense of those with lesser clout. The subtle nature of bullying in the society makes it insidious and accepted.

I think it's learned and I think it's reinforced in society. Because people who have power over other people seem to be the ones who are successful. I think we're trained or I guess we see in society that if you want to be successful, it's the idea that you have to retain a certain level of power and how do you do that? Well, usually you do that by pushing somebody else down. (Principal 8)

The political arena was replete with examples that modelled bullying to the young generation.

She illustrated her view using the arguing, verbal jousting and public humiliation that takes place in the House of Commons.

There is that aspect of public humiliation when you think of the bullying speech that goes on by our leaders. I mean witness the House of Commons. I remember how excited I was when they finally televised that I guess more than 20 years ago and I had my Grade 6 and I was so pleased because we were studying government. And then I saw it and I was getting the kids to watch it. I was sorry I suggested watching it because the people were just so rude and silly and all that counted was this verbal jousting and one-upmanship, not getting something done. (Principal 3)

CHAPTER 6: SOLUTIONS—A MULTIFACETED, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO BULLYING

In this chapter, I describe solutions suggested by teachers and principals for controlling and decreasing the incidence of bullying in Ontario elementary schools. Participants made recommendations that they strongly believed could contribute positively to a school environment free from bullying. They based their suggestions on realistic scenarios and perceived areas of weaknesses within the system. They perceived bullying as a multifactorial, complex problem as illustrated in previous chapters of this research thesis. Most agreed that solutions must similarly be multimodal in order to make a substantial difference in the incidence and prevalence of bullying. For example, one principal said:

No one is going to solve the given problem without the backup or the resources going forward. A teacher alone . . . it isn't going to happen. A parent alone, it's not going to happen. A principal is not going to be effective. Peer mediation is not going to be effective. Anything in isolation is not going to be effective and I see bullying as being really, really a multifaceted problem that requires multifaceted resources, and multifaceted efforts and approach. (Principal 2)

Such a multifaceted, collaborative approach is discussed in this chapter under the following subthemes: community partners; solutions that address students' needs; solutions for students who bully; solutions for students who are bullied; strategies for parents; support services; the school culture; improving the teacher–school fit; and the student–teacher relationship.

Community Partners

Principals believed that bullying was an insurmountable challenge for the school to address single-handedly. Parents and schools needed to collaborate to minimize bullying.

The school and the parents have to acknowledge it is happening. At the same time, if the parents are not willing to acknowledge it and the parents are not willing to do something to change the child's behaviour, it can't just be the school that's doing it. It's got to be a collaborative effort between home and school. The kid's got to know in both situations [school and home] that it's unacceptable. I don't think it's going to happen in just one area. (Principal 4)

Several principals discussed the valuable contributions that community agencies could make.

Community services, community partners! There is the church, there are agencies that can very well set up partnerships with the school, and I think that some of the agencies and some associations are starting to provide some of these services. (Principal 8)

Working on my own, definitely I can't. Working in conjunction with the teacher, kids, the parents, the church, outside agencies you can have a much, much greater effect. If you have all your corners covered, you've got a greater chance of success. Alone as an educational institution, it's difficult to succeed! (Principal 5)

We're also looking at pulling in different kinds of support groups. So it might be Crime Stoppers or Young People's Theatre, which has some themes that deal with bullying. (Principal 7)

Several teachers discussed the importance of police involvement. For them, the police were the community partner with the most influential, credible information to impart to students regarding the consequences and laws governing bullying.

I think police presence or police involvement more in the schools in a community fashion would certainly be helpful because bullies become criminals. (Sandra)

I have seen situations in our school where the administration has actually called the police in to talk to a bully about consequences and assault and what forms assault can take, so that they are aware there are even more serious consequences beyond the school if their behaviour continues. (Rose)

Solutions That Address Students' Needs

Raising Awareness

Several principals identified early intervention, that is, raising students' awareness about bullying, as a major step in tackling the problem. They felt this was necessary because children often did not quite understand the dynamics of bullying even when they were victims. They emphasized the importance of openly teaching, explaining, and discussing the topic so that children would be able to identify and report bullying in a timely fashion.

Because they don't know how they should feel sometimes, they need somebody to clarify it in their own heads as to "What just happened to me? Is that right? Is that wrong? It doesn't feel good but what is it?" (Principal 1)

I think it's incumbent on parents and teachers to give them information about their own personal safety. What are the parameters, what is okay, what isn't okay? When people ask you to do certain things, what do you do about it? How do you respond? (Principal 7)

I think strong, focused education on the topic is necessary. We're moving in that direction now. We can now start to identify some of the difficulties that we see and work to teach children how to overcome those difficulties. (Principal 6)

As a major step towards tackling the problem, several principals identified early intervention through raising the students' awareness of the different aspects of bullying.

I think it's incumbent on parents and teachers to give them as much information about their own personal safety. What are the parameters, what is okay, what isn't okay? When people ask you to do certain things, what do you do about it? How do you respond? (Principal 7)

I think strong, focused education on the topic is necessary. We're moving in that direction now. We can now start to identify some of the difficulties that we see and work to teach the children how to overcome those difficulties. (Principal 6)

Some principals pointed out that if the right students were targeted, awareness raising could act as a preventive measure, preempting bullying. Raising the self-esteem of low-functioning students, teaching students who were likely to bully the reasons they resorted to such behaviours, and encouraging students to resist peer pressure and report bullying were among the ideas suggested for accomplishing this purpose.

When we put a little more of a well-aligned program in place I think you'll be able to spot those kids a lot earlier. You wouldn't have to wait for the bullying behaviour. For example, we target the low kids and we do a lot of work with self-esteem or kids who've been bullied. . . . For the bullies, you start to reflect it back to them, mirror it back and hopefully they can start to see that they weren't born like this but they're doing what somebody did to them. It's like the victim becomes a bully and the cycle goes on. You talk to them about the cyclical nature of it and why it's important to stop it. Kids in Grade 6, 7, and 8 will get that. (Principal 8)

I think it needs to be brought out in the open and discussed. When it is discussed and it happens to them, then they know, "Oh, I can say no." The kids can say, "No, we had that talk, we saw this play. This is just disgusting and I don't have to take it." They can be encouraged to report it in any manner they like. (Principal 9)

They need to know just because you need to belong; the peer pressure should not make you vulnerable or put you at risk. Belonging is important but you can't be a victim just

because you want to belong. The more training you do in that way I think kids get a little more savvy to where the line is. (Principal 1)

Programs

Participants discussed programs and practices that had proved beneficial for controlling bullying in the schools. Most agreed that school assemblies, where bullying was defined and the Code of Conduct was reviewed, were instrumental in starting the process of raising awareness. Presentations by theatre groups were also seen as good for this purpose, but one principal said they were not sufficient on their own; teacher follow-up and continuous reinforcement were crucial.

We have assemblies to discuss the code of conduct. We do define what bullying is so people are aware. (Principal 10)

I had assemblies and I did a PowerPoint presentation by collecting all sorts of resources even letters from children themselves where they described a situation and I presented it to the school. I've also had presentations brought in into the school that dealt with bullying and what to do with the bully. Presentation alone does not do it. It needs to be constantly brought to the forefront and the teacher needs to work with the presentation. (Principal 9)

Several teachers and principals emphasized the importance of bringing in experts as guest speakers to make presentations. Students tended to consider these authority figures more credible than their own teachers on the subject of bullying.

I try to bring in as many outside people as possible because kids see them more valid authority figures than the teacher. They see the teachers on a constant basis and maybe what they at times say does not have the same value as bringing somebody from outside the school. So I get the local police officer, I get the local karate school in to talk about the attitude of bullying. There are also theatre groups that you can bring in. (Principal 2)

It's very different for the children to hear it from an expert, from a police officer or someone who does it as a career than to have your teacher say it because children adopt the "in one ear, out the other" mentality with their teachers as well as with their parents. (Jackie)

In some programs, younger students were perceived to respond positively to older students who helped them academically, recreationally, and socially. One such program, hailed

as very successful by principals and teachers alike, was peer mediation and conflict resolution.

This program empowered the older students and allowed them to be part of the solution.

We have a peer mediator program and the children . . . wear orange vests. . . . It's mainly used in the primary yard, but the primary students know that if they have a problem with another student that they can go and talk to the peer mediator who is an older student, who can then help them out and try and solve the problem. If the peer mediator can't solve the problem, then they go and see the child and youth worker, or they come and see a teacher or the vice-principal or principal. But the problem gets solved. (Principal 5)

Teachers acknowledged that setting up a successful peer mediation program required great effort; the complexity of a teacher's role made it difficult to provide the dedication needed to ensure its success.

It is quite the challenge and a lot of work, but peer mediators gets kids involved actively in helping to address these kinds of issues themselves, teaching them conflict resolution. I think that genuine peer mediation . . . programs in the school are essential for empowering kids to be able to take responsibility to these kinds of situations and becoming part of the solution to the issue of bullying. But, it takes a lot of work to train the kids, then continue to build this and make it part of the culture of the school. Schools that do have these in place definitely see the difference in terms of kids becoming more aware of the need to make the school a very safe environment. (Bob)

One school where it was done, it was done very well but there were a lot of meetings, a lot of time spent, and it worked for that one year. We had very few incidents. . . . There was a rewards system built in, there were all kinds of things that kept that nucleus of kids that were delivering the program interested still. But, it took an individual the whole year's work that she applied herself to organizing. . . . It's an enormous effort. (Sam)

Recreational ideas that kept children busy and entertained in the schoolyard were thought to have positive results in curbing bullying. Facilitating sports, extracurricular activities, and talent shows were believed to allow the students opportunities to excel and showcase their talents and decrease the incidence of bullying. One principal mentioned the positive results achieved through a program called Friends where older students walk around the junior students giving them ideas and helping them play.

Having things to do in the yard is important. We have basketball hoops so they're out there so students can play with those. A lot of extracurricular activities, I think that's important, kids are busy. Ways for students to show their strengths. Not just in sports but in music . . . to display talents that other students may not even see. A talent show for

example could be a good way to do that; where a student who's very withdrawn plays a piano extremely well and kids are impressed by that. (Principal 5)

We also have what's called friends and they're basically out in the primary yard. They are not the peer mediators but they're there to show the younger students how to play and to help them play. They'll bring up a parachute; they'll show them how to play games. (Principal 6)

Prosocial Skills

Most teachers agreed that there is a need for teaching social skills in schools today.

Multiple social factors have given rise to such a need. One teacher speculated that in the past, family values and expectations were very similar resulting in homogeneous social skills. She surmised that this had drastically changed today, for a variety of reasons, including the advent of multiculturalism; parents who grew up with disadvantaged parenting practices; and very young parents who lacked the experience and the support system required for effective parenting.

When we were kids pretty well everyone had the same kind of family values. Now you have kids coming from all different ethnic backgrounds, you have kids coming from different realms of experience, and they're not on a level playing field. Also, you just have parents who are parenting exactly the way they learned. So if they had bad parenting as a child, that's the skills they're passing on to the next generation and also we're having a lot of younger parents who don't have very much experience and they don't have people to fall back on. . . . So if there is a social skills program, you're at least teaching them, "This is what we want." (Sandra)

Teachers emphatically echoed these concerns in their description of qualities and deficits that students displayed today. Deficits necessitating teaching social skills included egotism, lack of cooperation, inability to work in a team, and difficulties dealing with conflicts. These were considered rampant.

Society is becoming so egotistical and everyone thinks of me, me, and I, I. I find that kids don't know how to work together. There always has to be a leader and then you have the followers. They don't want to take turns being the leader. There's always that bully or that one that's more aggressive that wants to be the leader. It's those skills of working together, understanding that the leader is the one that sort of just guides everyone but that everyone is a part of a group. (Sunshine)

They have to learn proper behaviour, socially acceptable behaviour. (Butterfly)

Learning socially acceptable behaviour is a life skill. Academics is academics, it's there every day, but learning proper behaviour and interaction, like that's life. (Theresa)

I think they have to learn a little more empathy and compassion. (Sarah)

Teachers praised programs such as I Care and Red Light, Green Light, which teach children how to play successfully with one another and how to deal with conflicts.

We need more programs as the I Care program for social skills and the social programs that teach children how to deal with conflict in more suitable ways than what we're doing. And those types of programs should be expanded. (Dorothy)

I know in other schools there have been programs that have been set up where there's a fair play program and you teach how to play and what to do. It's an excellent program and then there are other programs that give the concept of fair play; like the Red Light, Green Light program for the primaries. (Queenie)

A few teachers mentioned programs that used to be run by community police officers which addressed bullying, peer pressure and appropriate behaviour from a legal standpoint. These teachers attested to the success and positive influence of those programs and bemoaned the fact that they were no longer funded by the government.

We used to have a program at this school where a police officer came in to talk to the children in the Grade 6 classrooms. It had a lot to do with peer pressure, appropriate behaviour, deciding where you want your life to take you. And then what happened to that program? The city stopped funding it. So here was a program where you really could see children changing the way they were behaving. There was a little bit of thinking involved rather than resorting to suspensions. (Franz)

As a guidance counsellor, I remember partnering with the community police officer to deliver a program called Values, Influences, and Peers (VIP). This highly successful program addressed bullying, gangs, peer influence, and potential legal consequences. As part of the program, the students visited the police station and a courtroom, where reasons for discussing issues that went beyond reprimanding, lecturing, and teaching values were brought to life.

Numerous participants mentioned the importance of teachers' role modelling values and prosocial skills in their own classrooms. As one principal explained, when teachers practised

what they preached and consistently illustrated examples of kindness, tolerance, and equality, they sent a strong message to their students. Inevitably, students would reflect similar values.

I think pretty well a teacher dictates the kind of behaviour in that classroom . . . demonstrating and showing kindness to one another. . . . If this is part of who you are, and you practise what you preach, inevitably it's going to impart that message to your students. (Principal 2)

Solutions for Students Who Bullied

According to the participants, consequences to bullying (with suspension as the ultimate punishment) seem rather ineffective (see Chapter 4). In discussing solutions, principals and teachers suggested ideas that went beyond consequences, focusing instead on attempting to modify the behaviour of students who bullied.

I think the most important thing to talk about is rehabilitation, reeducation, and I think that is the key. Nothing else is important. Can that kid be rehabilitated so that they are no longer a bully? Can you provide a safe school environment by adjusting these issues? I think the rest is all punishment and reprimand. (Principal 10)

Several teachers and principals discussed the concepts of rehabilitation and reeducation. One teacher referred to encouraging the bully to reflect and engage in self-examination, a solution already in practice in some schools. This teacher, however, suggested involving the parent in the process too.

We have to get the parents and the kids to think. Reflection papers are a perfect example of that. Basically you're not giving them mindless lines; you're giving them a form where they have to force to reflect. After a suspension from bullying, the parents come in, you define it and you have to be on the same page and you have the kid reflect. Through self-examination do you decide whether you're going to continue as a bully and become a criminal or realize there's a better way? (Adam)

One principal advocated the use of an anger management program, under the assumption that some bullying behaviours are based on cognitive distortions and perceived danger. Students who bullied needed to be taught to identify the triggers that precipitated their bullying behaviours, and then to consider alternative behaviours and potential consequences.

Predetermined choices and courses of action could eventually translate into a reduction of bullying behaviours.

We have programs for kids for anger management. . . . If somebody says, “Yo, momma,” I do this. If somebody gives me the cut-eye, I do this. So, match the behaviour with the precipitating event. Then you take a look at your options. So if somebody does this, now list all your options for somebody giving you the cut-eye. So you list all your options. Then you might have the consequences of the behaviours. So there’s the behaviour in the middle and you have the negative response and the positive response, the long-term consequences of one and the long-term consequences of the other. So by building these rubrics they can see . . . I’m going to learn how to restrain myself. (Principal 1)

Several teachers strongly believed in the power of mentorship: pairing the student with a peer who modelled positive relationships with others or a teacher who acted as an advisor.

The guidance counsellor has become involved now with a group of students trying to associate the bully with other students who are not like that, who are very confident in themselves and yet treat others with kindness and respect. (Rose)

It would be nice to get a system whereby each student has a potential mentoring teacher, not necessarily your own classroom teacher. Having a teacher you can go to over time, seven years or eight years, may be helpful. (Nadia)

Several teachers and principals argued for empowering students who bullied to engage in positive activities. This would allow such students to receive the recognition and attention appropriate to these alternative behaviours; it would also allow them to feel a sense of responsibility and to have an important role in the school.

Once you empower kids in whatever way, you start to see a shift in their behaviour. We need to empower them . . . to engage them in a positive way. . . . In this day and age, kids don’t have any responsibilities. They don’t have jobs at home. There’s nothing they need to do that has a significant impact on the rest of the community. Kids need to feel important . . . making them feel that there is a role and that they have to play that role. (Principal 9)

One principal gave an example of this. A student who had had many suspensions for bullying was placed on a school team. He became an accomplished athlete and his bullying acts diminished. According to this principal, there was an inverse correlation between the student’s ability to be successful in some area and his level of engagement in bullying behaviours.

We had one student, for example, he had a list of suspensions this high. He had come from another school, he had a terrible background, he was in Grade 7, and had very low reading skills. So as a punishment for bullying, he had to play basketball on the school team. He turned out to be a star and he turned out to be an amazing runner. There [was a] correlation between his level of bullying and his ability to succeed in something and be recognized for it. (Principal 1)

Some students achieved satisfaction through the power they got from bullying. According to a few teachers, if such students could get this satisfaction from other activities, they could raise their self-esteem.

If there's power in bullying due to the bully's poor self-esteem, we've got to try and find a way to raise that bully's self-esteem so that the high comes from something else beyond putting somebody else down. That is so difficult, so difficult to do because that power is intoxicating. (Sandra)

According to Principal 1, no students really wished to be on the fringes. If given the opportunity, they could be just as easily drawn into positive endeavours such as the Green team and Earth Clean team. Engaging in such positive activities had a ripple effect which could be seen in students' general behaviour and academic performance.

I think those kids [who bully] who are on the fringe can go either way. Nobody wants to be on the fringe. These kids can be just as easily engaged as they can be disengaged. By the same token, kids who are engaged in a positive endeavour, like the Green team, and Keep the Earth Clean team, and Go Clean up the Park team, get on the running team, I think can galvanize other kids . . . schools play an important part. Schools make those opportunities available to kids. There's a positive transference I think in some ways . . . it has this ripple effect in all different areas. All of a sudden he's reading, he's saying good afternoon to you, he's respectful, he's opening the door. (Principal 1)

Of all the solutions offered, I related best to the empowerment method. As a teacher, I chose this method after observing the leadership qualities and strong personalities of students who bullied others. I hypothesized these students drew power and a sense of importance from bullying. I rationalized that if I gave them opportunities to use their leadership skills in positive endeavours, they were likely to achieve the same satisfaction in addition to my approval as their teacher. Hence, the students' behaviour could be modified while, at the same time, allowing

them to satisfy their needs. Indeed, there was a substantial change in those students' behaviour. They strove to be star leaders to gain positive reinforcement.

Despite such positive and hopeful suggestions, several teachers and principals felt that, students who bullied require intensive help beyond what the schools could offer.

You need to deal with the bully on a more intensive level. We don't have the time. We don't have . . . the resources, the manpower, or womanpower to grab a kid and go sit with him for an hour. (Principal 2)

Solutions for Students Who Are Bullied

By and large, suggested solutions for students who are bullied seemed to focus on assertiveness training. The students needed to be taught appropriate responses to bullying tactics, and methods to report the bullying.

I think what we need to teach the student is how to control their reaction so that it doesn't spur on everyone else around them. (Mango)

I think communication is a big thing. If we can teach our students/children to communicate their feelings or just stand up for themselves a little bit more. Not with swearing or physical violence, but to just stand up for what they believe in and not being the bystander. I think that would break down the bullies a little bit more. (Butterfly)

You can tell in the schoolyard that the bully will pick the easy mark and they go up to them. . . . In a way we have to teach the victims how to defend themselves. And if they learn new strategies, they may be able to cope with this. (Sandra)

Strategies for Parents

A partnership between school and parents was perceived to be integral to the success of potential solutions. Parents needed to support schools' efforts and strategies and follow up on the schools' suggestions and rules for understanding bullying. To this end, several teachers recommended workshops for parents.

We could start by educating the parents. We could hold workshops. We could hold them responsible for certain things that their children do. Have a parent night and they have to come . . . they must attend just like interviews. You know, no parent wants their child to be a bully or to be bullied. (Queenie)

I think it goes even with educating the parents and letting them know what a bully is. When you talk to them, sometimes they have no clue. They think, “It’s just children’s play.” Educate the parents, they should know clearly what it is, what the consequences are from Day 1 when they bring their child into the school. You give them school guideline rules, like a school handbook. (Wendy)

But once you empower kids in whatever way, you start to see a shift in their behaviour. It needs to be supported at home. (Principal 8)

Several teachers alluded to difficulties experienced by the parents in dealing with their own children’s behaviour. Parenting courses were recommended to help parents handle situations at home and remain supportive of school initiatives.

I think not just the school. It has to be the parents and the school together, somehow led by a professional to teach the parents or to guide the parents on what to do and how to handle situations at home. (Mrs. D1)

Support Services

To deal effectively with bullying, participants strongly emphasized the need for guidance counsellors and other support services. Teachers and principals attributed the difficulties in dealing with bullying to shortages in human resources and support staff.

I feel that the guidance counsellor should be in the school from morning to night, the same thing with the social worker. The social worker has what? Six, seven schools, spends a day at your school. How can you counsel a student in need of social work intervention? “Well you know what, student? I know you’re having a problem, but you have to wait to speak about it.” These things, the cutbacks in some areas, need to be addressed by the government. (Principal 9)

Guidance counsellors should be in a school five days a week. I think each school should have a social worker, especially in these times of need. Each school should have, according to the population, the use of CYWs that deal with social issues, can teach these programs. I think that boards and the ministry should also develop and stick to guidelines as to their exact roles. (Principal 8)

Due to cutbacks, shortages in human resources and support staff meant increased difficulties for teachers and principals in dealing with bullying. They postulated that schools have not kept up with the ever changing demands of the society. They argued that significant

changes, such as the breakdown of the family unit and other psychosocial issues, have erupted but were never matched with the required human resources.

In many cases we lack the resources to deal with all these issues. It's a very different society than when I grew up. There are a lot more needs than there ever used to be. My honest belief is that ever since the breakup of the family, a lot of social issues have erupted that were never present in the old days. So, as a result, we do need a lot more human resources to deal with all these issues. At the school level we just do not have them. (Principal 10)

There's a need for involvement by social worker, guidance counsellor, or maybe mental health professionals. Some of the economic issues, parenting issues, trying to continually talk to the kid and talk to the parents, and trying to move them along, require special services. (Principal 7)

Teachers expressed their frustration at having to deal with bullying issues without having enough time or resources. They clearly abhorred the drastic cutbacks to guidance support that had been implemented at the elementary level and mocked the limited time that guidance counsellors had been given to spend in the schools.

We're not dealing with the issues; we're doing a Band-Aid approach. There's no more guidance program and we can't figure out why these kids aren't changing their behaviour. (Twofour)

Guidance counsellors have been cut down drastically so we don't have that. We have a large school with 660 students and we have a guidance counsellor available for a half day a week but we share that half day with another school. So really it's a quarter of a day per week that's available. (Mrs. S1)

Teachers said some guidance counsellors also reported feeling frustrated at not having enough time to rectify a situation.

We have a guidance counsellor who is so overworked she can only be here a certain period of time and has so many students on her list. And she's very good. She's here one half day a week for 750 students. She says our school should be her only school. That's how needy we are . . . she feels guilty because she can't give us the time that she knows we need. So that's another huge obstacle. (Sandra)

I think often times we try to maybe get that person involved with the guidance counsellor. But then again when you get a guidance counsellor for 2 hours a week it sometimes makes it a little difficult to get things rectified. (Principal 4)

Schools were seen as limited in their resources to deal with the roots of the problem. Teachers tried their best but their already complex role did not allow for the thorough or early interventions needed for such an insidious problem as bullying. This had left schools with a gaping need for special personnel.

There needs to be somebody with the skills to get to the bottom of things. (Jane)

Teachers, they'll do what they can in the classroom but I think you really need a dedicated professional to implement a program in a school. Whether it's guidance . . . or a child and youth care worker in every school to do that. I think the right way to go about doing this is to educate the children right from an early age and then you avoid the issues when they reach Grades 6, 7, and 8. (Principal 5)

While agreeing that their role was to identify bullying problems, several teachers felt that good solutions and interventions required collaboration between teachers, administrators, and support services. They also felt that administrators were far too busy to take on this problem alone.

I think by definition you should be the person identifying the problem. After that it should be in collaboration with some sort of administrative body or whatever, or support service, or guidance department, which is no longer in effect. It should be taken over in collaboration. But that doesn't exist. All I'm saying is that when you throw it in the administration's lap they're surrounded by all this other noise. (Coach)

Some teachers felt that funding needed to be allocated to the field of guidance to restore services for bullying; lack of such services was perceived to be strictly a funding issue. The complexity of the teacher's role was perceived to interfere with providing appropriate attention to issues of bullying which could be rectified by guidance counsellors.

Depending on the magnitude of the school, funding should be allocated by the Ministry regarding guidance. I think guidance has been one of the fields that has been cut drastically. Funding needs to be put back into that because children need guidance when we reach situations where we have a problem and unfortunately the teacher is now the psychologist, the social worker, the nurse, the curriculum delivery expert, so it's...you know, we need more people, we need more manpower. (Rose)

Well, first of all I feel that the government needs to step in and provide funding to have guidance counsellors, to have well trained CYWs that can run programs that could be there on the spot throughout the day and run these programs not in isolation but in a

continuum. I think the programs should be developed and should be run by professionals. Not adding it to the teachers' workload. (Principal 3)

Participants agreed that the solution to lack of services for bullying involved increasing funding. The demand for funding to provide support services and an effective continuum of programs for bullying was loud and clear. As one teacher put it, "Bullying problems would be under control and teachers and administrators would be relieved of this burden if a specialist were hired to attend to bullying issues in each school."

If money was not the question, if you wanted to solve all the bullying in schools nowadays, if you had one person that you could pay a salary and take care of these kinds of things, it could really work but you need a specialist for it. (Sam)

School Culture

Principals' Leadership

Teachers considered the person who sets the tone of the school culture to be the principal. Hence, the attitude and approach used to deal with bullying was largely attributed to the principal's desire to effect change and maintain a safe school environment.

If you're the type of individual who really believes that you can effectuate change . . . you're going to use your power to benefit the school . . . to make this the safest place for 700 kids and their teachers and you're not going to tolerate any kind of behaviour that will diverge from making this a very safe place. Bullying is one of those situations and you're going to do everything possible to try and eradicate it. (Sam)

In general, the key person in any particular school would be the principal. Because even a vice-principal, in general, has to follow the principal's lead. (Tony)

One principal agreed with this view and emphasized that a principal who is determined can decrease the incidence of bullying.

I know that if you come into a school that has bullying . . . and you go after it in a very determined way, you can have a significant impact on the frequency of the act, on the perpetrators, on the culture of the school in general. And sometimes an administrator who doesn't really take that in hand could experience different degrees of bullying, right up to gang stuff. But I think it's worth the trouble. I think that a primary responsibility of the school is to make sure that kids are safe. (Principal 1)

If you're the type of principal who is committed to safety, and you are a champion of the cause, you're going to do everything possible to ensure that your vision of creating a very safe place is achieved. (Bob)

Teachers' Involvement

Several principals and teachers strongly believed that bullying can be indirectly allowed or disallowed by the school culture which in turn is largely determined by teachers' level of commitment and involvement. Whether bullying flourishes or not is dependent on the teachers' level of involvement in taking bullying seriously, addressing bullying frequently within the context of other subjects, listening to students' complaints, and empowering students to be assertive.

Teachers indirectly contribute to bullying by not really being attentive, by not helping kids, by not doing things in the classroom. I think they need to address this issue in subject areas such as in health and . . . religion. They need to address it in a specific manner so kids know. They need to empower kids when it happens. They shouldn't ever, ever look away and say, "Oh forget it now. Don't worry." They need to attend to it. (Principal 1)

Sometimes we unknowingly, unwittingly encourage bullying by the fact that we don't see what's there or the fact that we don't recognize it to be as serious as it is. We don't listen to the child who is perhaps a victim and we think, "Grow up, learn to deal with it." And then later on you find that it's been going on for years. (Dorothy)

To help prevent bullying while on yard duty requires training, alertness, and a proactive attitude. For example, having conversations with individual students could compromise teachers' ability to scan the schoolyard and detect situations that may be escalating on the periphery.

I think the key is to have staff trained in how to do yard duty. If you have staff who are conscious of what's happening on the periphery and what's happening under their noses, and who are not engaging in a kind of one-on-one social interactions with individual kids on their yard duty, you have a better chance of trying to prevent things from escalating. Being aware there's a group of kids starting to gather here around this kid or something, so I better be in the middle of it. It's important to try and be proactive and be in there, moving around, talking to kids, and listening to kids. (Principal 7)

Interestingly, one principal noted how bullying had been rationalized so that it was now acceptable in some schools. In her opinion, some teachers and students now believed that bullied

children bring it upon themselves; that in some distorted way they deserve it. These beliefs allow teachers and students to feel they have the right to ignore bullying which helps create a school culture in which the bullied child is silenced.

Actually too it's sometimes I think adults and maybe kids tend to rationalize it as the child is his own worst enemy, he's causing it. Sometimes I think it's an easy out, "Well, I don't have to deal with it." It's not the other kid's fault, it's his own fault. If he'd just shut up and left them alone, whatever. We tend to duck it. (Principal 4)

Most principals, however, believed that a serious attitude about bullying should permeate the school culture. They discussed the importance of teachers' and principals' commitment in addressing bullying complaints.

Bullying needs to be taken seriously by administration in a school and also by the teachers. When a student comes to complain, they need to act on it and deal with it by interviewing the students involved, by taking the time and actually dealing with it. (Principal 5)

Team Approach

Teachers criticized the tendency of colleagues to deal with bullying only if it was happening in their own classrooms or only if their own students were involved. According to participants, a school culture that embraced community ideals and teamwork would meet with much better success in addressing bullying.

You can't take that approach that, "It's not my problem." Or you're walking by a classroom and you see somebody doing something and you don't deal with it. "Well, it's not my class." No, no, they're our children. That's what I meant about the team approach. It doesn't matter if they're in Kindergarten or Grade 8, they belong to the community. If people really embrace community ideals, then you deal with everything because it's part of everybody. I think that's important. (Nancy)

You try your best; you have to work as a team. If you do not work as a team, the school will fall apart. . . . You have to think about what's in the best interest of the students, your school, because that's where you have to work every day. (Mrs. G)

Teachers' numerous duties, curriculum pressures, and the fast-paced environment of a school interfered with their ability to work as a team. One principal said that teachers still tended

to work behind closed doors and he acknowledged the need to allow teachers the time and forum in which to work as a team.

They don't have the time. It's not a priority. There's too many pressures. . . . There's a million things that are happening that are impacting on teachers' time unless you say, "Well, this is important, so in October we're going to free up people for an hour from 9:00 until 10:00, and we'll find some way to organize things so that we can sit and talk about this. What do we do about it?" If you're going to change people you're going to need to get them together and talk about different things and get away from the "close the door" atmosphere that we still have. (Principal 7)

Several principals and teachers discussed the importance of collegial, collaborative efforts from all school divisions in establishing a plan of action and a program to address bullying. One principal argued that teachers would be more inclined to follow the plan if they had a role in its development.

I think it would be really important to get you and your staff together, representation from all divisions and all your specialties and work on, "Okay, this is the reality of our school, what are we going to do?" and come up with a plan that puts things in place. Having a piece of coming up with what the plan is, expect people to buy into it. (Principal 1)

Teachers in general emphasized the importance of early intervention and consistency as part of the team approach in addressing bullying.

Consistency is important with everybody right from administration to teachers to everybody, to the kids, and for every student from JK to Grade 8. Not, well he's little, he doesn't get it yet. No, if you nip it now, then by the time he's in Grade 3 he's not going to do it. (Laura)

And you let the kids know, over and over again, every month at assemblies, what your expectations are. (Principal 9)

Parents as Partners

It is important for parents to be involved in and aware of school policies. Schools need to inform parents about aspects of each school culture such as consequences and positive reinforcement to encourage students.

And you try to be persistent with your consequences and you let the parents know certainly what is acceptable and what isn't acceptable in the school and that there will be consequences if their children behave that way so it's no surprise when you get the call.

And you might do some rewarding, whether it's Good Samaritan awards or whatever. You know. Whatever works in your particular school and the plan can look quite different from school to school. (Principal 9)

One teacher added that teachers, administrators, and parents needed to collaborate on behavioural expectations from students. For the same standards to be reflected throughout the school culture, the collaborators needed to act as one united support team. Only through such cooperative efforts would students realize that bullying is unacceptable by everyone's standards.

It does go further if they know they're going to have to face their teacher and eventually their parent and administrator. We have to support each other. If they know that there's a support team, it's not good cop/bad cop. There's a much greater possibility of less bullying occurring. Clearly where you have good class control and a really good relationship with the student and their parents, it does project further throughout the day and into activities and classrooms and the lunchroom and the schoolyard. (Irena)

Positive Staff Relations

Positive teacher relationships with one another, with students, and with administrators were considered a major determinant of a positive school culture. If teachers were not happy or felt that they themselves were being bullied, this would be reflected in the way they interacted with students. In turn, students would be unhappy and they too might resort to bullying. The principals emphasized the importance of a friendly, warm, and happy school culture.

I think that if you have a place where teachers are not listening to students, and situations are not dealt with in a serious manner, where teachers don't treat each other properly, professionally, I think that would contribute to bullying. Where teachers are not happy and they perceive that they're picked on themselves . . . it will reflect on the way they interact with their students and the other teachers and administrators on staff. I think that if the teachers are unhappy, the kids are unhappy and if the kids are unhappy then anything can happen. I think you have to have positive energy in a school. You basically need a friendly, loving environment for kids. Kids have to want to come to school. They have to be happy there. . . . They have to feel safe. (Principal 5)

I think a person who really enjoys what they're doing, a person who likes children, a person who brings enthusiasm to the classroom, who keeps children engaged, occupied, and interested. I think that's the type of teacher that would contribute to a positive school culture. (Principal 3)

One principal went so far as to suggest that bullying could only be decreased by building a positive, inclusive school culture. For example, empowering and encouraging teachers would allow them to deal with bullying rather than ignoring it.

I think you can control it but I think the major way in which you can improve things is to build a more positive culture, more inclusive culture. A culture where teachers are empowered, encouraged, given the courage to deal with things, rather than bury them, where people are prepared to put the time in. (Principal 7)

Several teachers discussed the significance of role modelling in influencing students' behaviour. They acknowledged that teachers' behaviour and personality could be a major determinant for setting standards of behaviour within the school culture.

I think it's really important because I think your personality comes across to the students. Whether we know it or not, they will listen to what we say, they imitate us, and sometimes when you least expect it, you can hear your words coming out of their mouths, your actions and your words. (Laura)

Improving the Teacher-School Fit

All participants agreed that teachers were in a unique place to address bullying. They made several suggestions for improving teachers' effectiveness in dealing with bullying.

Teacher Training in Bullying

Some principals acknowledged that teachers were often asked to coordinate bullying programs in addition to their regular duties without the appropriate training. Understandably, this practice did not achieve optimum outcomes as implementing such programs effectively would require trained personnel.

We bought a program, I believe it was called Peace Works, at my last school. We didn't have a child and youth care worker to implement this. We had a teacher coordinating it for the school but that teacher had her own class and could not go around to every classroom to implement the program, so we relied on teachers to actually implement the program. The teachers then had to deliver that program but the teachers without being trained basically are just following a curriculum guideline and I don't think, deliver it effectively. (Principal 6)

New teachers were often unaware of the dynamics and different aspects of bullying. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, often got stuck in their ways and lacked the flexibility needed to deal with such situations. Hence, educating teachers on how to deal with bullying was as necessary as developing awareness in students.

I think we need a lot more in-servicing of people so they're aware of what's going on and the subtle differences in bullying. (Principal 3)

I think that it's all about education again. Not only education for the students but also, I think, teachers need to be reeducated or reminded as to what works, what's appropriate, and what's not. I think sometimes either new teachers who are not privy to that kind of awareness or education, or maybe older teachers forget or get stuck in their ways or just maybe they've been in too long. I think the key is that educators need to be educated as well, or reeducated, or reminded, or both. (Tony)

One principal pointed out the necessity of continuous and consistent training for teachers. He believed it was important for them to be aware of the different options in dealing with bullying and the methods of dealing with violent and aggressive behaviour in nonconfrontational ways.

I think it's important for staff to be in-serviced on an ongoing basis . . . with how to deal with bullying, what the options are, and how do you deal in a nonconfrontational way with violent behaviour. (Principal 6)

Some teachers suggested using professional learning centres (PLCs) and peer mediation programs for in-servicing teachers on bullying. Any school that claims expertise in a specific area of the curriculum can be declared a PLC. Teachers from other schools are sent to the PLC location to receive training in that particular topic or subject area.

A professional learning centre where other teachers come to your school and. . . . For mathematics, your school has been declared pretty well an expert in that field. . . . Another school will send their teachers to, say, St. Sebastian's to watch a literature circle in place. Well, we can have schools, for example, where we could send specific teachers to learn the art of peer mediation where it's already been in place. (Sam)

These types of situations are invaluable. We could do this in areas of classroom management, we could do it in areas of peer mediation, watch schools that have mastered these philosophies and see them hands-on as opposed to just reading about it. (Bob)

Others disagreed with the idea of using PLCs to promote bullying awareness. One such teacher suggested instead that teachers need strategies that evolve through peer discussions and dialogue, such as what she was experiencing in the focus group.

This whole professional learning centre; I don't even like those that much because again it's like sitting or taking notes. Strategies; that's what we need more of! Teachers actually don't have a forum for discussing issues that are challenging or the time to consult with one another. No, we need time as a staff to sit down and do exactly what we're doing here [in the focus group discussion]. (Nancy)

I think you need a lot of dialogue. I think you need awareness on the part of the staff. (Principal 3)

One principal who agreed with the Nancy's opinion reported that workshops, manuals, and lessons had failed to bring about any positive change or reduction in bullying. For example, teachers were often hesitant to share challenges and concerns with colleagues lest they be judged incompetent. Hence, he strongly suggested that principals should coordinate discussions and dialogues on issues and challenges of this kind.

I kind of hesitate to say we should have more lessons in this or lessons in that or lessons in the other thing. The curriculum is fractured enough at the moment. I think if you're to attempt to bring staff together and talk about these things and encourage discussion . . . many times they're afraid to bring up issues like these things in front of their peers because they're afraid of looking stupid or not knowing what's going on. If you could somehow have the resources and the time to free people up to get them to talk about what's actually happening and have a principal who is able to lead a discussion like that, or focus a discussion like that, I think it would do more good than bits of paper floating around and manuals and going off to workshops where they come back and . . . nothing seems to change. (Principal 7)

Teacher-Student Relationship

Rapport. Most participants agreed that rapport in the student-teacher relationship was crucial to success in controlling bullying. They affirmed that, despite all obstacles, a teacher with positive relationship with her students has an extraordinary opportunity to curb bullying.

That rapport in the student-teacher relationship can sort of mend a whole bunch of things. You know things can be smooth sailing because of that. (Mandley)

I think a teacher with an excellent rapport with their students, and a teacher who really enjoys what they're doing, and who is aware of what's going on in their class at all times, and who loves her children. I think that type of teacher is less likely to have consistent bullying. You're going to get cases of bullying but I think a teacher like that is able to handle it in the classroom. (Principal 5)

In schools situated in disadvantaged and tough areas, the teacher-student relationship was perceived to be integral to students' happiness. Teachers were said to be the only positive influence in such students' lives.

I taught right at Jane and Finch. It was a tough area but they were the easiest kids in the world to work with, in a lot of respects, only because you were their day. You were the only good thing in their day . . . if you were to deal with something they've done at school they were devastated because you were the only good thing that they had all day long. (Nancy)

Most times, the only positive influence they have is the teacher. I taught summer school in the Jane/Finch corridor and one of the kids said to me at the end of the summer school, "I'll come back next year if you come back." He said, "The only thing I enjoyed about these classes was because you were here to help us." (Mandley)

Similarly, several teachers espoused the view that a positive student-teacher relationship could result in a breakthrough with a student who had behavioural difficulties. They often saw students at the elementary level behave differently from year to year, based on their relationship with their homeroom teacher.

I think that's an important relationship that you have with your kids. Kids behave differently from year to year. Sometimes you see the worst child, someone who's always been in trouble and all of a sudden, they have a really good beginning of a year. . . . Also in regards to bullying, they change. Someone says, "Oh, they've really changed over the last little while," and I think that has to do with the teacher. Maybe they click with you. But it does have to do with personality and how you influence the children too. (Diane)

If they think you like them, they'll take anything from you. I think you can pretty well achieve anything with them. (Jane)

Classroom management. Poor student-teacher relationships could lead to adverse reactions of various kinds. Angry and frustrated students resorted to bullying, hence, displacing their anger on peers.

I see some situations where teachers treat students . . . when the student goes out in an angry mode and they take it out on somebody else, I've seen that. When we have that teacher who has no empathy or lacks rapport, again that student may walk away feeling frustrated as well and [that] leads to all kinds of adverse reactions. As a result, I've seen children hit other students because they were angry from something else. So I guess transference of anger might be the term that you people use. (Principal 8)

On the other hand, a positive student-teacher relationship was linked to having exceptional classroom management skills. Numerous teachers and principals believed the two went hand in hand.

Well, rapport is crucial. Usually from my experience the two go hand in hand. Usually the teacher who has great management skills will also manage to somehow develop great rapport. If you don't have rapport, you don't have the management skills either. (Principal 10)

Moreover, participants linked the combination of positive student-teacher relationship and good classroom management skills to student cooperation and a decrease in bullying.

I think a teacher with positive classroom management skills, positive relationship with her students, has the best chance of curbing bullying. (Principal 8)

I honestly feel that if you have excellent class management skills and rapport, no matter what you say to students, they will respond differently to you. I think that's what classroom management skills and the ability to relate, eventually will lead to cooperation. That is exactly the way kids will react if they have rapport with their teacher. (Queenie)

One principal explained how quick students were to detect if their teacher liked them or not and notice if their teacher was fair in her/his interactions with students.

Relationship between a teacher and a student is definitely extremely important. A teacher who has a good rapport with his or her students. . . . Kids are very sharp. They know if a teacher likes them or not. So a teacher with a good positive relationship with her class, bullying would be rare because a teacher like that would recognize it right away. A teacher like that who has a really good positive relationship with the class would treat all students equally and so there wouldn't be a reaction by students who perceive favouritism or who perceive the teacher picking on a student because everybody is treated the same way. So, I'd say that a teacher who has a good relationship with a class can impact on how that class behaves, how that class treats other children. (Principal 5)

Another principal affirmed that, if teachers had poor relationship with their students, they would be "doomed to failure," regardless of their knowledge and academic skill. The underlying

problem was that teachers and teacher candidates had limited instruction in classroom management and positive discipline which she perceived to be interconnected. She strongly believed that such skills would allow the teacher to intervene positively in all situations.

As far as I'm concerned, you could be extremely knowledgeable about the curriculum and if you have no idea how to interrelate with your class and the children in your class, then you're doomed to failure. I don't think the teachers or teacher candidates have enough instruction about positive classroom management and positive relationships with their students. I think it goes hand in hand. I think the way you deal with a bully would be no different than any other thing that you're dealing with in your class. If you have the skills, I think being not a bully yourself and knowing how to intervene in a way that would be positive with everyone involved, will help you come up with other solutions to everything. (Principal 9)

Teachers may fail to preempt or interrupt bullying due to lack of classroom management skills.

Sometimes it [bullying] happens in the class where the teacher does not really try and control, does not have the proper skills to deal with some difficult situations. Whether it's a matter of personality but the teacher many times fails to deal with certain things and so that can result in bullying. (Principal 7)

Numerous teachers agreed with this assertion and considered classroom management skills to be the key to having successful interactions within the class. One teacher said that weak classroom management skills allowed a bully the opportunity to "compete with the teacher for power over the class." She asserted that without an excellent classroom management protocol, a bully can influence the teacher's agenda and class interactions.

You're going to have a flourishing bully if your class management skills are poor because they all compete with the teacher for the power over the class. The first thing you have to have is an excellent class management protocol in your class or they're going to tell you how they want to direct the class. You've got to have all your strategies in place so that their agenda does not become your agenda. Class management is the forum for everything. (Irena)

Good classroom management skills, together with concrete teacher and school expectations, would clearly define the authority structure within the class and provide parameters for students' behaviour.

So you need, in my opinion, good classroom management skills, you need to have the authority structure well defined in a classroom. Then the children know your parameters

and I think your children will behave within those parameters. There's greater incidence of bullying where the teacher's expectations are vague, where the school's expectations are vague, and that allows for greater interpretation of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in kids. (Principal 2)

Several participants acknowledged that improving student-teacher relationships and establishing rapport could only marginally be accomplished through training. Rather, they said, the essence of rapport was innate; it lay within the teacher's personality.

I think that kind of skill [establishing rapport] you can probably improve, you can in a lot of people. Although I honestly feel that unless it's innate, it's in you, that is your personality, it will not work. (Principal 10)

Several teachers affirmed that the teacher's approach determined the type of student-teacher relationship that would prevail. They described two types of approaches that failed to gain students' respect. One was the teacher who befriended the students at a peer level; the other was the autocratic teacher that put herself above her students. They explained that if students felt they were treated with respect, they behaved differently and approached their interactions with the teacher with respect.

I guess you must consider the reason why people come into teaching. You have the teachers that come in saying they want to be friends with their students because they don't want to treat the students the way teachers treated them when they were in school. And so they want to be a little more friendly with the students. And then you have the people that come in saying, "Well I'm the teacher, and so I deserve respect as the teacher. You're just the student, you're down here, and you have to look up to me." So you have that kind of authority. If students feel that you think they're people, then they will approach you differently and they know you will approach them differently. (Marg)

I think it's time to reach them as a person and then they react accordingly. So if they see [one teacher] comes in with, "I'm the teacher, you're the student, you have to listen to me and follow my rules," well they might be more rebellious than if [another teacher] comes and is more approachable and more supportive and discusses things a little more differently with the students. So, they kind of react to how you react to them and then your reputation builds as such. (Lois)

Numerous teachers and principals emphasized treating students with respect. One principal admitted that some teachers were "the biggest bullies." He reaffirmed that teachers who

treated students in a positive, respectful manner ensured that respect permeated all interactions in their classes.

It all comes down to respect. Does the teacher treat the children with respect? Or is the teacher bullying? Because there are teachers unfortunately who are the biggest bullies. I mean we all lose it from time to time. I'm not looking for Mother Teresa, but if you have a teacher who deals with her students on a daily basis in a positive, respectful manner, instills that tone in the classroom, and expects that back from the students, you get total respect that goes both ways in those classrooms between the staff and the children.
(Principal 2)

Importantly, teachers linked respect to positive relationships with students which led students to trusting their teacher. This, in turn, could result in students confiding in and reporting bullying to their teachers.

I think if the students know what their teacher is like and they can trust the teacher and if it's something that they feel that they have to disclose because it is something that is bothering them, it's upsetting them, or it might be that they are really uncomfortable with the situation. I think that if they have trust in the teacher, that they will come up and they do think at least the teacher will try to do his or her best to get the situation resolved.
(Mrs. S1)

So they do learn when to come to you and when not to come to you and I think that rapport with the kids is so important. When they know they're not being dismissed and that you value what they have to say, then they do behave differently, they do try. (Nell)

Students report bullying to teachers they believe are good listeners and problem solvers.

If the students feel that the teacher will be a good problem solver or good confidante for them, then that's important for the teacher to establish but not every teacher is willing to do that because it requires a lot of extra time, a lot of extra work. (Coach)

Thus, teachers stated, since bullying often went undetected because students did not report it, increasing the trust between students and their teacher would ultimately decrease the incidence of bullying.

Yet sometimes they do tell you, depending on the teacher. They will come in and they will tell you, "Miss, I have something, can we talk later?" . . . It's happened here that they tell only certain teachers things. So in essence that relationship also influences the reporting which would, if we have more reports, then we definitely can deal with the bullying. So that will eventually influence the incidence in that it will decrease. (Diane)

Honesty is really important. I think the way that a teacher deals with his or her students is tantamount to them coming to you because if they can trust your word, if they know that what you say is what you do. People can talk the talk; they don't always walk the walk. There's got to be that follow through. The kids have got to be assured and they've got to know that you're going to deal with something in a consistent manner. (Franz)

Empathy. Principals and teachers strongly suggested the significance of empathy as a personality trait in relating to students and establishing trust and good rapport. They believed that some teachers needed more empathy to be able to connect with children especially at the elementary level.

People in every kind of profession really have no business being there and that includes teaching. I think it needs to be stated that I think that is a very small group, but they do exist. The majority of them relate quite well. But I think what needs to happen is that the teaching profession must attract, I guess, people who have a lot of empathy for children. (Principal 3)

Participants believed that some teachers showed little commitment to the profession through their minimal involvement in school matters and student life. In general, such teachers seemed to dislike their job and had no interest in listening to students. As a result, their students were believed to engage in bullying.

Some teachers are just here. They come in, they do their job, they close the door, they leave as soon as possible and they don't want to hear anything from their students and they give that image to the students and that image persists and the new students, every new year, every new group of students know that this teacher doesn't care. (Mrs. D1)

And they're very unhappy in the classroom, they don't like to be in the classroom, and they fear all summer long. . . . In our profession, like in any profession, there's the good apples and there's the bad apples. And so these children often turn to bullying. (Mrs. D2)

One principal, comparing strong and weak teachers, surmised that the most important difference was their empathy level. Teachers who had empathy understood the feelings of their students and communicated with them accordingly; hence, they tended to be effective and successful. Teachers with lower levels of empathy tended to demand and expect students to comply and, as a result, they failed in their efforts to relate to students.

I think the difference between good teachers and not so good teachers is the level of empathy and I know from my own experience that the teachers that I thought were really good teachers, were strong teachers who had good discipline. They weren't the yellors and the screamers. They were the people that could feel how the kid was feeling and could relate to that child. . . . And the ones who can't understand how the child is feeling and just expect that, "Well, I said jump, so you jump," don't seem to have that ability to empathize with the kids and I think those are the teachers that sooner or later become the weak teachers on staff because they can't relate to the children. (Principal 4)

Some principals described how empathy impacts students. Students seemed to interpret empathy in terms of caring and love. These principals believed that unless an individual has empathy, she should not be a teacher. Moreover, most believed that empathy cannot be taught.

I recall many, many times students who were interviewed by the media about their favourite teacher and . . . the one variable that always came across was that, "He or she really loved us" or "He or she really cared for us." So unless you have empathy, you should not be a teacher. (Principal 10)

It's really hard to hear as a principal when the student says, "I hate so-and-so." You know that the child really isn't trying to be rude; the child isn't trying to shock you. It's just how they feel because they're not getting anything back the other way. I think that the difference between being a good teacher and a so-so teacher is the ability to empathize with the kids. . . . Some people don't have that. I don't know how you teach that or whether you can. (Principal 4)

Ultimately, lack of empathy was perceived to reflect on the teacher's motivation to address bullying. Basically, teachers believed that those who lacked empathy ignored signs of bullying and generally minimized it when it was reported.

Lack of compassion, understanding, the ability to assess a situation, looking for it. . . . If you don't look for it, you're not going to find it. And minimizing it when it happens when the students report, that is the biggest thing. (Principal 6)

One principal went so far as to suggest personality tests should be administered, to ensure that only those who had empathy would be offered admission into teacher education programs.

I think it's vitally important you have empathy with the kids. Some people I think are really good at that. Seem to be able to empathize with the students and other people, that just isn't there. (Principal 2)

I guess there are criteria that they use [in admission to teachers' education programs] but my view would be that maybe a personality test might not be a bad idea to make sure that

we have people who are very empathic towards children, especially children with special needs. (Principal 10)

Teacher education programs. Several teachers and principals seemed puzzled that, for admission to teachers' preparation programs, so little emphasis was placed on personality traits compared with the great emphasis placed on academic achievement.

We're losing what teaching is about. A's are not teachers. (Butterfly)

Sadly, this particular job it really depends on who you are as a person, what you bring to your job and for some people it's not that they're bad people, it's just that they react badly with others. That's why I have trouble with this whole 80 percent thing. You might have 85 percent and not be a good interpersonal relater. Therefore, your 85 percent is worth nothing. I remember, many moons ago, I had a prof that said, "Never, ever forget you are teaching children, not subjects." And I thought, "Oh my God, that is so true! You are teaching children, not subjects." (Nancy)

In addition to high academic achievement, the typical profile of a person who is accepted into teacher education programs usually includes work as camp counsellors, swimming instructors, or other such mentorship or leadership experiences with children. For one principal, such experiences did not necessarily signal nor guarantee success in teaching; the most important indicator of success in teaching was personality.

When I look at the profile of the person who gets accepted to teacher education now and so many of them have worked with swim teams, other activities, camp counsellors, and that, that they have had some opportunity to learn how to manage kids and to test and to develop their own personal insight. But, again, it's the personality that matters. (Principal 4)

One teacher vehemently attacked the emphasis on high academic achievement for admission to teacher education programs. Skill in dealing with behavioural problems and bullying did not rely on such credentials; rather, it depended on personal qualities such as compassion and the ability to suspend judgment.

This is why I have trouble with this marks issue because in order to deal with bullying, in order to deal with anything, you don't need a course. Honest to God, you don't need credentials, you need compassion, and you need to be nonjudgmental as best you can. (Queenie)

Other participants also questioned the preparation provided by teacher education programs for dealing with student behaviour. In general, they felt that teacher candidates and new teachers were ill-prepared for classroom management, bullying, and anger management.

I'm not really all that familiar with the teacher training program at this point in time. From what I see, the classroom management, bullying, anger management, these kinds of things . . . I would say are probably not as well taught as they should be. On several occasions, I've asked them whether they've had any classes on anger management, how they would deal with certain situations with students, and some of them would deal with it quite appropriately in spite of the fact that they really have not been taught. Others, not quite! (Principal 10)

Most participants commented that new teachers tended to be too friendly with students, overstepping their limits. They said they found them “wishy-washy” and too “buddy-buddy” in their communication patterns. Hence, they failed to set appropriate expectations and parameters of behaviour but still required compliance. Following is what one teacher said; as a result of such ill-conceived relationships, she had witnessed fights in such classes. Most participants believed that teacher education programs should provide extensive training in classroom management; they emphasized positive over negative methods.

Teachers' college should definitely emphasize more management skills, positive and negative. I do not know whether it is specifically taught in a one-year session with them. I see at times some new teachers are too wishy-washy, some new teachers are too buddy-buddy with the children. They're much too friendly with them and children will react to someone that's trying to be friendly and goes overboard. I've seen fights in the classroom because the teacher was not strong enough and had not set up proper expectations. A lot of them are your new teachers. Some of them are very unrealistic as to their . . . what they allow and don't allow and then all of a sudden expect, “Okay, now you're going to sit down and work” . . . there's got to be more prep work. (Marg)

New teachers usually started teaching equipped with theories and curriculum ideas but participants felt that, without classroom management, all instruction was rendered futile. One principal held teacher education programs responsible for this lack of training.

With new staff members that I have, I don't feel that new teachers are ready to come into a situation and have everything under control. I don't feel that the colleges and universities prepare teachers for classroom management. They come equipped with theories and curriculum, ideas and ideals that do not relate to reality. Once they go into a

classroom, they have a difficult time. I don't think they are given the tools to deal with the situation. (Principal 9)

Several participants emphasized the specific lack of training in bullying. Teacher education programs tended to treat bullying in a very superficial way relying on merely advising teachers to help children. They failed to teach the basics of bullying, help candidates be able to analyze it, or give strategies to address it. One principal emphasized that teacher education programs were notorious for giving an overview of the subject matter but never delving into the core of any topic.

I don't think they address the subject enough because I think they give them a superficial blather about bullying and consequences and how important it is to help kids. But I don't think they really go into the nitty-gritty of what bullying is; what is down at the bottom? What is the building block of this thing you call bullying. . . . You have to be able to give them specific things to look for, organizational systems, some scaffolding so that they can get a fix on it. But teachers' colleges . . . they're noted for that, giving you an overview and not giving you much else. You learn in the field. They're notorious for doing that. (Principal 1)

Consequently, teacher candidates were not well prepared. They were usually described as inundated with academic responsibilities and deadlines and overwhelmed by the elementary school students' attitudes. As well as untrained, they were perceived to be totally unprepared to deal with bullying.

I work with teacher candidates and they are shocked. They have no idea of how to go about dealing with [bullying]. Some of them think elementary school is still the way it was when they went to school. First of all they're in shock at the change in the environment, at the change in the curriculum. They're so inundated with trying to get their lesson plan done and learning the curriculum and trying to do things on time and get records. [Bullying] is a really grey area for them, they just don't have any background training in it at all. So it's a huge shock to them and they're not prepared to deal with it. (Sandra)

Disappointed in the lack of training for bullying at the teacher education level, young teachers expressed a need for workshops so they could learn strategies and methods for addressing bullying.

It would be neat to have some workshops on how to deal with it, as teachers. I would be interested in going to workshops on how to deal with bullying or how to deal with strategies. Let's face it; teachers' college doesn't prepare you for that. (Sunshine, seven years' experience)

New teachers, with two to three years of experience, seemed particularly outraged by the lack of training in bullying. One teacher criticized the teacher education program for her lack of training in conflict resolution and the narrow scope for problem solving it presented. Only one solution would be presented for any given problem. In reality, teachers had to be prepared to employ a variety of solutions based on the situation and the type of student. She felt deluded by the program which presented utopian models and unrealistic scenarios that disregarded the uniqueness of students.

I've only been here for two years so . . . I just graduated. . . . Let me preface that with the fact that I wasn't even taught conflict resolution. . . . They presented utopian classrooms at the faculty, at any Faculty of Education. This is what you do when . . . Johnny is pulling Sarah's hair, for example. Yeah, that'll work in the textbook but you know what, when Johnny really pulls that hair . . . they don't give you the proper strategy and they only give you one. I understand with them they have their own curriculum obviously to get through. Because then you've got to go out to practicum, you go to go do this. From a teacher's standpoint, I understand the professors' dilemma with everything. But at the same time there are certain issues that need to be covered more in depth and properly. Just let me get this off my chest. The fact is that it's not always going to work. Can you tell us the truth really? Not that this is what you're going to do. You should try this, maybe it'll work. Here's this idea, maybe this will work too. The reality of the fact is they're human beings, they're not Johnny, Sarah, in a textbook and they're going to react differently. (Mango, two years' experience)

Another young teacher agreed with Mango and added that teacher education programs seemed to rely on the practicum as exposure for teacher candidates to real-life experience. However, she explained that those were also unrealistic situations because candidates could only follow the classroom teacher's guidance and rules. They were not allowed to be alone with students because they were not yet certified.

Like Mango said earlier, you get this utopian classroom. What I found in teachers' college as well is you're the assistant teacher, you're the teacher candidate, so the kids might show you some respect. But that's only because the real teacher is there. So, they give you no opportunity to be a "real teacher" to deal with the students alone . . . you're

not certified so that's not allowed. You leave me with them for a day, that would have been a true experience. (Butterfly, three years' experience)

One principal also believed that the practicum experience was an artificial situation; in it, a teacher candidate would be integrated into a classroom that was already functioning well. She acknowledged that some valuable techniques could be learned through observation but candidates would miss the challenge of setting up class rules and routines. She recalled past academic discussions in which extending the teacher education program to two years had been considered. With a longer training period, candidates would be exposed to the whole preparation for running a successful classroom starting in August of their second year. She added that candidates need to spend at least one whole semester in schools to learn the practical side of teaching.

It's hard because I think it still is an artificial situation because the student teacher walks in and here's a class that's running fairly well because they probably had a strong teacher who knows all these little techniques. Granted, they can learn from it but I don't think that they see the amount of work that goes into getting it running that way, because it's already up and going when they come through the door. I think it would be a good idea to have more time for the schools. A few years ago they were talking about having people coming [for] two years and sometimes you really wonder whether they need to do that. Maybe the first year is a little bit of hands-on stuff in the class but maybe the second year, there's a whole lot of it, or maybe they're assigned to a mentor or whatever. But they should be there from Day 1. . . . Maybe that last week in August they can go in and help the teachers set up and maybe spend a semester, or maybe more. I think that's something you need to see, the practical side, and I don't think you see that when you walk into the classroom and it's already up and running. (Principal 4)

Some teachers discussed the concept of mentorship, including institutionalized mentorship, as continuous training of new teachers after their graduation from teacher education programs. One teacher argued that there should be several such teacher-mentors in each school who had been trained in helping new teachers "head in the right direction."

I think we need to also have a lot more support systems in place for beginning teachers or new teachers; institutionalized mentorship, for example. Make it a point to have mentors in place in each school if possible where they've trained to help new teachers head in the right direction; whether it's through curriculum but more specifically bullying, discipline, and dealing with behavioural situations. I think that's one of the biggest things, I think,

new teachers don't have that confidence; don't have the toolbox with all the tools in it, the repertoire. They need to share and borrow from other people and we need people equipped and willing and able to train new teachers into carrying that right toolbox. (Tony)

Teachers as Catalysts of Change

Figure 5 identifies the collective conditions and factors that influenced teachers' behaviour and acted as obstacles that affected their efficacy in bullying intervention and

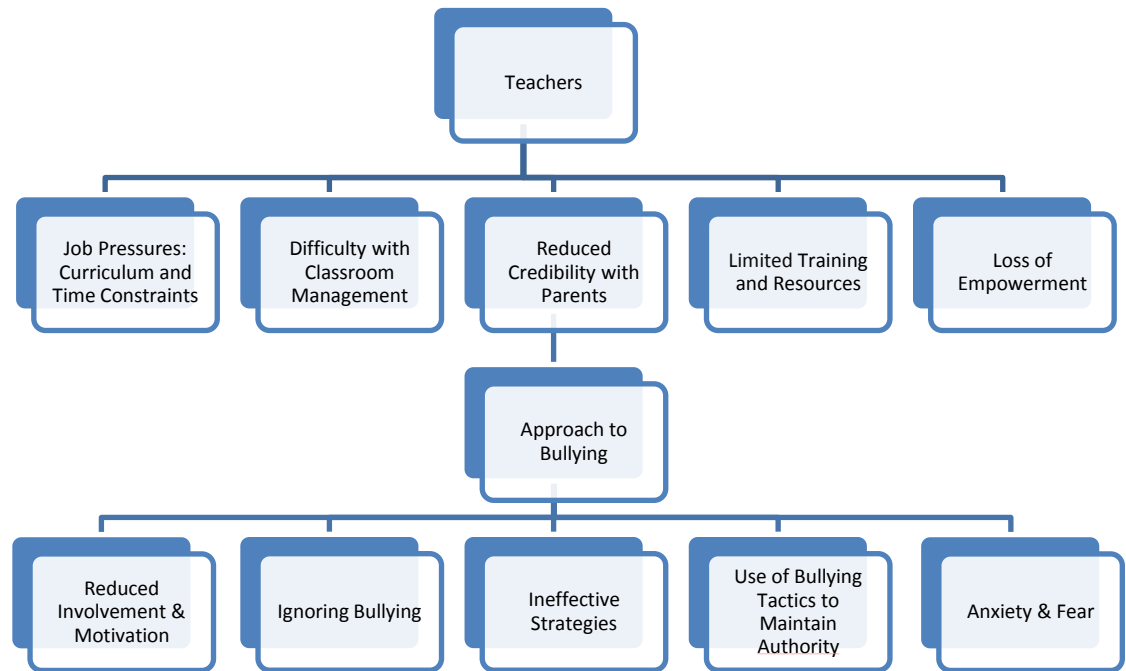


Figure 5. Obstacles to intervention, as identified by teachers.

prevention.

Throughout this research, the message that teachers were uniquely and strategically situated to deal with bullying came across loud and clear despite all obstacles and challenges. Most participants believed that, with better awareness and determination, teachers could definitely be the catalysts of change for the status quo.

Teachers have the biggest impact on bullying, more so than administrators. . . . Every teacher in every class must take that on as a nonnegotiable. . . . “There will be no bullying

in my class.” And attend to it when it happens. Kids are empowered to report when they know teachers do something. (Principal 1)

At times you’ve got to stop the world spinning and say, “I have to deal with this right now.” Sometimes you have to stop and deal with it right there and then. If you don’t, then the kids don’t see you as the authority figure who will deal with the bullying. (Dorothy)

One principal urged teachers to support a child who had been bullied and to take a stand regardless of where the bullying had taken place. She encouraged teachers to feel directly responsible rather than deflecting the responsibility to some other authority. Such an attitude would be reassuring to students and, hence, they would be encouraged to trust their teachers and not hesitate to report.

Kids are empowered to report when they know teachers do something. That’s the bottom line. If a kid who won’t tell you something it’s because they’ve seen you do nothing when he got hit, when he got robbed, and then somebody else got his bike taken. The teacher says, “It was off school property. I don’t know, talk to your mother. Call the police if you want.” That doesn’t help kids. They need to know that somebody is directly responsible and going to take charge of that and do something about it. (Principal 1)

Can We Eradicate Bullying?

The question “Can we eradicate bullying?” precipitated very passionate responses from teachers and principals alike. Remarkably, most participants seemed to agree that appropriate efforts could result in a diminishment of bullying but that eradicating bullying was an impossible feat. Some believed that bullying had its roots in the history of humanity and hence was unlikely to ever disappear.

I’m not sure the word *eradicate* will even be appropriate. I’m not sure we can ever eradicate some of these behaviours. Some of which have been going on since the dawn of history. I’m not so sure it’s about to end. So I think it’d be very difficult. (Principal 10)

Other participants believed that the society in general continued to model bullying, rendering its eradication moot.

I don’t think you can eradicate bullying. I don’t think you can. I think you can lessen; you can control it to a certain extent. But when it’s so prevalent in every other area of society, why would you assume that you can change it in the school? (Laura)

I think that if you want bullying stopped in the schools, I think society has to change the way we deal with each other on an adult level too probably first. I don't think we're going to eradicate bullying in schools the way society is set up right now. You may control it to some extent. You may lessen it but you're not going to eliminate it. (Sam)

Some participants attributed the tenacious nature of bullying to its insidious spread in the society as a whole.

Kids see their parents doing it. . . . Kids playing sports see their parents scream and yell and swear at referees and other players. That's a form of intimidation and bullying. . . . The press keeps telling us we have this right to know everyone's business and it also seems to give us the right to say anything we want. (Sam)

Several teachers and principals argued that bullying could never be eradicated since it was hailed by television particularly on reality shows that continued to model and teach students how to bully. They believed that bullying had become socially acceptable.

I don't know how you stop bullying in society. Like we talked earlier about reality TV, you've got ABC and NBC and everybody else teaching the entire world how to be bullies. With the television we're watching right now, it almost seems like it's socially acceptable. (Principal 3)

Reasons within the school itself sometimes made it impossible to eradicate bullying. One principal noted the ever-changing nature of the school environment and the variety of continuously shifting conditions that contributed to keeping bullying an ongoing problem.

I think that it's an ongoing and ever-changing thing because there are certain areas where bullying takes place. There are certain things that cause bullying. But there's always a new factor, there's always a new student to show up, and a new case that you haven't dealt with before and I think that . . . I think it's an ongoing issue that you have to continually revisit. (Principal 6)

Another principal discussed the complexity of the relationships involved in bullying and pondered the influence of the family environment on students' behaviour. He felt that hostile relationships and reduced empathy were at the root of the problem and alluded to the challenge that schools faced in trying to tackle such complex problems.

Well, I think if we go back and talk about the fact that many come from hostile backgrounds. I would say bullying is usually based on relationships and I am not so certain that these students will get to the root of the problem because we just don't have

the resources for all of these variables. How do you instill empathy in a child who has grown up in a hostile environment? So, really we have to change the way that they see relationships. (Principal 10)

PART III

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

The main findings, contributions of the study, and recommendations for future research are summarized in this final chapter. A multidimensional model of bullying prevention based on grounded theory analysis is presented here. General observations are offered regarding the ecological and contextual variables associated with bullying at the elementary school level. The significance of contexts, conditions, relationships, the relevance of the teacher's role, and participants' recommendations to minimize bullying are outlined. Finally, the discussion provides a critique of teachers' efficacy and impact on the dynamics of bullying as well as recommendations with regards to teacher training.

Emergent Themes

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the contextual variables that allow and encourage bullying to thrive in elementary schools. Given the increasing recognition that contextual variables such as peers, teachers, and school environments have a significant influence on the incidence of bullying (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Barboza et al., 2009; Craig et al., 2000; Furlong et al., 2003; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Mishna et al., 2005; Olweus, 1994), the present study sought to expand on existing knowledge about the role of these variables in shaping bullying interactions. Another goal of this research was to capture the complexity and multidimensionality of the teacher's role in bullying prevention and intervention. Through in-depth focus groups for teachers and interviews with principals, this study aimed to gather detailed information about principals' and teachers' perceptions of bullying experiences. Their reflections about the issues and obstacles they faced in tackling bullying can help enhance existing theoretical frameworks for understanding bullying as a thriving phenomenon. Moreover,

they will provide policy makers and teacher training institutes with a better understanding of the unique and complex challenges encountered by teachers interfacing with bullying.

Studies have shown that the typical trajectory of bullying shows an increase in early adolescence and a decrease in high school (Nansel et al., 2001; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Therefore, it is imperative that research, intervention and prevention efforts be directed at elementary years. Understanding the ecological factors surrounding bullying is important for the success of such efforts. In particular, this study acknowledges the teacher's vital role in influencing interactions within the learning environment and attempts to identify the variables that interfere with teacher efficacy in bullying intervention.

Several themes and subthemes emerged from analyzing the data provided by the teachers' focus groups and the principals' interviews. The findings of this study are examined through the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. The contextual variables in this study are outlined based on his model (Figure 1). This model emphasizes the variables as they cascade from the microsystem to the mesosystem, exosystem, and then the macrosystem illustrating the interactions amongst all variables. The most salient ecological variables are highlighted and teachers' and principals' recommendations for reducing bullying in schools are summarized. The discussion that follows addresses the prominent individual characteristics of bullies and victims as well as the significant contexts of bullying. The findings of this study pertaining to the ecological variables that interact to provide fertile grounds for bullying are outlined in Appendix K.

Ecological Variables at the Individual/Child Level

Victims

At the individual level of children who are victimized, the findings are consistent with other studies indicating that becoming a target for bullying is contingent on a number of salient

variables. Being victimized was attributed to being different in some way from the mainstream. The difference in individual characteristics could either be negative (e.g., being obese or socially inept) or positive (e.g., excelling academically; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Espelage & Asidao, 2001; Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). Numerous participants emphasized that being physically or emotionally weak (Egan & Perry, 1998; Hodges & Perry, 1999; Pellegrini, 1995) was a strong indicator of potential bullying while sensitivity was identified as a compounding factor (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Hazier et al., 1992). Although teachers emphasized that students tended to be more tolerant, helpful, and protective of their peers who had visible and severe disabilities, less visible disabilities (e.g., mild intellectual or learning disabilities) increased a student's vulnerability for bullying (Estell et al., 2009). Moreover, children and youth who failed to dress in designer clothes, thereby failing to adhere to societal standards of the latest trends in fashion, were perceived to be prime targets for bullying (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Espelage & Asidao, 2001). Girls were identified to be more involved in this type of bullying than boys.

The findings of this study were consistent with past research which highlighted that lack of confidence and self-assertiveness influenced students' ability to defend themselves, making them potential targets for bullying (Fox & Boulton, 2006). Students with low self-esteem were viewed as targets who would allow others to bully them. Students with low self-esteem also lacked the social support networks which might have helped defend them against bullying (Swearer et al., 2001). The results of this study suggest that these qualities are compounded by weak verbal and communication skills which interfered with victimized students' ability to report bullying.

Race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation were also linked to bullying. The results showed controversial evidence about the relative connection between race/ethnicity and being bullied. Some teachers and principals asserted that, in the multiracial society of Toronto, students had

learned to fully integrate different cultures, and that harmony prevailed when it came to differences in race and ethnic background. Others agreed with past research that has shown race to be a major determinant of bullying interactions (Storch et al., 2002). Sexual orientation, on the other hand, was clearly connected to bullying for most participants (Poteat & Rivers, 2010).

There were some divergences in the perceptions of intent assigned to the teasing and verbal bullying of sexually diverse students. Several participants, particularly those who taught at the primary level and early junior grades, believed that the word *gay* was simply used as a derogatory term of belittlement. Other participants, however, reported that even at such a young age, children noticed atypical gender expression. Boys, who displayed feminine characteristics, mannerisms and other behaviours that were more commonly associated with females, drew a great deal of negative attention from peers. Significantly, regardless of their actual sexual orientation, boys who had less macho and/or less athletic qualities provoked negative reactions from other boys and were often bullied and excluded. This occurred especially frequently in the higher grades at elementary schools. Exclusion, ridicule, and verbal abuse were the chosen forms of bullying rather than physical harassment. For a girl, being a tomboy and pursuing interests traditionally followed by boys, was perceived to be more acceptable amongst the student body than being a boy with feminine qualities and interests. Homophobia and the fear of being perceived as gay were reported to be concerns voiced only among the male students.

In this study, the need to belong to a group of peers was cited as a major contributor to the tendency of vulnerable students to conform. Students who were bullied strove to belong to the very same group that was victimizing them (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). Being the weakest members in the group's power hierarchy, they seemed grateful to pay the price, being bullied in order to belong to what they perceived as the in-group. They continued, however, to be on the fringes of the group rather than becoming fully fledged members.

The findings strongly suggest that none of the variables—size, stature, poor communication skills, low self-esteem, failure to follow current fashion trends, sensitivity, or being different in some way—in itself predicted a tendency to be bullied. Rather, for teachers in this study, a complex interrelation of two or more variables seemed to be at the core of potential victimization.

Bullies

The study provided further evidence that one of the most prominent characteristics of bullies was their ability to pinpoint vulnerable students, those students who could easily be dominated and victimized (Brown, 2003; Monks & Smith, 2000; Sutton et al., 1999). Students who are most skilled at bullying others tended to be proficient in theory of mind. In other words, they were able to manipulate the environment and navigate their surroundings and the context of their bullying so that it remained hidden from adults. The teachers in this study expressed concern that the most serious cases of bullying were probably never reported to them because of the bullies' skill in manipulating others and the environment. The bullies were able to cover up their actions and behaviour leaving the teachers unable to hold them responsible. Girls were identified as being particularly proficient at this skill. They chose psychological rather than physical types of bullying which were often more difficult to identify.

Several personal characteristics were identified as variables that contributed to a student's likelihood to bully others. Such students often misinterpreted social cues and tended to engage in cognitive distortions. They believed that they were not at fault; rather, they tended to perceive their bullying behaviour as self-defence and often the only solution to the problem (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Crick & Dodge, 1996). Consistent with past research, self-esteem received mixed reviews as a contributing factor to bullying tendencies. Some participants regarded low self-esteem to be a variable motivating bullying (Duncan, 1999; Rigby & Slee, 1991); others felt

that one of the most important characteristics of bullies was their high self-esteem (Natvig, Alberktsen, & Qvartstrom, 2001; Olweus, 1997). This high self-esteem allowed them to control and overpower others. Many teachers described conditions that allowed such students to maintain high self-esteem. These include learning to bully in tough neighbourhoods or having personal characteristics that attracted peers to them (Connolly et al., 2000; Slee & Rigby, 1993).

Further to existing research, some teachers and principals noted that as well as being a product of personal characteristics, bullying was a learned behaviour. These participants suggested that students often mirrored behaviours that they had had to endure at home and that hostility and anger resulting from strained family relationships were at the root of the problem (Bowes et al., 2009; Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Students who bullied may have come from homes where aggression and lack of respect were the norm and where verbal bullying permeated family interactions. In addition, bullies may have been abused at home. They felt powerless, neglected, and insignificant as a result of growing up in violent, disorganized homes. Participants reasoned that the goal of physical abuse was to maintain or gain control. These children, therefore, grew up with a need to regain control which they satisfied at school through bullying and controlling others.

In this study, participants noted that bullies could come from different backgrounds and were not necessarily the product of families from lower socioeconomic strata. Several participants discussed the emergence of a new type of bully, the bully who came from middle-class and higher socioeconomic backgrounds. They strongly emphasized that these students tended to be equipped with skills such as expressive language and social skills that facilitated leadership and manipulation. More importantly, they were perceived as very confident and empowered by parents who were their greatest supporters. Those parents tended to only see

situations from their children's perspective and refused to believe that their children bullied other students.

Gender differences in bullying were consistent with research. Girls were found to resort to more covert, subtle forms of relational bullying (Besag, 2006). Their inventive methods often complicated teachers' investigations and hampered their efforts to intervene.

One of the most important findings of this study was related to the etiology of bullying. Numerous participants endorsed the belief that bullying was a response to inner problems and a manifestation of much deeper problems. Bullying was perceived to be driven by the bully's pain which may have stemmed from having been bullied in the past or having had other difficulties. Some suggested that bullying behaviour might be a façade covering a variety of personal challenges such as feelings of inadequacy, academic difficulties, family problems, or an unmet need for attention. Bullying might even be seen as a cry for help, if only teachers were to take the time to figure out the problems behind such unacceptable behaviours. Some participants explained that everyone needed control and consistency in their life and, when these components were compromised in one setting, students might actively and aggressively seek to have control in other settings.

Participants felt that instability in the family unit, including separation, divorce, and parents with multiple partners, was a major cause of students' distress and sense of loss of control. Such factors were perceived to contribute to the controlling and difficult behaviours bullies exhibited at school. Some participants spoke of the importance of fathers' presence in the family unit, particularly for boys. Disappointment at home was often the underlying emotion that fuelled bullying. These students lacked empathy and often engaged in bullying and overpowering others in their pursuit of the attention they craved. This need for attention appeared to be a significant variable driving bullying behaviour. Moreover, participants reported

that students who grew up in unstable family environments were often unable to focus on tasks or achieve their goals or potential. For such students, bullying provided a sense of power and achievement and served as a response to their inner turmoil.

The Microsystem

Ecological Variables Inherent in Relationships

Peers

Participants strongly agreed that the bystanders were an integral part of the bullying dynamics (Craig & Pepler, 1997). They were the target audience without whom bullying might easily be curtailed or controlled. Since the ultimate goal of bullying was to gain peer attention and popularity, teachers hypothesized that eliminating the bystanders would put an end to the motivation for bullying. Participants expressed their concern about the apathy displayed by bystanders, especially in the schoolyard. They reported that the majority of bystanders contributed to the bullying process through observation and an egocentric attitude regarding safety and involvement. Alarming, however, teachers emphasized that crowds of bystanders often acted in unison to incite the bullies through cheering and making inflammatory statements (Brown et al., 2005). To some teachers, the bystanders became bullies acting as one body and evading responsibility through group anonymity.

Bullying is often considered a rite of passage into group membership. Peer group norms appear to be significantly powerful and depart drastically from teacher expectations. Within the peer group, a hierarchy of power seemed to emerge with the bully leading the group and holding the ultimate power (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Sutton & Smith, 1999). Students' desire to belong to this powerful group perpetuates bullying and explains its insidious nature. The peer group has gained tremendous importance in children's lives due to their continuous connection beyond school hours through social media (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Peers' access to

social media allows them to continue to engage in victimization using cyber bullying (Dehue et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Willard, 2004). Hence, bullying can be an unremitting process removing the geographical barriers between school and home.

Previous studies have shown that students do not report bullying (Brown et al., 2005; Oliver & Candappa, 2007; Whitney & Smith, 1993). The findings offer further understanding of the critical power of peer groups and its influence on victims' reporting. Teen students tended to adhere to certain adolescent norms, one of which is the "no ratting" rule. The concept of "ratting" or not reporting was perceived to be perpetuated by the bullies to protect their own self-interest. Ratting implies a breakdown of all the adolescent culture rules and norms which everyone is expected to follow. Such an infraction results in lack of support by all peers not only by those involved in the bullying but by everyone. Appearing tough and being able to defend themselves was another factor that participants thought was at the centre of students' reluctance to report. To fit in the adolescent culture, they believed that students strove to appear capable of coping with bullying and looking after their own problems.

Parents

As outlined by Duncan (1999), parents and the family environment indirectly influence the occurrence of bullying. In this study, some parents were perceived to inadvertently contribute to children's unwillingness to report. Parents who were too busy to hear their children's concerns, those who emphasized qualities such as strength and the ability to deal with negative social situations independently and parents who were overprotective were thought to unwittingly set up their children to keep bullying a secret.

In this study, parental lack of support was found to create challenges and present the system with major obstacles. Some parents were perceived not to care about their children's bullying while others were thought to be in denial, both of which interfered with effective

interventions. As a result, teachers sometimes gave up on these students. Parents were also perceived to represent two ends of a reactive spectrum when it came to suspensions as a consequence for bullying. Some parents paid little attention to school disciplinary measures while others reacted very strongly. These latter parents exerted pressure on principals and often challenged suspensions legally. Teachers' perceptions indicated that well-educated, influential parents were treated differently by principals due to the threat of possible legal action in response to suspension. This was found to dissuade principals from pursuing this extreme consequence for bullying. Several teachers reported that many appeals resulted in the dismissal of the suspension decision. Moreover, such parents seemed to set a precedent for other parents to follow in appealing suspensions.

Teachers

The importance of teachers' ability to unravel the complexity of bullying incidents and the efficacy of their interventions has long been recognized in studies (Boulton, 1997; Mishna et al., 2005). Findings of this study supported this view and showed that whether bullying flourished or not was dependent on the following factors: (a) the teachers' level of involvement in taking bullying seriously; (b) addressing bullying within the context of other duties, paying attention to students' complaints; and (c) empowering students to be assertive. Participants reported that teachers might inadvertently perpetuate bullying by acquiring the same attitudes that powerful peer groups exhibit. For example, they might exclude students who had learned to be habitually withdrawn due to bullying and fail to report bullying situations in their classrooms. They might tell students to "grow up" and learn to "handle" bullying situations leading students to avoid reporting for fear of being thought of as a "wimp" or a "suck." In some cases, teachers believed that the bullied children had brought it upon themselves. Thus, in some distorted way,

they deserved to be bullied. Because they believed that it was the bullied students' fault, they gave themselves the right to ignore the bullying and blame the victim.

The finding that the majority of teachers seemed unaware of the significance and impact of relational bullying raises concern and is supported by previous research studies (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Boulton, 1997; Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Teachers found relational bullying complex and difficult to sort out. They were often unfamiliar with the variety of gestures and nonverbal communications used by pubescent and adolescent girls as bullying language indicating who was in and who was out of the group. This lack of understanding of teen girls' ecology was perceived to directly interfere with teachers' ability to intervene. Moreover, they were often unaware of who was the leader of a group that regularly bullied peers. All in all, relational bullying was perceived as difficult to decipher and investigate.

The data analysis revealed evidence to support Mishna et al.'s (2005) finding that students' reports of bullying were often ignored and not attended to by teachers due to time constraints and the complex logistics of sorting out bullying situations. Meeting curricular demands was perceived as an insurmountable obstacle to bullying intervention by most participants. Such factors were perceived to contribute to teachers' ignoring bullying or resorting to ineffective interventions. For instance, teachers admitted that they were overwhelmed by the number of complaints they got while on yard duty. They indicated that social bullying was rampant, particularly amongst the girls. This situation made it impossible for them to keep up with the demands and sometimes led them to ignore complaints made by students in the schoolyard. Such teacher behaviour, that is, ignoring reports and failing to take action against bullying, established a negative cycle that perpetuated a code of silence (Mishna, 2004). Even bullies were said to notice that certain teachers took no action against bullying. This was most

evident in the cases of gender atypical boys. As a result, teachers' lack of action gave bullies further courage to bully, to the point of challenging their victims to tell.

Research shows that several individual teacher characteristics influence their response to bullying. This study supported Craig et al.'s (2000) finding that teachers' reactions and interpretation of bullying may vary according to the sex of the teacher. Male teachers were found to be more tolerant of bullying in general. Males in this study agreed that while female teachers were more apt to explore interactions, male teachers were more interested in reducing conflict in general. Male teachers were perceived to minimize bullying but women's attention to small details was considered a crucial factor in resolving issues of bullying. Males were more likely to perceive bullying as part of the experience of growing up and to use the old adage, "boys will be boys," which allowed homophobic bullying to thrive. Female teachers, on the other hand, tended to be more sensitive and less accepting of bullying. Moreover, female teachers reported that males tended to have less insight into relational bullying among girls and, hence, were less likely to treat it as a serious matter. Another individual characteristic that was revealed as influential to teachers' reactions to bullying was their level of empathy. Teachers acknowledged that the higher the level of empathy, the more likely a teacher intervened in bullying situations (Craig et al., 2000; Mishna et al., 2005).

Teachers' behaviour and personality were identified as major determinants in setting standards of behaviour in the school culture in general and in the classroom in particular . Personality factors such as level of empathy and a limited commitment to the profession were linked to minimizing and ignoring signs of bullying and, in turn, contributing to the increase in bullying (Bacchini et al., 2009). Conversely, an authoritative personality, rapport, and positive teacher-student relationships were thought to contribute to increased trust, reporting, and general student cooperation (Hows & Segal, 1993). Participants criticized teacher education programs

for ignoring the importance of personality and their emphasis on academics in their admission criteria. Teacher-student relationship was perceived to be directly connected to the quality of students' experiences in school and, in turn, to whether or not a student might be bullied.

Results of this study were consistent with previous research which indicated that teachers had insufficient knowledge to effectively intervene in bullying situations (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Craig et al., 2011; Mishna et al., 2005; Nicolaidis et al., 2002). They consistently grappled with what constituted bullying, as opposed to typical peer conflicts. To many teachers, bullying seemed to be shrouded in inconsistency and vagueness. Hence, the absence of an objective, concise definition was highlighted as an important determinant in identifying and intervening in bullying situations. The inability to analyze, understand, and address bullying effectively was attributed to lack of training in the initial teacher training program (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Craig et al., 2011; Drake et al., 2003) which impacted their sense of self efficacy in dealing with bullying.

One of the most alarming findings was teachers' use of bullying strategies, bias, and limited tolerance with their students which supports findings by Pepler (1994) as well as Whitted and Duper (2008). In this study, an explanation to such behaviours was offered by participants. Teachers with weak classroom management skills were found to resort to verbal bullying in their efforts to maintain discipline, hence, modelling bullying to their students. Training in classroom management is, therefore, necessary to eliminate teachers' inadvertent abuse of their power. Some teachers were also guilty of homophobic bullying and gay bashing of students in staff rooms amongst colleagues reflecting their own low tolerance for difference. Participants questioned those teachers' negligence of issues of liability and ethics.

The findings suggest that the frequency of bullying depends on the extent to which teachers (a) are well informed of bullying dynamics, (b) are trained in using effective strategies

for intervention and prevention, (c) have qualities of empathy and dedication, (d) are effective in classroom management, and (e) are able to establish positive teacher-student relationships. Such findings necessitate attention and illustrate the importance of changes and modifications at this ecological level. The significance of teachers' role in the early identification of signs of victimization and effective intervention in cases of bullying has been supported in the literature (Leff, 2007; Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 2000).

Past research has shown that teachers were found to wield considerable influence on students' psychological and emotional adjustment (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). Supportive teachers who promoted self-esteem, and rewarded achievement managed to offset risk factors and decrease vulnerability in high-risk students (Werner, 1990). In this study, positive teacher-student relationship was hailed as most influential in shaping and molding students' behavior. Regardless of obstacles and other factors, rapport between teacher and student was found to serve as a protective factor against challenging behavior particularly bullying.

Ecological Variables in the School Community

School Climate

A negative school climate was connected to increase in bullying behaviours (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011). The findings of this study considered certain aspects of the school climate and revealed that a combination of ambiguous definitions of what constitutes bullying, lack of severe consequences, and inconsistency in applying consequences contributed directly to the thriving practice of bullying. Despite the elaborate intervention processes and consequences outlined by principals, many teachers expressed disillusionment in the tolerance for bullying (Baker, 1998). Most felt that more work needed to be done on the initial stages; namely, on acknowledging and defining bullying.

Passing the buck was also perceived to be a major contributor to leaving bullying situations unresolved. Administrators were reported to be as overwhelmed as teachers by an abundance of duties, with the result that they were either unable to deal with bullying incidents appropriately or else they sent students back to their teachers to resolve the problems. Teachers concluded that passing the buck not only resulted in lack of appropriate solutions for bullying, but also contributed to students' reluctance to report bullying.

Teachers spoke about the political climate of the schools where it was in the school board's best interest to not offend any parents in order to avoid law suits. Hence, policies might exist, but were not necessarily followed. In general, administrators were perceived to be more interested in the school's reputation than in pursuing consequences for bullying which might serve to tarnish the school reputation. As well, teachers believed that some principals were pressured by their superordinates in terms of suspensions and consequences. In their view, teachers emphasized, the biggest problem was denial of the very existence of bullying by many school principals in order to look good. They indicated that teachers, who were on the front lines, easily recognized such politics.

The findings of this study suggest that the severity, seriousness, and frequency of bullying had tremendously increased in most school communities. Bullying today seemed more subtle and harder to detect than in the past. While physical bullying and taking possessions used to be typical of bullying in the past, cyber bullying, exclusion and emotional manipulation were now cited as typical of today's bullying. The bullying of the past was perceived as more blatant and easier to detect than the more covert, psychologically damaging bullying of today. In the past, bullying was mostly seen in middle and older grades while now it was often observed as early as Grades 1 and 2. Participants also discussed differences in the level of violence. While in the past physical violence invariably meant fist fighting, today's violence might also involve the

use of weapons, either inside or outside of the school. A few participants discussed membership in gangs as a contributing factor to the violence and use of weapons in schools. Teachers identified cyber bullying as one of the new methods used by bullies to extend bullying outside of school and thereby continue to have power and control over those they victimized. Another aspect of bullying that had changed over time was its duration. Participants were astounded by bullies' relentless pursuit of their victims.

Unlike past studies that touted the success of whole-school bullying prevention programs (Yoon et al., 2004), school-based bullying intervention programs came under a great deal of scrutiny from principals and teachers in this study. Inconsistency in implementation and follow-through of the programs was found to be a major obstacle to the success of whole-school programs. Some participants found the programs effective in controlling physical and visible bullying but believed that such programs drove bullying underground and, hence, resulted in an increase in covert and relational bullying. Similarly, presentations delivered to students by police officers and other groups were criticized for their repetitive and predictable nature. Many such repetitive presentations were regarded as entertainment by the students. Students were found to simply regurgitate required values and responses but not necessarily exhibit a change in behaviour.

Exosystem

Ministry and Board Policies

The *Safe Schools Act* (2000) directs school boards to empower principals to use suspension or expulsion as consequences for bullying (s. 306.1). However, suspension as a measure to control and minimize bullying was strongly criticized by all participants. Suspension was found to be a temporary measure only; it took pressure off the situation but it was unsuccessful in changing the behaviour of students who bully. For these participants, suspension

was a superficial way of addressing a much deeper problem. Students who bully required greater help in problem-solving, anger management, empathy training, and interpersonal skills through social work and counselling (Fonagy et al., 2005).

Suspension also failed as a deterrent for bullying. It was believed to backfire, since suspension seemed to give students a break from school and the liberty of staying home to play video games. Often, students were not suspended because there was no one at home to supervise them, hence, interfering with the consistent application of this measure. This inconsistency was thought to originate in the *Safe Schools Act* itself, which provides principals with options of discretionary or mandatory consequences. It allows principals to take into account mitigating circumstances and decide on consequences accordingly. Students might not be suspended because of mitigating circumstances. This often resulted in mixed messages being given to students; in essence, teachers believed, taking mitigating circumstances into account might unwittingly contribute to encouraging bullying. Moreover, this created opportunities for arbitrary decision making. Individual differences in levels of tolerance and problem solving resulted in drastically different consequences leaving principals unsure of how to provide consistency. For example, rather than finding solutions to modify bullies' behaviour, some principals were seen to overuse suspension as a solution, particularly for repeat offenders.

Several principals discussed concerns about where suspended or expelled students were to spend their time. They felt that a place or a program should be provided where these students could spend the duration of their suspension learning the impact of such negative behaviours. In the absence of such programs, they were concerned that suspended students might spend their day on the streets or engaging in criminal activities.

Findings revealed that although socioemotional or relational bullying could be more harmful than physical bullying, providing credible proof of it was very difficult. As a result, this

type of bullying often did not reach the level of seriousness that permitted a principal to apply consequences.

Findings of this study strongly indicated that the policies in general neither addressed the real problem nor met the needs of students who bullied. Students who were suspended for bullying tended to go back to school only to repeat the same behaviour. According to participants, these students came from stormy homes where their basic needs were not met. The only place they could get attention was in the schoolyard, albeit sometimes through bullying. Rather than helping to meet their needs appropriately, the policies allowed principals to continue to suspend such students. Suspension for students such as these was based on a zero tolerance principle that absolved teachers and principals from the responsibility of helping to rehabilitate them. The main premise behind the zero tolerance philosophy seemed to be that such students were not worth the effort. Principals agreed that suspension was simply giving up on the student; it did not teach the bully prosocial behaviours.

Participants emphasized that part of the mandate of elementary school was to teach socialization and to ensure the appropriate social development of all students. They believed that students who bullied needed to be taught why their behaviour was inappropriate and to learn alternative behaviours while at school. Participants strongly suggested that the school system had failed to understand the plight of students who were neglected and came from violent or disorganized homes. They blamed the system for its traditional hierarchical arrangement of power. They maintained that solutions were dictated by the Ontario Ministry of Education with little regard to what teachers, who work on the front lines, believed was needed. They emphasized that the system needed to be redefined with teachers as prime contributors to policy and solutions for bullying, since they were more aware of the issue.

Macrosystem

Societal Variables Serving to Support Bullying

Participants believed that bullying was entrenched in our society and had always been pivotal in achieving power and success in the wider society. To a great extent, success in our society was based on levels of power at the expense of those with lesser clout (Billow, 2012). Hence, the subtle nature of bullying in the society makes it insidious and accepted. Political campaigns and elections hinged on rumours spread about candidates' personal lives in the media. The political arena was fraught with examples that model bullying behaviour to the young generation including the arguing, verbal jousting, and public humiliation that takes place in the House of Commons. Teachers surmised that it was not surprising to find students learning and reflecting such behaviours.

In general, the media were seen to perpetuate bullying amongst the young generation by modelling gossiping and spreading rumours. A significant relationship between television watching in general and bullying has been established (Barboza et al., 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2005). Several teachers argued that the most problematic programs were reality shows, with their main focus being human degradation and humiliation. Reality shows were believed to have caused a shift in the society, challenging and changing the way individuals think and act. Teachers and principals felt that watching such distorted images in the media resulted in a lack of empathy. They argued that it had become fun to watch the pain and suffering of others so that, in essence, children and youth today had become largely desensitized to the distress and misery of others. Of great concern to teachers and principals was the value placed on achieving goals regardless of the means. Participants perceived competition and achieving power over others to be the central theme in many reality shows.

The image of aggressive women using armed violence to achieve their goals, as portrayed on television and in action movies, was perceived to influence girls' behaviour. Participants explained that girls had become more diversified in the methods they chose to bully others. In addition to socioemotional bullying, girls now resorted to swarming and physical bullying in a manner similar to their male counterparts. This was quite different 15 to 20 years ago when girls rarely resorted to physical bullying.

Videos and video games were also perceived to have glamorized antisocial behaviour and weapons. Violent media messages were seen to underlie students' desire to belong to gangs where bullying was the main edict. Such students had no true understanding of the purpose or ramifications of their behaviours. Although video games were amongst the preferred leisure activities of children and adolescent, little research has investigated their relationship to bullying.

An imbalance in family activities was often implicated in the great influence of media messages on children. Participants noted that, in today's society, children did not spend sufficient time sharing sports and other activities with parents leaving media, the Internet, and reality TV shows to guide their behaviour and thinking instead. Children were found to be bombarded by games and programs that condoned sex and violence. As a result, participants hypothesized, they had become desensitized to acts of violence and street language had become the norm. Teachers attributed the changes in language standards to rap songs and the use of street language in the media. The situation was viewed as further complicated by the lack of censorship by authorities and parents alike.

Teachers maintained that a paradigm shift in moral values and standards of behaviour in general had taken place. Lowered standards of public behaviour and conduct set by the media permeated society and the young culture today. According to participants, media portrayal of new images and expectations, have resulted in substantial changes of values and mores. Students

were perceived as lacking empathy and compassion compared to children 25 years ago. Teachers believed that students in the past were more friendly, caring, and more cooperative than students today. In addition, students today were said to lack respect for authority compared to students in the past.

A Multimodal Model of Intervention Based on Grounded Theory Analysis

Data analysis revealed the complexity of bullying, which was illustrated in the models discussed in Part II (Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). Consequently, teachers and principals viewed the solutions to bullying to be equally diverse. A multimodal, multifaceted model to approaching bullying was constructed based on their recommendations. The model included several sub-themes that addressed ecological variables that ranged from the microsystem to the exosystem.

This model emphasises the participation of community partners such as parents and community agencies to be paramount to schools' success in quelling bullying. The inclusion of the student body and bystanders in addressing bullying is central to this model of prevention and intervention. Successful and evidence-based whole school programs including extra-curricular and recreational programs for unstructured time were perceived as important components of this multifaceted model. The prominence of teaching prosocial skills throughout the different grade levels was supported with multiple social factors. Perceptions of changes in the family unit and values, parenting practices, and multiculturalism accounted for the absence of homogeneous social skills. For students who bully, the model departs from the Safe School Policy abhorring the use of punishment as a solution and focusing instead on modifying the student's behaviour. Anger management, conflict resolution, rehabilitation, education, and engagement in positive endeavours are the focus of this model. Solutions for students who are bullied focused on education, assertiveness training, counselling, and strategies to raise self-esteem.

Inherent in the model is the belief that schools are historical institutions that are failing in keeping up with the social issues that have erupted with the ever changing needs of the society. The demand for funding to provide support services and guidance counsellors is a significant component of this continuum of intervention. A positive school culture led by strong principal and proactive teachers is central to this model. Collegial, collaborative efforts and consistent professional development are essential to maintaining such a culture.

The most vital theme in this bullying prevention model is enhancing and strengthening the role of the teacher as a catalyst of change. Training in bullying, classroom management, and establishing a positive teacher-student relationship are identified as essential to efficacy in addressing bullying. Several personality characteristics such as empathy and confidence are considered essential to teachers' success. Table 1 presents a model that summarizes the final outcome of the grounded theory analysis, and outlines solutions and recommendations as suggested by teachers and principals.

Table 1:

A Multifaceted Approach to Addressing Bullying

Community partners	Community agencies Police Theatre groups
Solutions that address student needs	Raising awareness regarding bullying Bully prevention programs Theatre group presentations Expert speakers Community police presentation Teacher follow-up Peer mediation Conflict resolution Extracurricular activities Teaching pro-social skills
Solutions for students who bully	Reflection, education

	<p>Anger management Mentorship Leadership in positive programs/initiatives Opportunities for success Community projects and endeavours</p>
Solutions for students who are bullied	<p>Assertiveness training Counselling</p>
Strategies for parents	<p>Workshops Parent handbook Parenting courses</p>
School culture	<p>Determined positive leader/principal Teachers actively addressing bullying Team approach A collaborative school plan Early intervention Consistency Parents collaboration Positive reinforcement of kind deeds Positive staff Friendly, warm, happy environment Empowered teachers Teacher modelling pro-social behaviour</p>
Support services	<p>Government funding for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers • Guidance counsellors • Mental health professionals • Child and youth workers • Bullying specialists
Improving the teacher-school fit	<p>Teacher training in addressing bullying Professional development Forum for discussion with colleagues Positive teacher-student relationships Rapport Classroom management Empathy</p>

Conclusion

This study utilized an ecological perspective to explore the complex dimensions of bullying behaviours at the elementary level through the perceptions of teachers and principals. The primary focus of this framework is to understand the influence of the immediate and the more distal contexts on the dynamic interaction between the bully and the victim. A multidimensional model of bullying intervention was developed and explained.

The main findings reaffirmed those of previous studies in which teachers' involvement in bullying issues was found to be sporadic and inconsistent. In this study, participants cited a number of political and social variables as well as personal characteristics that served to hinder intervention. Teacher personality and classroom management were particularly salient issues with regards to teacher-student relationships, which in turn influenced the incidence of bullying. Supportive relationships and school environments were identified as crucial elements for bullying prevention and teacher efficacy of interventions. Moreover, poor classroom management and teacher personality were inextricably linked to the incidence of bullying. This led to a careful examination of teacher preparedness and training for the role. According to participants in this study, teacher's personality, which is integral to communication patterns, is not taken into account in the admission process of teacher education programs. Furthermore, teachers who were new graduates (1 to 5 years of experience) identified lack of training at the preservice level as a major factor in teachers' inability to effectively address behavioural problems in general and bullying in particular. This is compounded by the overwhelming demands of teachers' roles. Ontario Ministry initiatives place emphasis on curriculum expectations that teachers strive to meet which leaves little time to spend on sorting out bullying problems. The shortage of resources—from curriculum that addresses social skills, disability awareness, and respect, to personnel who can aid with solving problems—adds to the complexity

of the situation. The majority of participants viewed the decrease of guidance counselors at the elementary level and the limited number of social workers and child and youth workers as major contributors to the thriving bullying culture in most schools.

In addition to school and community variables, the importance of supportive policies for successful interventions and teacher efficacy in bullying prevention was highlighted. By and large, little reference was made to the *Safe School Act* and the Code of Conduct which provide guidelines of acceptable behaviour. They were considered to be rather ineffective with the exception of cases of physical bullying. Under these policies, suspension has become increasingly popular as a solution to physical bullying. Most participants found social, emotional, and verbal bullying to be more difficult to address under the present policy. Passionate views regarding the ambiguity and impracticality of the use of suspension as the ultimate consequence were evident amongst participants. They viewed correcting the behaviour of young people to be a process that involves engaging them in a respectful and meaningful way, one that helps them understand themselves in relation to the world around them.

Participants also cited some indirect but powerful social variables that serve to encourage bullying. For example, the emphasis placed by media on stereotypical images, standards of beauty, fashion, and body image has dictated the desirable images and ideal look. Paradoxically this has in turn created standards for what is unacceptable and, hence, considered “uncool” by students. At the same time, the popularization of reality TV has served to normalize sarcasm and ridiculing others as forms of comedy. Taken together, the media messages shape young people’s expectations in peers. Those who fail to adhere to such images can be subjected to emotional and social bullying at the hands of their peers. In general, standards of civility were noted to have changed drastically in the last few years.

These findings highlight the complexity of bullying interactions and lend support to the importance of multimodal interventions that address the variables at the core of the problem and can elicit and enhance protective factors such as positive teacher-student relationships. Although the teacher role is criticized by participants for its limited decision-making powers, the position was demonstrated to produce significant differences in bullying behaviours and class culture at the hands of the right teachers. Such teachers appear to be able to engage students in a collaborative process that delivers learning experiences and communication patterns which inspire positive relationships and community spirit. These relationships allow students a sense of belonging and appreciation of a shared humanity and a sense of hope for the future.

Contributions of the Study

This study provides the first contextually rich understanding of ecological variables that contribute to the incidence of bullying. It highlights the logistics, obstacles, and challenges that teachers encounter in the course of attempting to address the pervasive phenomenon of bullying. It also provides a practical, multifaceted model for addressing bullying based on teachers' and principals' recommendations. Knowledge of these expert views can provide assistance to policy makers, educational institutions, and administrators who seek to increase teacher involvement.

In addition, the study contributes to the existing literature by replicating findings regarding prevalence, harmful effects, and the need for teacher training in bullying prevention. Moreover, it illustrates the interplay of contextual variables such as peers, teachers, and school environments that allow and encourage bullying to thrive in elementary schools. Notably, this study addresses unique issues of bullying such as the important issue of understanding why some students resort to bullying. Such understanding highlights the need to offer new interventions to help students that bully.

Furthermore, the data allowed for an evaluation of the teacher-student relationship and its impact on the incidence of bullying. This, in turn, generated suggestions for teacher training as well as recommendations regarding individuals' eligibility for admission into teacher training programs. These findings could inform and possibly challenge the current standards set by academic institutions for teacher training.

Importantly, the study shows evidence of parents' lack of trust and support for educators. This can have negative consequences on teachers' level of involvement in bullying situations and, in turn, on students' general trust in teachers as effective problem solvers and authority figures in such situations. Parents' trust in educators needs to be rebuilt by establishing cooperative efforts and partnerships.

Finally, the study raises concerns regarding media messages, specifically the bullying and lack of empathy portrayed in reality television. Although several talk shows have attempted to address the issue of bullying, the influence of reality television has not been explored. These findings could serve to raise awareness of the harmful effects of such careless programming.

Theoretical Implications

The main findings of this study reaffirmed those of previous studies in which ecological variables were found to interact with individual characteristics to allow bullying to thrive in schools (Swearer & Doll, 2001). Teachers' experiences demonstrated the centrality of their role within the social-ecological theoretical framework (Pellegrini, 2002; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Research based on the ecological perspective has assumed that the teacher's role is but another variable within the interactive ecological model as a whole and has disregarded the complexity and promise of this position. Teachers' experiences in this study, demonstrating the centrality of teachers in bullying prevention, challenge this perspective. Their perceptions suggested that, although bullying was determined by several ecological variables, a teacher could be the most

influential variable on student interactions since most other social and community variables were more difficult to control (Ellis & Shute, 2007; Pepler & Craig, 2000). The integral role and experiences of teachers have largely been overlooked. The findings in this study delineate ways in which the teacher role may be transformed to be the leading key to bullying prevention.

Teachers' experiences in this study illustrated the multidimensionality and dynamic nature of their role. Such indicators of the complexity of the role highlighted the teachers' need for support and resources in order to address bullying fully (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Nicolaides et al., 2002).

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

Teachers are a school's most valuable resource for controlling bullying and establishing a social environment permeated by friendships, peace, and harmony. Teachers are closest to the peer ecology and can help shape this critical microcosm where children interact (Chang, 2003; Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O'Neal, & Cairns, 2003). In this study, teachers and principals unanimously agreed that teacher education programs needed to address bullying as a momentous problem requiring serious preparation and thorough knowledge of research and intervention strategies. A common understanding of the definition of bullying and awareness of the different aspects of this damaging phenomenon would allow for more consistency in teacher efficacy. Participants also strongly believed that classroom management required more formal training at the teacher education level (Chang, 2003; Roland & Galloway, 2002). Training in the area of challenging behaviour and positive discipline strategies would better prepare teachers to deal with bullying (Yoon, 2004).

Teachers' actions, whether intended or inadvertent, have an enormous impact on the social dynamics among their students. Warm, caring, skillful teachers have the power to offset home and community risk factors and can orchestrate positive peer relationships (Werner, 1990).

Collectively, the participants emphasized the significance of several personality characteristics in a positive teacher-student relationship believed to act as an antidote to bullying (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hows & Segal, 1993). Empathy, active listening, caring, and commitment to the profession were identified as integral to establishing rapport with students (Baker et al., 1997). An authoritative personality was linked to good classroom management and a decline in bullying. Teacher training programs were implicated for their lack of training in behaviour and classroom management (Nicolaidis et al., 2002; Nucci, 2006). Teacher training programs were criticized by participants for their emphasis on grades in their admission criteria. More focus on personality was suggested as an important component for admission as well as specific training in bullying intervention and prevention (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Boulton, 1997; Nicolaidis et al., 2002; Pepler et al., 2004). Taken together, the aforementioned personality qualities are indeed important aspects of emotional intelligence that programs would be advised to consider in their admission criteria.

Directions for Future Research

Relatively little research has been directed to listening to the views of teachers on bullying while even fewer have investigated the perceptions and opinions of principals. This study explored an abundance of issues related to bullying as viewed by principals and teachers, but more studies are needed to isolate and focus on some of these issues. In addition to delineating variables that interfere with teacher efficacy in intervening in bullying, researchers should also consider which of these factors are more prominent in hindering motivation and involvement. They need to compare the personal characteristics (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008; Justice & Espinoza, 2007) and political and social structures within the school culture (Baker, 1998; Leff et al., 2003) that encourage or deter teachers from getting involved.

Accessing the views of students and their parents could expose important information on several issues. Their input could shed light on one of the most prominent findings in this study, namely, the teacher-student relationship. Exploring the impact of negative interactions on students is integral to ensuring the prevention of bullying. Parents were found to lack support for teachers and administrators on bullying issues and to show little trust in the school system compared to parents in the past. Such findings reflect a gap or a cultural divide between educators and the school community and highlight the significance of examining parents' perceptions on this matter. This suggests the importance of research approaches that would explore the problem as viewed by all involved and identify common goals and service context.

One of the most salient findings of this study relates to the influence of separation, divorce, and family problems on the mood and sense of happiness of some students and the potential for subsequent bullying behaviour. In order to address the roots of bullying, further research is required in this area of motivation for bullying. Effective interventions and consequences should take such motivation into account (Bernstein & Watson, 1997; Bowes et al., 2009; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Viding et al., 2009).

In summary, bullying has become an increasingly alarming phenomenon for both students and educators. The goal of research should be to engage in further qualitative studies of the variables and processes associated with bullying in order to address the areas that impede a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon. In so doing, research could suggest new approaches to intervention and prevention which could in turn enhance the students' rights to a safe school environment.

Personal Reflection

My Journey

This part of my journey was long and arduous as I researched bullying in elementary schools. Rather than focus my research on a specific area of bullying, I chose to try to capture as many different variables as possible that influence the child's ecology. My goal was to show the complexity of bullying which renders the success rate of intervention efforts inconsistent. I also wanted to illustrate the multitude of factors that may interplay to influence teachers' efficacy in addressing bullying. Despite the obstacles I faced collecting, analyzing and organizing my data, I was pleased with the rich themes my research revealed. The findings clearly point to the tenuous position that a student may hold amongst peers. At such a developmental stage of identity formation, the impact of bullying is far reaching. As a therapist, I am astounded at the frequency with which I see the effects of bullying on the lives and personalities of so many children, teens, and adults.

My Message: Have Adults Abdicated Their Responsibility?

No longer does a student go to school just to receive academic instruction. Everyday each student in elementary school must navigate through the complex dynamics of the school environment. Depending on how the ecological variables interplay, a student may have a happy time at school or may have endless challenges and battles. Within such an environment, bullies, victims, and bystanders emerge. Looking at the findings of my research at every level, it almost seems as if adults have abdicated their responsibilities towards children.

This study brings the impact of parents on children's behaviour to a sharp focus. Some parents are no longer dedicated to the traditional structure of the family unit. It is evident in my research that separation, divorce, or lack of exposure to one parent interfered with children's sense of security. Such students may harbor anger or sadness that school becomes their outlet

and bullying their channel. Other parents lead their children to bullying by example; they role model abusive behaviour and show little regard for others. Yet others are over-indulgent in their parenting style. They deny their children's responsibility in bullying situations and support their behaviour regardless of the situation. Parents may even contribute to their child's own victimization through overprotectiveness and limiting their children's opportunities to practice assertiveness and problem solving. In general, the complex roles that parents play today, in an environment that is often fraught with stressors, influence children's behaviour. The cultural divide and lack of trust and support between parents and teachers serve to further alienate students.

My research exemplified Haim Ginott's philosophy which emphasizes the significance of a teacher's impact on students' well-being. According to Ginott (1975), a teacher has the power to create or destroy a child's happiness:

As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized. (p. 13)

It was evident in my study that not all teachers recognize their immense influence on their students. Levels of empathy, motivation, and sense of responsibility influence teachers' responses to bullying. While some show great concern and take serious action against bullying, others ignore and minimize it which, in turn, influences the rate of reporting of bullying. Such disparity in teachers' reactions brings to question the vocational fit of some individuals to the profession of teaching. Schools are no longer the historical academic institutions they were in the past. Rather they serve as a second home where academic as well social and emotional needs of students are met. Such change in the society necessitates additional skill sets in teachers. The complex nature of a teacher's role was illustrated in my research. Empathy, emotional maturity, strength of personality and the ability to connect and be a role model to students are additional

qualities that are needed in teachers. A teacher needs to act as a parent, a mentor, a friend, a psychologist, a social worker and a child advocate in addition to an educator. Academic skills, aptitude, and achievement are no longer sufficient to fulfill such a rewarding and significant role. A teacher must have an understanding of the child and adolescent group dynamics in order to protect all pupils and establish positive student-teacher relationships. Most importantly, a teacher must be passionate and committed to protecting children and eradicating bullying.

School boards and adults in charge of academic programs for teachers have also indirectly failed children. They have ignored the societal changes and have not responded with the necessary methods. High academic standards continue to be the main requirement of admission in teaching programs while personality factors are neglected. Moreover, curriculum requirements for teachers neither mandate bullying awareness nor train teachers in behaviour strategies. Professional development opportunities in both areas are not easily accessible for teachers. Rather than address bullying, principals and school boards often neglect or deny its presence in their schools in an effort to maintain a positive reputation in the community.

The lack of effective policy and resources to protect children who are bullied and to rehabilitate those who bully adds to my belief that adults are minimizing their responsibility towards children's well-being. The lack of appropriate policies was strongly emphasized and illustrated in my research. The vague, confining mandate of the *Safe Schools Act*, as pointed out by educators, contributes to the thriving practice of bullying. Despite the extensive research and the abundance of theories on positive discipline, the ultimate solution to bullying is punishment by suspension! A developmentally appropriate program that addresses bullying, multiculturalism, disability awareness, individual differences, tolerance, and respect should be mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education at every grade level. The presence of special personnel such as guidance counsellors with special training in behaviour, bullying, and conflict

resolution is as equally important. It is sad to see that the government would not invest in the safety and mental health of our future generation. This is where we need additional funding.

I find it disappointing that the majority of intervention programs, policies and prevention programs collectively ignore the bully. In many ways, a bully is regarded as a menace to the school community rather than a student who requires more attention and appropriate intervention. Punishment is the only recourse with a bully rather than collaboration with community partners for counselling and clinical intervention. Are we not giving up on our children?

The lack of censorship and regulation of media epitomizes the abdication of responsibility towards children. The media has both attempted to expose bullying and at the same time has indirectly encouraged its survival. Although the media can be credited with raising some public awareness regarding bullying, several practices inadvertently contribute to the rise of bullying. Social trends and examples set by television shows exemplify faulty standards of behaviour while so-called reality shows distort norms and contribute to the growth of bullying. Name calling, belittling, mocking, and putting down others are common practices on all such shows. Violent and aggressive behaviour is encouraged through video games and group harassment is permitted through cyber bullying. The advent of technology has allowed bullying to thrive by offering numerous resources for connecting with peers and a variety of creative venues to express hate and bullying messages. Shockingly adults continue to allow these practices with little intervention. The lack of legislation, regulatory bodies, and policies is notably absent and disturbing.

It appears that we have long abandoned the notion of “It takes a village to raise a child” and, to a great extent; we have come to rely on children to fend for themselves. We place children in insecure risky environments where they may be bullied and expect them to survive or

ask for help. This is the law of survival for the fittest. Indeed strong, resilient children are able to assertively deal with bullying. Those that fall under any compromising positions are rejected and become victims while adults either ignore or lack the awareness of their duty and responsibility. To me, this is reminiscent of child abuse. Only when adults are determined to intercept the ecological variables that interact to allow bullying, will we see a decrease in bullying. We need to put a stop to bullying through vigilance and consistent intervention. I believe that we need to make changes at every level but teachers are in the best position to make the biggest and quickest impact. We need the right teachers and we need to equip them with the necessary resources and support. It is time for adults to take back their responsibility to protect children.

So my journey continues; I teach educational assistants about bullying intervention and hope to transmit my passion and my mission to them! My dream is to someday contribute to a new school policy designed to address bullying fully.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Research Summary

Research in bullying has been rather theoretical and has largely focused on the context of bullying from the researchers' viewpoint. Research involving teachers has mainly targeted their level of empathy and their ability to identify bullying behaviour on survey forms or vignettes. Nevertheless, bullying continues to thrive in schools perhaps because research on intervention and prevention has failed to elicit the obstacles that interfere with teachers' ability to prevent bullying.

My extensive experience with bullying while serving as a teacher and guidance counsellor in elementary schools suggests that bullying is a complex social phenomenon that is often shrouded by misconceptions and limited understanding of children's interaction and the adolescent culture. Teachers' ability to empathize with students, their level of awareness of the impact of peer groups, and their problem solving skills seem to greatly influence the outcome and incidence of bullying. Capturing and understanding such complexities is crucial to tackling bullying in the schools.

The purpose of this research is twofold: (1) To explore teachers' perceptions of: (a) bullying and interventions, and (b) the impact of their relationship with students on bullying interactions; and (2) To explore the principals' perspectives of: (a) teachers' competence in tackling bullying situations, and (b) the variables that may impact or interfere with teachers' effectiveness in bullying situations. It is intended that this research will provide data for broadening our understanding of the role of interpersonal factors and social context on the incidence and maintenance of bullying in the schools.

This qualitative research will consist of two phases. In the first phase six focus groups of elementary school teachers will be conducted. The questions used in the focus groups are based on areas that were not fully covered by previous research. More importantly, several questions draw from field observations based on my experiences with bullying situations in elementary schools. In the second phase, eight to ten elementary school principals of both genders will be invited to participate in interviews lasting approximately one hour at a mutually convenient place and time. Some of the questions used will be similar to those used in the focus groups; however, most questions will be based on the transcripts of the focus groups, and hence will be formulated at that stage. Data will be transcribed from audiotapes and field notes from the focus groups. A similar process will be followed with information recorded during interviews. Data will be analyzed using the qualitative software program NVivo-2. Themes and subthemes will be identified for each question. Themes and patterns of responses will be used to develop categories and draw research results.

Appendix B

Information and Consent Form

Research in Education Focus Group
(on OISE letterhead)

Tina Calafati, Principal Investigator

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Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research project to explore teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs on bullying in elementary schools. You will participate in a focus group to discuss some of the issues and obstacles that teachers encounter when dealing with bullying. Participants will be asked to be candid with their attitudes, beliefs, and views on the topic. There are no foreseen risks to participating in this research, rather you may benefit from examining your own views and those of other participants. Individuals will be asked to refrain from discussing other participants after the focus group, however, there is no guarantee that they will not.

The focus group will last approximately two hours in a meeting room at your school. It will take place after school and refreshments will be provided but there will be no monetary compensation. The discussion will be audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for research purposes. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality and only the researcher will have access to the tapes. No identifying personal information will be included in the research.

All focus groups will be audiotaped and the tapes will be transcribed. The transcripts will not contain names or other identifying characteristics. The audiotapes, transcriptions, and demographic forms will be kept for up to seven years for research purposes, after which they will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to discuss any particular issue during the focus group. Should any problems arise during the course of the study, participants may contact the research supervisor, Dr. Roy Gillis. You may also withdraw from the study at any time and/or withdraw the data gathered for the research prior to data analysis.

If you would like to participate in this research, please complete this consent form. To receive information on the results of this study, please complete a Research Summary Form (Appendix H). For questions or additional information please contact the principal investigator, Tina Calafati.

I, _____, have read and understood the above, and give my consent to participate in the focus group, and have been given a copy of this consent form. I allow the researcher to use and analyze the data collected for research purposes, including the publication or public presentation of such data.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Focus Groups

Focus Group 1: Mixed

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Mango	Grades 5–7 French	2	Grades 5–7
Mandley	Grade 3	22	Secondary, junior, intermediate
Nancy	Grade 8	30	All grades, behaviour classes
Candy	Grade 8	15	Special ed, junior, intermediate
Butterfly	Grade 2	3	Primary, junior
Sunshine	Grade 5	7	Grades 3 and 5

Focus Group 2: Males

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Two Four	Grade 6	15	Junior, intermediate
Fiddlehead	Grade 8	18	Junior, intermediate
Dr. Bob	Behaviour (junior, intermediate) class	18	Junior, intermediate
Coach	Grade 7	14	Intermediate
Jake	Grade 7	2	Grade 7
Touch	Grade 8	20	Junior, intermediate

Focus Group 3: Females

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Sarah	Grade 6	5	Primary
Helen	Grade 3	5	Primary, junior, intermediate
Laura	Grade 6	21	Junior, intermediate, guidance
Nadia	Grade 3	3	Grade 3
Lola	Grade 4	3	Junior
Kathy	Grade 2	2	Primary
Queenie	Grade 3/4	25	Primary, junior
Wendilyn	Grade 1	1	Grade 1

Focus Group 4: Mixed

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Franz	Grade 7	13	Junior, intermediate
Cassandra	Grade 8	28	Primary, junior, intermediate
Theresa	Grade 1–2	15	Primary
Larsson	Grade 7–8	6	Secondary, intermediate
Dorothy	Special ed	20	Primary, junior
Jackie	Library	7	Library
Wendy	JK / SK	23	JK/SK

Focus Group 5: Females

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Ms S2	Grade 7	4	Grades 5-7
Mrs. G	Grade 6	24	Junior, ESL
Mrs. D1	ESL	25	French, primary, ESL
Mrs. S1	Grade 8	30	Junior, intermediate
Mrs. D2	Grade 5	15	Grades 4–5

Focus Group 6: Females

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Sarah	Grades 1–2	15	Primary, junior
Diane	Grades 4–5	28	Junior, intermediate
Jane	Grade 8	26	Junior intermediate
Lois	Grade 6	24	Primary, junior
Marg	Grade 7	22	Primary, junior, intermediate

Focus Group 7: Mixed

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Genevieve	Grade 2	25	Primary, junior
Irena	French	30	Intermediate, French
Mary	Grade 5	22	Junior, special ed
Rose	Grade 3	11	Primary
Sandra	Grade 6	30	Primary, junior
Nell	Special ed	18	Junior, intermediate

Focus Group 8: Males

Pseudonym	Assignment	Years of experience	Area of experience
Bob	Special ed	19	Special ed, junior, intermediate
Sam	Grade 7	26	Junior, intermediate
Adam	Grade 8	14	Junior, intermediate
Tony	Special ed	5	Intermediate
Doug	Grade 8	28	Junior, intermediate

Appendix D

Focus Group Demographic Information

Pseudonym _____

Grade level/assignment _____

Years of teaching experience _____

Degree(s) obtained _____

Professional/additional qualifications _____

Grade(s) taught

Number of years

Date

Appendix E

Questions for Focus Groups

A.Context of Bullying

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “bullying”?
2. Tell me where and when does bullying occur in your school? What type of bullying have you witnessed?
3. What and when was your first encounter with bullying?
4. Tell me what you know about how bullying may have changed since you started teaching.

B.Nature of Bullying

1. What kind of bullying is the most difficult to detect or control?
2. What are the conditions that contribute to the occurrence of bullying in schools?
3. Why do students find it difficult to report bullying?
4. Who are the prime targets of bullying? (Elicit responses with regards to acceptance of racial minorities, disabilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and gender.)
5. Tell me what you know about students that bully and why many continue to bully despite reprimand.

C.Interventions

1. Identify some of the obstacles that make it difficult for you to intervene in bullying.
2. Does a teacher’s gender play a role in the way teachers respond to bullying?
3. How is bullying addressed in your school?
4. How do you try to minimize bullying in the classroom? In the school?
5. How do your relationships with students influence the incidence of bullying?

D.Systems

1. Are there any board/ministry policies that address bullying?
2. How do teacher education programs prepare new teachers to deal with bullying?
3. How may teachers contribute to student bullying? Why is this so?
4. What measures are needed in schools in order to control or eradicate bullying?

Appendix F

Questions for Principals

A.Context of Bullying

1. How would you define bullying?
2. Tell me where and when does bullying occur in your school?
3. What type of bullying is reported to administrators?
4. What and when was your first encounter with bullying?
5. Tell me what you know about how bullying may have changed since you became a principal.

B.Nature of Bullying

1. What kind of bullying is the most difficult to detect or control?
2. Why do students find it difficult to report bullying?
3. What are the conditions that contribute to the occurrence of bullying in schools?
4. Who are the prime targets of bullying? (Elicit responses with regards to acceptance of racial minorities, disabilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and gender.)
5. Tell me what you know about students that bully and why many continue to bully despite reprimand or consequences.
6. What role do group dynamics play in maintaining or reinforcing bullying?
7. On the average, how do parents respond to reports that their son/daughter is a bully?

C.Interventions

1. Identify some of the obstacles that make it difficult for you to intervene in bullying situations.
2. How is bullying addressed in your school?
3. How do you try to minimize bullying in the school?
4. Does a teacher's gender play a role in the way teachers respond to bullying?
5. How does a teacher's relationship with students influence the incidence of bullying?

D.Systems

1. How do teacher education programs prepare new teachers to deal with bullying?
2. How may teachers contribute to student bullying?
3. Are there any board/ministry policies that address bullying?
4. What is zero tolerance?
5. What measures are needed in schools in order to control or eradicate bullying?

Appendix G
Principals Interviewed

Interview	Number of students in school	Number of staff	Years of experience as administrator	Teaching experience	Community demographics and school challenges
Principal 1	420	54	6	22	Tough neighborhood (Jane-Finch corridor), New Canadians, 40-50% African Canadians, refugees, low SES
Principal 2	326	22	14	17	Immigrants, both parents working day/night jobs, low parental involvement in school
Principal 3	247	31	13	15	Middle class, multicultural
Principal 4	238	32	6	26	Many students with special needs, not enough staff, limited or no parental involvement in school functions
Principal 5	665	50	10	19	Multicultural, high needs, low to middle SES, large number of students, small playground (not all areas visible)
Principal 6	640	50	16	13	Bullying, lack of cooperation, limited space in schoolyard, 11 portables
Principal 7	300	12	8	26	Multicultural, middle class
Principal 8	240	33	3	14	Multicultural, large Special Ed/ESL population, many single parent families, many low SES families
Principal 9	750	55	21	16	On site construction, transient population, large number of ESL students and students with special needs
Principal 10	650	45	15	17	Multicultural, 40% African Canadian, very low SES, high needs, many single parent families, suspensions challenged by parents

Appendix H

Interview Information and Consent Form

Tina Calafati, Principal Investigator

17 Hill Garden Road
Etobicoke, ON M9P 1X8
(416) 243-1992 or (905) 491-4360
tcalafati@oise.utoronto.ca

Dr. Roy Gillis, Research Supervisor

OISE/UT, Department of Counselling Psychology
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
(416) 923-6641, extension 2387
jgillis@oise.utoronto.ca

Dear Principal,

You are invited to participate in a research project to explore teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs on bullying in elementary schools. You will participate in an interview to discuss some of the issues and obstacles that teachers encounter when dealing with bullying. You are asked to be candid with your beliefs, and views on the topic. There are no foreseen risks to participating in this research, rather you may benefit from examining your own views.

The interview will last approximately one hour in a meeting room at your school after school dismissal. There will be no monetary compensation for participating in this interview. The discussion will be audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for research purposes. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality and only the researcher will have access to the tapes. No identifying personal information will be included in the research.

All interview sessions will be audiotaped and the tapes will be transcribed. The transcripts will not contain names or other identifying characteristics. The audiotapes, transcriptions, and demographic forms will be kept for up to seven years for research purposes, after which they will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to discuss any particular issue during the interview. You may also withdraw from the study at any time and/or withdraw the data gathered for the research prior to data analysis. Should any problems arise during the course of the study, participants may contact the research supervisor, Dr. Roy Gillis.

If you would like to participate in this research, please complete this consent form. If you would like to receive information on the results of this study, please complete a Research Summary Form (Appendix H). For questions or additional information please contact the principal investigator, Tina Calafati.

I, _____, have read and understood the above, and give my consent to participate in an interview, and have been given a copy of this consent form. I allow the researcher to use and analyze the data collected for research purposes, including the publication or public presentation of such data.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix I

Principal's Demographic Information

Pseudonym_____

School K-5_____ K-8_____ 6-8_____ Other_____

School enrolment_____

Special challenges of the school

Number on staff_____

Presence of vice-principal Yes_____ No_____

Number of years of experience_____

Assignment	Number of years
------------	-----------------

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Date

Appendix J

Research Summary Request Form

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the study by mail, please indicate below and return to the principal investigator, Tina Calafati.

Tina Calafati, Principal Investigator

17 Hill Garden Road
 Etobicoke, ON M9P 1X8
 (416) 243-1992 or (905) 491-4360
 tcalafati@oise.utoronto.ca

Dr. Roy Gillis, Research Supervisor

OISE/UT, Department of Counselling Psychology
 252 Bloor Street West
 Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
 (416) 923-6641, extension 2387
 jgillis@oise.utoronto.ca

I would like a summary of this study's findings:

Yes _____

No _____

Name: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Appendix K

Ecological Variables That Contribute to the Incidence of Bullying

Ecological Level	Context	Ecological variable
Individual	Victim	Has different characteristics: negative (e.g., obesity), positive (e.g., high academic achievement) Physical or emotional weakness Sensitivity Disabilities (particularly less visible ones) Weak verbal and communication skills Lack of confidence or self-assertiveness Race, ethnicity Sexual orientation
	Bully	Proficient in theory of mind Misinterprets social cues due to cognitive distortions May have been bullied in the past Has personal challenges (feelings of inadequacies, academic difficulties, family instability) Needs to have control May come from aggressive, abusive home May be empowered by influential, educated parents
Relationship	Peer	Bystander: egocentric, apathetic Acts as bully by cheering and using inflammatory comments Adheres to adolescent norms: no reporting
	Parent	Too busy to listen to children's concerns Emphasizes qualities of strength and independence Lack of support to school personnel Gives little attention to school disciplinary measures May challenge/appeal suspension for bullying

(table continues)

Appendix K (continued)

Ecological level	Actor	Ecological variable
Relationship	Teacher	Minimize/ignore bullying
		Expect students to resolve own problems
		Struggle with time constraints and curriculum pressures
		Overwhelmed by the number of complaints
		Lack the knowledge base to intervene in bullying
		Difficulty unravelling the complexity of social and emotional bullying
		Weak classroom management skills
		Use bullying tactics to maintain discipline
		Lack of commitment to the profession
		Poor student-teacher relationship
Lack of assertiveness		
Community	School climate	Lack of a consistent definition of bullying
		Inappropriate and inconsistent consequences
		Diffused responsibility
		Political climate
		Increase of bullying
	Ministry/board policy	Ineffective bullying prevention programs and presentations
		Suspension as a consequence to bullying
		Ineffective
		May encourage further bullying
		Lack of consistency
Society	Media	Does not address social and emotional bullying
		Does not meet the needs of students who bully
		Does not offer opportunity for rehabilitation
		Emphasis on fashion, trends, and body image
		General drop in level of civility and acceptable language
		Role modelling of bullying, evident in:
		Politics (e.g., the House of Commons)
		Celebrity gossip and rumours in media
		Reality shows
		Videos and video games
Paradigm shift in moral values		
Reduced empathy and compassion in images		

Appendix L

Words Used in Participants' Definitions of Bullying

Descriptors of bullying	Number of times used
Power/control/dominating	25
Aggression/aggressiveness	6
Intimidation	7
Violence	4
Harassment	3
Ostracizing	4
Rumours	6
Gossip	5
Persistent	1
Pervasive	1
Teasing	8
Name calling	5
Taunting	1
Maliciousness	1
Temper	2
Rage	1
Frustration	1
Pain	3
Peer pressure	3
Fear	4