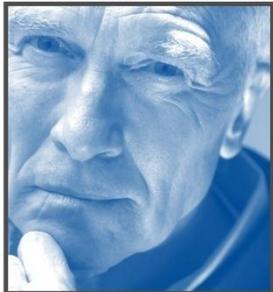




Bullying in Alberta: Suggestions for the Future



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An ESPC Youth Internship Project



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Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of anti-bullying initiatives in place in Canada, the United States, Japan, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Examples of programs commonly used in each country are selected, evaluated and discussed in relation to their appropriateness for use in Canada.

Such an investigation and analysis is important as the Alberta government has been exploring possible anti-bullying legislation, including the recently unsuccessful Bill 206. The Bill was designed to allow increased police involvement in dealing with school bullying and would have effectively restricted an administrator's options when implementing appropriate disciplinary action for bullies.

A more effective intervention program would encourage school-wide involvement while also encouraging student responsibility and ownership over bullying issues. Each bullying case is unique and thus requires individualized intervention, not the net-widening program proposed by Bill 206.

Section I: Background

What is Bullying

Bullying is abusive behaviour involving groups or individuals. This abuse can be verbal, physical, emotional or any combination of all three (Wolke et al 674-675). More recently, exclusion has been added to most definitions of bullying. Definitions of bullying tend to differ widely according to social and cultural environments (Kaneststuna 578).

Consequences of Bullying

All parties involved in bullying face a variety of consequences. Some consequences for victims include social isolation, physical and mental illness, and refusing to attend school and other social gatherings (Kawabata et al 86). Possible consequences for perpetrators include the development of anti-social behaviours and a higher risk for criminal behaviours and sanctions (Eslea 205). Aggressive and isolating behaviours can foster major impacts for both victims and perpetrators well into adulthood.

Why Analyze Bullying

Bullying in the educational systems of post-modern societies is not a recent phenomenon but has become a prominent social problem for youth today. Recent decades have seen an amplification of anti-bullying movements and programs that vary internationally. The

effectiveness of programs is dependent upon several factors, including the social context of the countries in which they are applied (Limper 130).

Current Implications for Alberta: Bill 206

In 2009, Bill 206 was introduced in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the 2nd sitting of the 27th Legislature. The legislation introduced educational measures programs which offending bullies would participate in. The legislation required that all incidents of bullying be reported to the principal. The principal would then consult with a police officer and the school board, which would in turn report all incidences to the Minister of Education before the end of the school year (Bill 206).

School officials expressed their lack of support for this proposed legislation and called for different approaches to the issue (McLean). Specifically, the Calgary Board of Education's Board of Trustees voiced concerns that police must be involved for educational measures programs to be successfully implemented, that the programs are ill defined in the legislation, and that no new funding was introduced along with these educational measures programs (Calgary Board of Education). The Alberta Teachers' Association, on the other hand, expressed concerns regarding confusion of the role of police officers and principals (Theobald).

The Bill 206 legislation would impede the success of programs because restricting the powers of school officials by implementing requirements such as police involvement is in fact counterproductive to anti-bullying goals. Bullying issues vary from school to school and thus narrowly-focused, province-wide legislation is not an appropriate solution. These types of restrictions limit the ability of school officials to employ alternative approaches to bullying (McLean; McGinnis). The solution must come from school officials and students themselves.

Methodology

An international analysis is necessary to explore anti-bullying programs from different social climates and their possible applicability to Albertan schools. The United Kingdom was selected because of its political similarities to Canada. Japan was selected because of its unique cultural environment and highly competitive education system. The Netherlands' aggressive approach to eliminating bullying made it a useful country to study. The United States was selected because of its geographic proximity and cultural similarities to Canada. Different approaches to the bullying issue are used within and between these countries, and elements of these approaches can be used in the creation of a successful approach in Alberta.

An analysis of the programs implemented in other countries can inform a complete and successful approach to the issue in Alberta. Successful anti-bullying programs found in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Canada incorporate student involvement, which should become a component of Alberta's strategy. Legislation that requires schools to outline intervention programs by certain dates should also be appropriately applied in Alberta. The

examples outlined below show that any legislative movement must recognize the individual requirements of schools and their students and must allow school officials the ability to address bullying situations that arise within their school environments.

Section II: Overview of Selected International Intervention Programs

The United Kingdom

Social and School Environmental Analysis

The British education system is comprised of four types of schools. These include state-run, religious, boarding and specialty schools. Speciality schools constitute the vast majority of state-run schools at the secondary level, which students enter at about eleven years of age (Wolke et al). These schools specialize in one or two particular subjects (Eslea and Smith). A recent study which compared British schools with those of other developed countries found that they have firm roots in the country's class system. Academic performance is linked to the social class of the parents, and "poorer pupils were in many respects becoming worse off" under the current system (Clark 1). The foundations of such an education system create an environment conducive to bullying and other forms of segregation.

Overview of Programs in Place

Several anti-bullying programs have been used in Britain since the early 1990s (Wolke et al). The Olweus Bullying Program, which was originally created in Norway in response to an increase in bullying related suicides, is used in the United Kingdom (Ibid). This program makes use of surveys and specialized training for school staff. The results of those surveys are used to determine which problem areas to target (Lee). This program involves all parties connected to the school environment, including parents (Ibid).

Another program implemented in Britain is the DFE Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project. It incorporates many elements of the Olweus program, including surveys (Lee). In addition to the use of surveys, the program is entwined within the school-wide curriculum. It is also implemented on the playground, as school officials concentrate resources to areas indicated through surveys as the most common location for bullying to occur (O'Brian). Education and training are the main focus of this particular program. It does not place blame upon any member of the school community but instead treats bullying as a wider social phenomena.

Student participation and ownership over the issue has become the cornerstone of anti-bullying programs in Britain and other western nations' education systems. Personal experience and testimonies are often featured on websites that offer advice and links to help- lines similar to those available in North America (O'Brian).

Another approach taken by schools in Britain was the creation of Bully Courts. These enable students to take ownership of their school and to mobilize as a community of by-standers, victims, and bullies (Kanestsuna et al). These courts are run by peers and facilitated by staff members. They place blame on the bully but also follow restorative justice goals by seeking accountability, participation and healing for all parties (Ibid). Bully courts mobilize the largely silent bystander majority.

The Netherlands

Social and School Environment Analysis

The Netherlands has considerable state involvement in citizens' economic and social lives because it is a welfare state (Korthouwer). Such a stance leads the government toward an intentional and interactive approach to social issues such as bullying. The Netherlands has a long history of anti-bullying programs and legislation dating back to 1995 (Limper 125). Three years later the government created legislation which requires that schools implement some process for reporting bullying issues to school authorities (Ibid). However, it should be noted that national legislation would be very difficult to implement in Canada as education falls under provincial legislation, not federal.

Overview of Programs in Place

The Netherlands employs a wide range of anti-bullying programs. The "5 track method" is directed at the education of all parties involved. Rob Limper lists the five steps as (127):

1. Help the bullied child with advice or social skills training.
2. Help the bully with social skills training or education to deal with aggression.
3. Mobilize the silent majority.
4. Educate the teacher about bullying: signs, causes, consequences and ways to deal with it.
5. Provide parents with advice and background information.

As can be observed from the 5 track method, education and information are the foundation of bullying intervention in the Netherlands. The National Education Protocol Against Bullying allows for many programs to be employed uniformly. This allows for comparison and situational sharing between schools (Limper 130). This agreement must be signed by the school administration, the school board, and parent representatives to create a unified front against the social issue of bullying (Limper 130-131).

National advertising was another method experimented with in the Netherlands. The SIRE media foundation (<http://www.pasopaardig.nl/>) was approached about the creation of a pervasive national media program including billboards, radio ads and commercials (Limper 130). This was one of many media programs implemented by SIRE and remains one of its most successful (Ibid).

One program that has been implemented in twenty five percent of schools in the Netherlands is the Bully Test, also known as Pestest (Limper). This is a computer-based program through which children can express what they feel are bullying behaviours in their schools. They can anonymously report the time of day, such as recess or lunch, the location, and the actions taken by the school (Ibid). This is an excellent method to assess the effectiveness of interventions because the test is short and repeatable throughout the year. The test is performed in the classroom environment. The results of the tests can be used to identify target areas and times for further intervention.

Japan

Social and School Environment Analysis

Japanese culture is traditionally more community and conformity based. Members who deviate from the norm become victims of ijime, which is the behaviour most closely related to Western concepts of bullying (Motoko). Ijime is defined as “intentionally giving psychological or physical pain to someone who is weaker or subordinate” (Kawabata). Such behaviour, which promotes traditional values of community and conformity, is justified as a benefit to society as a whole (Motoko).

Japan modernized rapidly after World War II. Presently Japan is becoming more individualistic and influenced by western cultures (Kanestsuna). Today, youths are expected to be independent, but the traditional focus on strong relationships is still prevalent. Parent and teacher influence and power remain more influential than the liberalism of western culture (Ibid).

Two major forms of bullying (ijime) have been identified in Japan: direct and indirect. Direct bullying includes the stereotypical physical and verbal attacks aimed at a student by a single bully or small group. In contrast, indirect bullying includes exclusionary behaviours designed to alienate a student from a group or whole classroom environment. Indirect bullying has been identified as a more common phenomenon in Japan (Kanestsuna). Such behaviour can be attributed to massive pressure to succeed because of the standardized testing process for secondary school. Students who did not excel academically were most frequently targeted. (Kawabata).

Overview of Programs in Place

The Japanese approach to anti-bullying has mainly focused on reforming and changing the education system (Ibid). One major goal was to cut back the curriculum and the number of days in instruction. School days in Japan were longer than in typical western systems. The Japanese system traditionally utilized entrance exams to restrict access to secondary education, and the pressures in such a system were described as “examination hell.” Reforms have removed exams as an access restricting device (Motoko). It was believed that this would lessen the stresses

placed upon students and therefore make the school environment a safer, more comfortable place for student who did not excel academically.

Another technique used in Japan was providing diaries to students as a tool for expressing themselves and their problems (Kawabata). These diaries can be used by teachers in much the same way as the Bullying Test and other programs with survey components to pinpoint target areas for change (Ibid).

The above techniques deal with both the school system and the victim, but not necessarily the bully. The traditional Japanese education system fostered the development of bullying behaviours by instilling conformist attitudes in youth which enabled them to justify their actions by blaming the victim, or the non-conformist. In more recent years, programs such as Olweus have been used in Japan to target and reform problem areas within the school (Kawabata).

In Japan, a sense of safety is sometimes provided to bullied students in the form of individual education programs. This separates the victim from the class into their own area. The school facilitates the student's separate education until they are deemed ready to return to the classroom environment. Correspondence teaching can also be used with a diary until the student is ready to return to the classroom. The diary enables a student to confront and work on the issues they face (Kawabata). This approach places a large portion of blame upon the victim and not the bully or group of bullies. Another weakness of this approach is that it does not deal with bullying as a larger social issue but as an individual problem.

United States of America

Social and School Environment Analysis

In the past few decades, America has witnessed several school violence incidents linked to bullying, including the famous Columbine case. The media also reported several incidents of bullying as a catalyst for suicide. Such cases include Jeremiah Lasater, Phoebe Prince and Alexis Pilkington (Ellis). Research has found that students who report being victims of bullying are at least twice as likely as other youths to report suicidal thoughts (Ibid). Many of the violent events in the US inspired new political movements and legislation. Every state has its own particular laws and regulations regarding bully issues, with varying levels of success (High "Making the Grade").

As another important social characteristic, it must be noted that the United States practices the cultural melting pot model in which cultural differences are de-emphasized. Assimilation is expected in both the classroom and society (High "Statements and Purpose"). In connection to this, racial segregation was historically practiced in some U.S. schools, as well as more broadly in society.

Overview of Programs in Place

Each state has its own anti-bullying legislation, which is monitored by the website Bully Police (<http://www.bullypolice.org/>). This website evaluates legislation in light of criteria which include: concrete definitions of bullying; emphasis upon individual student safety and not just a school-wide safe environment; and, the education and involvement of all participants in the education system, from school officials to parents and students. Another important criterion is ensuring that legislation is enforced within schools, an element which may seem obvious but is often overlooked. Often, deadlines are in place to ensure compliance with state-wide policy. Analysts for Bully Police also emphasize healing of victims. The definition of a victim is not narrow as there are various forms of bullying, victims, and consequences of bullying (Bully Police).

The states with the lowest rank according to the Bully Police website do not have anti-bullying legislation. These include Michigan and North and South Dakota. One notable low grade state is Minnesota, which received a C- . While the state does have internet and anti-cyber bullying laws, legislation remains limited to this area. It appears to simply be limited to the physical version of bullying and does not include any provisions for emotional bullying. There are no deadlines to enforce the legislation (Bully Police).

Florida scored an A++ on the website. This state's legislation includes deadlines for compliance, minimum requirements for actions to be taken, and the inclusion of all parties connected to the school system including the school board, other officials, parents and students. This state has various definitions for bully victims as well as the act of bullying and therefore covers several different behaviours. Legislation also dedicates a section to providing counselling for both victims and bullies. A new section includes information pertaining to internet and cyber bullying (Bully Police).

Another program employed in the United States is Bullies to Buddies, created by Izzy Kalman. This program takes a drastically different approach and focuses on changing the victim instead of the bully and bullying behaviour (Kalman). The base of this program is the idea that dependence upon the school system to deal with bullying issues creates individuals unable to cope with real world situations. Bullies to Buddies removes the victim state of mind and supports the stance that bullying situations will dissipate if ignored. Schools that have used this program provide positive reviews and praise the fact that it allows school officials to teach instead of investigate bullying complaints (Kalman). This differs from traditional anti-bullying programs which blame the bully and deal with the bullying behaviour. Some psychologists and anti-bully program experts do not support the theoretical basis for this program.

Canada and Alberta

Social and School Environment Analysis

The social climate in Canada is similar to that of the United States. Canadian history is plagued with racial and cultural segregation, as evidenced by residential schools which separated native students from their families and culture to integrate them into the dominant culture. Today, Canada practices a cultural mosaic in which different cultures and people are accepted for their differences and often even celebrated. This approach is not successful in every situation, but one manifestation of it in the education system is the minority language section of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This guarantees educational options in both of the official languages. The cultural mosaic model is not evident in every aspect of the education system, as observed in the celebration of main stream culture holidays without allowances for other cultures' unique celebrations.

The violence that plagued American schools has not been as widespread in Canada, but there have been instances that mirror events like Columbine. Most notably, a young teenager with a history as a victim to violent bullying entered a high school in Taber, Alberta and killed one student (CBC News). While violent incidents are not of the same magnitude as those found in American schools, intervention is still required to ensure a safe and stable educational environment for Canadian youth that caters to and accepts all cultural backgrounds with equal importance.

Overview of Programs in Place

Many of the programs that have developed in Canada in recent years are internet-based. Several websites are dedicated to sharing personal stories, including the B-Free website based in Alberta (B-Free). This website is run by a youth board and provides a wealth of information. It defines bullying in broad terms, offers personal stories to inspire youth, suggests ways in which youth can become involved to anti-bullying movements, and includes art and video contests and links to other websites with further information (Ibid). One of the sites that B-Free links to is Bully Free Alberta. This site provides workshops for parents, tip sheets for students who are mainly in their teen years, presentations for educators, and lists of events across the province (Government of Alberta).

YouCan.ca is a Canadian website which provides conflict resolution training for youth within the school environment and a variety of other settings. Other resources available on this website include workshops and guest speakers. Individuals, or "leaders," from the YouCan staff are able to tailor programs for individual classrooms or the wider school environment (YouCan). Another Canada-wide website is BullyingCanada.ca, which offers individual and group online chats. As of April 2010, this feature has 86 registered users. This organization can be contacted to find resources in the students' local area (Ibid). While all of the above web resources appear to be useful, they also may not be known or accessible by students. A more effective means of informing people about these resources is required.

The Olweus program has recently been implemented in an Edmonton area school. Talmud Torah Elementary and Junior High School started the program in September of 2009 and gained the support of many parents who observed the training programs offered to school officials (Maimann). The program at this school includes weekly classroom discussions and increasing sanctions as an individual student commits multiple bullying infractions (Ibid). Officials from the school reported to the news media that the goal of the program was to create an environment of “empathy and reliance” (Ibid) instead of simply blaming and punishing. This school became the forth in the Edmonton area to use this program (Ibid).

A program founded in the Edmonton area is Teasing and Bullying: Unacceptable Behaviour (TAB). This is a classroom-focused program that is modular and directed to older children, especially in grades four through six. The program employs several classroom and individual work assignments to encourage full engagement from students. Although this program was created with a focus on stuttering, it can be applied to individuals with a wide spectrum of differences. One component of this program that warrants special note is the creation of a contractual plan by the student to ensure true behaviour change. Situations are discussed and solutions are created by the students themselves. This dialogue fosters responsible and critical reasoning skills. Mediators are selected from the student population to work within the groups as situations are discussed. This incorporates the essential element of student leadership and increases the effectiveness of such activities.

Section III. Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposed Bill 206 was limited because it would not have engaged the whole school community. More grass-roots approaches that do not limit the powers of school officials are necessary to address all aspects of the bullying issue. While legislation is useful in insuring action by school officials, a comprehensive solution can only be created at the individual school level. Each country, province or state, and school is different, and programs of action must be tailored in accordance to each school’s social and environmental circumstances.

Two countries reviewed in this study are similar to Canada in social and educational climates, the United Kingdom and the United States. Observations from these two countries are especially relevant in the formulation of a more complete and efficient approach for Alberta schools.

Program elements implemented in the United Kingdom that are relevant to Alberta schools include:

- Programs that include youth and encourage participation, such as Bully Courts.
- Programs that use observations from students gathered through surveys, in order to pinpoint problem areas and allow for proper allocation of resources.
- Programs that encompass the entire school community.

Program elements implemented in the United States that are relevant to Alberta schools include:

- Legislation that enforces deadlines to ensure compliance without limiting powers of school officials.
- The use of websites and other media to monitor and report school progress.

The initiatives outlined above are only a sample of the programs available in each country. There are multiple methods available to address the social problem of bullying. These range from complete system changes observed in Japan and the legislative interventions of the United States to the website resources found in Canada. Programs such as TAB and Olweus offer direct classroom intervention with a focus on elementary and junior high school students.

Recommendations for anti-bullying programs in Alberta:

1. **School-wide programs** that require whole school community involvement, as seen in Bully Courts and the TAB program.
2. **Students must accept responsibility and ownership over bullying issues.** Student acceptance of a program is necessary for behaviour change.
3. **Students must be involved in the solution.** A solution can only be successful if the opinions of students are incorporated, such as the survey information collected in the Olweus program.
4. **Identify root social causes.** Bullying is not limited to the education system but is a rooted in wider social trends, as seen in Japan. A closer look at social causes is needed, as well as solutions to address these causes and their symptoms (such as bullying).

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