



Primary School Learners' Understanding and Experiences of Bullying

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Abstract

This study aims to explore learners' understanding of the different types of bullying as well as the extent of their exposure to various forms of bullying. As a result, the research question is: What is the primary school learners' understanding and experiences of bullying? This study is based on the Olweus Method (1985), which offers a theoretical framework that could assist the researcher to explore the roles of the bully, victim and bystander. The study has an initial quantitative method in which concepts are tested by means of a questionnaire for learners, followed by a qualitative method involving interviews with a focus group on their experiences in relation to bullying. During the analysis phase, the questionnaire responses were counted and percentages calculated to determine general trends. Thereafter, qualitative data was analysed systematically and organised into patterns and themes with the intention to propose some recommendations that might assist teachers in their efforts to create safe classrooms.

Keywords: Bullies, bullying, victims, power, bystanders.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a serious problem that has seen an increase in recent years in our schools (Brindley, 2010:2). According to Sullivan (2000:39-43) bullying is not a new phenomenon, because it has recently been recognised as one of the main concerns in schools internationally including Australia, United States, England, Norway and New Zealand. In South Africa, there has been an awareness of bullying in schools that have recognised more needs to be done to create a safe environment (Prinsloo, 2005:460). In a survey conducted by the Centre of Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in 2009, cyber bullying is also on the rise since one in five young South Africans admitted that they have bullied someone via text messaging and a quarter of them actually experienced bullying via text messaging (Baily, 2012:1).

Bullying can be defined as “the action of one child to hurt, threaten, intimidate, or embarrass another child” (Neser, Ovens, Van der Merwe, Morodi & Ladikos, and 2003:1). Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan (2004:5) states: “Bullying can be physical or non-physical and can include damage to property.”

They further describe that (1) physical bullying occur through being bitten, hit, kicked, punched, scratched or

any form of physical attack, (2) non-physical bullying can be verbal or non-verbal bullying and include abusive telephone calls, name-calling, racist remarks or teasing and spreading of untrue rumours or (3) damage to property can include ripping of clothing, damaging of school bags and books and destroying school property.

A challenge to helping victims of bullying is the concern of secrecy surrounding bullying in primary schools. Many victims are afraid to tell someone about the bullying incidences. Educators should aim to bring bullying into the open by raising awareness of bullying and by encouraging victims to seek for help by speaking up. It would be helpful to introduce rules to prevent bullying behaviour in schools and to continually communicate that it will not be accepted or tolerated (Prinsloo, 2005:457). School rules maintain order and build an environment of security and discipline within the school. It is therefore necessary to have school rules in place to make learners and parents aware of the school's educational aims.

The Department of Education (1998:6) makes provision for the protection of learners against physical and mental harm by stating that "every learner has the right to non-violence and the freedom and security of a person". Schools are legally recognized to make sure that these rights are fulfilled for every learner. The act of bullying directly impacts on these provisions in the SA School's Act. Learners' rights and freedom are threatened by bullies' aggressive behaviour that affects the victim's physical, social and emotional well-being.

Zeelie (2004:66-67) writes that schools are "accountable and need to be proactive in behaviour policy and implementation thereof". However, educators need training to develop and implement educational policies

and practices (Prinsloo, 2005:464). As soon as measures are put in place to put a stop to bullying, schools will be a much safer and pleasant environment for our learners. Educators should therefore be empowered to meet the challenges of bullying behaviour in such a way that it does not impact negatively or get in the way of the learning process.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

As a Grade 4 educator at a school on the Cape flats in the Western Cape, the researcher found that many of the Grade 4 learners were bullied by older learners. This prompted the researcher to investigate learners' understanding and experiences of bullying as the researcher is concerned that learners who physically attack others could inflict injury and cause psychological harm.

In a survey conducted at the researcher's primary school by a non-government organisation in South Africa, 89% of the learners indicated that they were physically assaulted by other learners, 56% indicated they bully others while only 11% of the learners reported bullying incidents to an educator (Anon, 2005:5). The fact that 11% reported the incidences is an indication that many learners in the school are suffering in silence while exposed to the trauma of bullying. As an educator the researcher is concerned that bullying is having a significant effect on more than half of the learners within the school.

In a study done in Gauteng among 207 scholars, Neser, et al, (2003:5) found that 60.9% of the learners reported to being bullied at school in 2002. According to the Centre for School Quality and Improvement, 90% of the learners at a Johannesburg school had been bullied the previous year (De Wet, 2005:83).

Further research confirms that only a small number of incidences of bullying are reported (Cullingford & Brown, 1995:3) and many victims keep their suffering a secret (Simanton, Hoover & Burthwick, 2000:4). Bullying flourishes on an element of secrecy as bullies threaten their victims with more bullying if they report the bullying incidents. According to The Antelope Vally Times, there is an atmosphere of “don’t talk about the bullying or don’t bring it up kind of thing” (Daly, 2012:1).

With this study the researcher looked forward to understanding the role of the bully, victim and bystander.

The researcher wanted to have a greater understanding of the extent of the learners’ exposure to various forms of bullying, be able to recognize and respond effectively to bullying behaviour, gained knowledge of new and effective strategies to reduce bullying behaviour when it occurs, learned how to empower learners to report incidences to prevent and stop bullying. Very little research on the topic has been done in South Africa and research on this topic has not been conducted in the Retreat area within the Western Cape. It is against this background that this study explores learners’ understanding and experiences of bullying.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY & RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to find out learners' experiences of the different types of bullying, explore the extent of their exposure to different forms of bullying and to examine what can be done to reduce bullying.

The research question for this study is: What is the primary school learners’ understanding and experiences of bullying? This main question is subsequently further subdivided to include learners’ understanding of various forms of bullying and understanding of the roles they have been exposed to.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Olweus Theory

A theoretical framework that underpins this study is the theory of the internationally recognized Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. The Olweus Bullying Prevention theory is a method for working towards reducing bullying behaviour in schools. By looking more closely at the roles of the bully, victim and bystander in the Olweus Method, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of these roles.

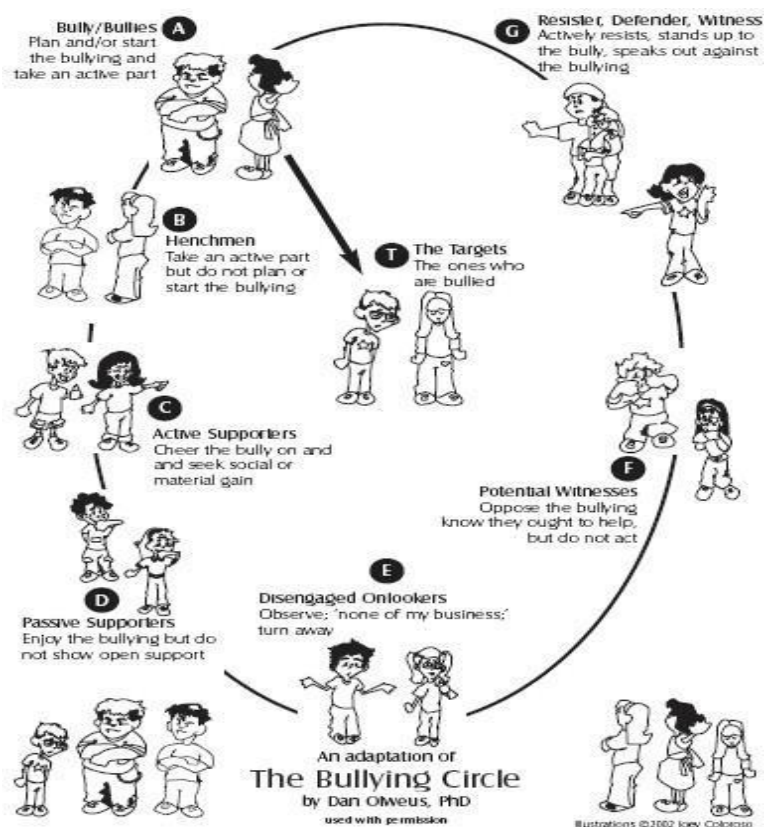


Figure 1. The Bullying Circle (Olweus, 2002)

Figure 1 outlines the "Bullying Circle" developed by Olweus in 2002 and it represents the different ways in which learners in a school are involved in or affected by bullying. It also describes how learners may be engaged in a bullying situation, as a victim, bully or bystander. The following role players are presented in the Olweus bullying circle.

A in the Olweus' bullying circle, refers to the bully as the one who starts the bullying as the perpetrator by taking an active leadership role. Olweus (2001:3-15) points out that bullies are often popular and like to be seen in a core group. They hardly ever bully on their own.

If they are part of a group, they prefer other bullies to be present to boost their confidence. Bullies in the bullying circle who take an active part in the bullying incident often blame others and show very little remorse for their behaviour.

B in the bullying circle shows that lead bullies often have followers or "henchmen" who usually do not start the bullying, but are helpful toward the bullying and participate in it. The 'henchmen' are therefore actively involved in the bullying incident. However, these henchmen as they are referred to in the bullying circle are not the ones who plan the bullying.

C points out the active supporters who would applaud the bullying and simultaneously look for social or material gain. This way, as active supporters they expand their group of friends.

D shows that there are also passive supporters in the bullying circle who support the bullying by enjoying and cheering the bullying on but do not join in. In this fashion, they watch the incident that occurs but do not openly support the bullies.

E refers to disengaged onlookers in the bullying circle. These onlookers are not together with the bullies because they play the role of the spectators in the bullying incident. They are the ones who will turn away because they feel that the argument or fight has nothing to do with them.

F shows that the bullying circle also includes potential witnesses who are against the bullying and who know they are suppose to help. However, these potential witnesses do not act.

G points out the resister who actively refuses to go along with the fighting or argument as well as the defender who stands up to the bully. Then there is the witness who does not hesitate to speak out against the bullying.

Bullying by the role players in the bullying circle may involve physical behaviour such as hitting, kicking, or stealing from the victim plus verbal abuse for example, name calling, insults, racist remarks or threats. It is against this background that the study deems it necessary to understand why learners bully and to identify the victims and the bystanders.

TYPES OF BULLYING

Through examining the bullying circle in the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and looking more closely at the roles of the bully, victim and bystander, the researcher found a much better understanding as to how the bully, victim and bystander operate in a bullying situation. It is therefore important for this study to include the various types of bullying because understanding the types can help in preventing bullying and stopping it before it takes place.

Direct Bullying

According to Boulton, Truman & Flemington (2002:354) and Lee (2004:10), direct bullying can be defined as “a relatively open attack on a victim that is carried out face to face and may include pushing, kicking and fighting”. Similarly, Woods & Wolke (2004:136) explain: “direct bullying includes direct aggressive acts such as hitting, kicking, pinching, taking belongings or money, pushing or shoving, or direct verbal abuse.” These are all ways that learners engage in as direct physical bullying. Another common type of direct bullying is verbal or spoken bullying. Verbal bullying involves teasing, mocking, name calling, threatening, and taunting by other learners (Beane 2000:56). Sharp, Thompson & Arora (2000:37-46) believes that this type of bullying

is also seen as “more hurtful in terms of the consequences including feelings of depression, low self-worth, loneliness, anxiety and severe difficulties with social relationships in adulthood”.

Indirect Bullying

Boulton et al., (2002:354) state that indirect bullying can be defined as “being more subtle and less direct and includes behaviour such as social isolation and exclusion from a group”. Emotional bullying occurs mostly as indirect bullying and it includes spreading rumours, gossiping about a learner and social exclusion (Shangkuan Koo, 2011:1). According to Butler, Kift & Campbell (2010: 85) cyber bullying is a type of bullying that occurs when the perpetrator intends to cause emotional or physical harm to the victim. He also suggests that the bully chooses “to hide his or her identity to place the victim in a powerless position where he or she is unable to fight back, unable to protect themselves as they feel hurt, vulnerable and embarrassed”. Cyber bullying is one of the foremost social media ways in which learners engage these days. However, cyber bullying did not form part of this study as the learners at the school surveyed in this study, did not allude to such activities. Therefore, cyber bullying was not included in this study in 2010. Learners in the school at the time of data collection in

March 2010 had little access to electronic media except at school where it is used under supervision. A shift has since emerged and cyber bullying has become more aggressive.

THE EXTENT OF BULLYING

It was mentioned in the introduction that there is an increase and a decrease of bullying behaviour in schools. In the 1990s two nationwide studies on the prevalence of bullying were conducted in Australian schools. One study was done by (Peterson & Rigby, 1999:483) with about 38 000 learners between the ages of 8 and 17 and another study was conducted by Cross et al (2009:181) with 7 418 school children between the ages of 9 and 14 years. The findings by Peterson & Rigby revealed that 23.5% of the learners reported being bullied at least once a week compared to Cross et al's findings of 16% who reported being bullied at least once a week. This shows a drop in the occurrence of bullying in the schools in Australia.

In a United States survey of over 5.7 million schoolchildren in Grades 6 to 10, almost 30% were bullies, a victim of bullying, or both. In a United States national survey, 13% reported they bully others, 11% reported being victims of bullies, and another 6% said that they both bullied others and were bullied themselves (Nansel et al. 2001:22). An additional study of American junior high and high school children, by Adair et al (2000), found that 81% of students witnessed bullying at their schools. Only 21% reported it to an adult. Other research reveals that around 30% of bullying victims do not tell (Rivers & Smith, 1994).

In a recent English study on bullying conducted by Osborn (2007) with 1 140 learners between the years 2002 and 2007, it was found that there is a decrease in bullying at the school. However, findings reported by Molcho, Craig, Due, Pickett, Harel-Fisch, Overpeck & the HBSC Bullying Writing Group (2009:1-10), showed an increase in bullying behaviour amongst peers between the ages of 11 and 15.

In a study conducted in Norway, of the 568 000 learners, regular targets of bullying (once a week), were 9% of the study's respondents and about 7% were bullying others regularly (Olweus, 1994:13). According to Olweus (1994:19) boys are expected to be more involved in bullying behaviour than girls and to be victims of bullies. On the other hand, Roland (2011) found in a survey of 1 200 to 5 000 Norwegian learners, that there is an increase of 6.2% in peer victimization (being bullied or bullying others) from Grades 5 to 9 between the years 2004 and 2008. However, Roland et al (2010:41-45) also confirms a decrease in peer victimization between the years 2001 and 2004.

In a recent study on bullying conducted by the University of South Africa's youth research unit, among 3 371 learners, it was found that 34% of the participants surveyed in Gauteng and of 901 learners surveyed in the Western Cape 30% were victims of bullying between the years of 2010 and 2012 (Louw, 2012:3).

In addition to this, Adam (2013:1) refers to cyber bullying as a kind of cruel behaviour of social media that has become the new playing field for the bullies. She writes that teenagers say that cyber bullying takes place on Twitter (23.8%), Face book (92.6%), My Space (17.7%) and on Instant messenger (15.2%). She further suggests that 65.8% of the learners respond online to the bullies while 35% confront the bullies in person. However, some learners prefer to avoid coming to school (15.4%) while 4.5% fight back with the bully. Statistics also reveal that 25% of the learners are victims of cyber bullying, two thirds witness cyber bullying online and only 10% of the parents are aware of the cyber bullying taking place at school.

The above studies show that bullying is fairly common across different countries in the world. From the literature, it is obvious that learners bully others directly or indirectly. This could include physical aggression, sexual harassment, social isolation, spreading rumours, etc. It is also important to take note that learners are not just victims to incidences of bullying, but also listeners and spectators of physical and verbal bullying.

Having the knowledge of the extent of bullying behaviour is one thing but understanding the factors that cause this problem is as important. Understanding the factors caused by the child's personality or by the environment can help in preventing bullying and stopping it when it does happen. Family factors may consist of violent behaviour toward the child by the parent. Individual factors may include certain personality styles and interpersonal behaviours. School factors refer to the social setting at school which have shown by this study's findings to play a key part in the occurrence of behaviour problems. Community conditions and attitudes where violence is widespread and children are exposed to aggressive behaviour can also encourage bullying.

THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING

According to Sullivan et al. (2004:6), victims of bullying may feel "angry, scared, depressed, disempowered, hateful, hurt, hopeless or vengeful". Bullying is a problem that can affect the ability of the victims to progress academically, socially and emotionally (Sullivan et al., 2004:18). Victims of bullying may feel insecure and

think there must be something wrong with them. They may become anxious, cautious, withdrawn, and isolated from their peers. They may even lose self-confidence and not want to go to school anymore. The effects bullying behaviour have on victims can be separated into two categories, namely the effects on the victim's physical health and the psychological effects on the victim. Effects of bullying on physical health will be discussed first. These include some physical effects such as frequent illnesses, headaches and migraines, sleeping disorder, problems with digestive system and study problems.

Physical effects on the victim

Physical effects of bullying on the victim refer to aggressive behaviour that can affect the learners physically. Physical aggression may lead to physical harm such as scratches, bruising or torn clothing. Frequent illnesses may include viral infections, especially flu and fever, colds, cough or chest infections. Victims may complain about headaches and migraines or have sleeping disorders by "having nightmares, waking up early and more tired." Another physical effect of bullying on the victim according to Garrett (2003:68) is that victims experience problems with their digestive system by having irritable bowel syndrome and stomach aches. As a result of poor concentration victims also experience study problems. Based on this, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, 1993: 2001b) as a method for reducing bullying behaviour in schools may be a way to stop physical bullying from taking place.

Psychological effects on the victim

Psychological bullying can be defined as something that happened to the victim emotionally on purpose or with malicious intent. Victims may experience intellectual constraints as a result of continual emotional stress and therefore victims may show a decline in grades. Another psychological effect on the victim is that of fear for e.g. fear of the bus ride to and from school or fear of going to the bathroom or less supervised areas at the school. Garrett (2003:69) claims that victims have spoken about bullying as leaving a person "bruised" inside. According to Garrett, victims who are emotionally affected in this way may cause "hesitation in victims in taking social, intellectual, emotional or vocational risks as learners or adults". Psychological effects can last for years if it is not addressed. According to Garrett "the loss in self-esteem lasts all the way into their adult lives". Psychological effects may include having problems with development of self-esteem. This may cause failing to develop self-esteem and may affect the learning process of the victims. In view of this, it is important for this study to focus on the school's code of conduct to promote appropriate behaviour within our schools.

SCHOOL CODE OF CONDUCT

A school's code of conduct outlines procedures for maintaining supportive and safe environments that cater for all learners. The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996), Section 8(1) requires the School Governing Bodies to draw up a code of conduct for learners after discussions with learners, parents and educators. In terms of Section 8(5), a code of conduct has to make provision to take care of the interests of the learner and any other party involved in disciplinary procedures. To maintain a quality school environment that is safe and bully-free, Zeelie (2004:29) proposes a code of conduct as an important instrument.

It is important that schools provide all learners with the school's code of conduct to make sure that learners follow the rules that they have seen, discussed and agreed to. A school's code of conduct encourages good behaviour and therefore describes what an offence is and what the consequences for offences are (Bray, 2005:134). Everyone will then know what actions will be taken against them for certain offences. This study deems it important to highlight the use of a school code of conduct as it enables schools to include an antibullying policy in which schools can state clearly that bullying is taken seriously and that consequence will be applied should it happen.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed method approach

The researcher has decided to combine two paradigms and use a mixed method research approach. By combining both paradigms, the researcher is able to make sense of the learner's experiences of the different kinds of bullying as he or she describes it, and compare learners' accounts of bullying with figures gained from quantitative research. More detailed experiences of the different types of bullying was generated in the interview session to gauge learners' understanding of the terminology and obtain insight into their personal experiences. Using both methods in this study was to provide better understanding and answers than using only one research method.

Piloting

A pilot test was administered at two different sessions. The researcher first piloted the questionnaire with an Intermediate Phase group at a school which did not form part of the sample. The idea of the pilot was to determine how long respondents took to complete questions, whether all questions and instructions were clear and whether to take away any items which did not generate usable data. The pilot was successful as nothing needed to be changed on the questionnaire.

Sampling

To answer the research question, the researcher identified all the Intermediate Phase learners at a Primary School in the Western Cape. The total sample comprises 296 learners, which includes 78 Grade 4 learners, 119 Grade 5 learners and 99 Grade 6 learners. These learners are most likely familiar and informed and therefore information rich on the issue of bullying. The criterion for inclusion in this study was therefore that the participants could relate to experience of bullying, either as a victim, bully, or witness. McMillan & Schumacher (2006:326) state that "criterion samples are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating."

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Questionnaires

The first instrument used was a questionnaire to explore learners' experiences of bullying and to what extent they have been exposed to various forms of bullying. To conduct the questionnaires, arrangements were made with the identified school, learners, educators and principal. The questionnaires were administered to the learners by their teachers in Grades 4 to 6 during a regular classroom period. It took place in their natural school setting: in their classrooms where the questions were carefully compiled in the language of instruction, English or Afrikaans. The process was arranged for the 7th of September 2009 and was written in the Reading period so that the Intermediate Phase learners could fill out the questionnaires. Learners used pencils that were provided for them to complete the questions. Teachers read the instructions on the questionnaires to the learners. It was agreed that completed questionnaires be sent to the principal's office for collection by the researcher.

The researcher decided to make use of a closed response Likert scale format where the following item response selections were provided: (1) "Everyday/always; (2) once/twice a week; (3) once/twice a month; (4) once/twice a year and (5) never". Learners could choose between these predetermined responses on the questionnaire. This study found the Likert scale useful as it allows the study get an overall extent of the learners' experiences of bullying. Learners were asked to write their names on the questionnaires to enable the researcher to select a focus group for the interview. However, learners' names are not revealed in this report, to maintain confidentiality.

Focus Group Interview

The second instrument used in this study was a semi-structured group interview. The interview was conducted in a classroom at the research site on the 25th of March 2010 with a focus group of six learners who were selected depending on the frequency of their responses in the questionnaire. An even mix of bully, victim and bystander were selected in relation to the category "how others treat you" on the questionnaire. In this category, these learners mainly pointed out that they were 'constantly' bullied either by being, hit, kicked, pushed, teased, called names or rumours were spread about them. Thus, these learners will be able to share experiences of bullying they were involved in.

The focus group consisted of two boys and four girls: two girls in Grade 4, one boy and one girl in Grade 5, and one boy and one girl in Grade six. Respondents 1 and 2 are Grade 4 learners; respondents 3 and 4 are Grade 5 learners and respondents 5 and 6 are Grade 6 learners. Interestingly, a mix of gender (girls and boys) indicated in the questionnaire that they are being bullied mostly at school. Their responses were transcribed verbatim.

The interview process was explained beforehand to the principal and the staff and with the permission of the

principal a recording device was used. The researcher initially experienced difficulty completing the interviews with the focus group due to a taxi strike and the H1N1 Flu (swine flu) scare during the third term of 2009. On the day of the interview, the process was also explained to the learners on how they were identified to be part of the interview process. A recording device was deemed necessary to check that data from the interview is accurately represented. The researcher managed the process to ensure confidentiality.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this study deals with a potentially sensitive emotional topic, the researcher endeavoured to be as ethical and considerate of respondents as possible. To comply with ethical standards, the researcher sought approval from WCED and from the selected school to conduct the research before collecting any data. All learners and their parents were of all the aspects of the research and consent was detained to conduct the study with the learners at the school. The researcher has taken care to conduct the research and present the findings in an ethically considerate manner.

Before starting with the study, approval to conduct the research at the school was sought from the school principal, the parents and from the WCED before collecting the data. The researcher met with the principal and the staff in the staffroom to inform them of the aims of the study and how the school could benefit from it. Both the principal and the staff were very enthusiastic about the idea of the bullying research since it was a problem at the school.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher made sure that the information collected is true and represents an accurate picture that is transparent and clear so that the researcher can undertake the same method and produce similar results. The researcher tested the issue of reliability by using a pre-test method in this study. The pilot test (questionnaire) was conducted with all Intermediate Phase learners from another school who did not form part of the study. The researcher evaluated the scores of both Intermediate Phase groups to test for consistency and repeatability of answers.

The issue of validity is tested by using a semi-structured interview method with a focus group to answer the sub-research questions. These questions pertain to learners' experiences of different types of bullying and the extent to which learners have been exposed to various forms of bullying. Using this measure by delving into the learners' experiences of bullying, the researcher was able to reach valid findings and conclusions. As a result, the researcher determines whether the test appears to measure what it is intended to measure. If it works, the test is valid at this point and may be inspected further to find out whether the test is valid and may be used in other contexts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data in this study is analysed by using descriptive statistics which provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. The responses were counted and percentages were calculated to determine general trends. All analysis were analysed using the SPSS 17 computer software package, a statistical data analysis tool.

In this study, accepted levels of significance reported are as follows: The five per cent level of significance includes all chi-square values where $p = 0.05$. A chi-square contingency test was done in this study to see if there is any statistical significant difference in the responses by the three grades (Grades 4, 5 and 6). A p-value corresponding to the chi-square value less than 0.05 shows that there is a statistically significant association between two variables e.g. boys being bystanders or girls being perpetrators of name calling. In contrast, probability value greater than 0.05 shows no significant difference or association.

With the assistance of a statistical analyst, the researcher systematically organised the data into themes and patterns using frequency tables. Some notes were taken to record perceptions of the learners and recollections of how they behaved and spoke during the interviews. The researcher listened to audio-recordings to analyse the focus group data and stored it in a computer file. The transcriptions were then given to an independent colleague who checked for any inaccuracies. The results are presented objectively summarizing the findings, so that respondents will be able to understand the material in order to increase the probability of acceptance of the conclusions.

DISCUSSION

Summary On Demographics of Learners

Table 1. Grade in school (Basis Information)

Grade		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4A	39	13.2	13.2
	4B	39	13.2	26.4
	5A	40	13.5	39.9
	5B	40	13.5	53.4
	5C	39	13.2	66.6
	6A	13	4.4	70.9
	6A (Afr)	15	5.1	76.0
	6B	35	11.8	87.8
	6C	36	12.2	100.0
Total		296	100.0	

Of the learners who participated in the study, 26.4% (78) were in Grade 4 and completed the questionnaire at the time of this study. Of the rest of the learners, 40.2% (119) were in Grade 5 and 33.5% (99) in Grade 6. Some of the learners in Grade 6A answered the questions in Afrikaans and the rest of the learners in all Grades completed it in English. At the time of this study the ages of respondents ranged from 9 to 14 years. The gender distribution of the learners was almost even, representing (50.8%) females and (49.2%) males.

Summary On Being Bullied

A basic statistical analysis was undertaken to gather information from learners who reported how often they have been bullied at school. Forms of bullying included direct and indirect bullying such as being hit, kicked, pushed, teased, spreading of rumours or name calling or teasing, while being deprived of their money, snacks or lunch was also investigated. Response options for the first few questions ranged from 1 (every day) to 5 (never) in the category 'how others treat you'. There were some questions which not all learners completed. Responses 1 and 2 have been combined in certain tables to get a significant indication of the frequency of bullying experiences in the school. The results have been computed as percentages only of those who

responded.

In particular, the researcher wanted to ascertain if the younger children (Grade 4s) are bullied more than the older learners (Grade 6s), as it appeared as such from experience in the school.

Table 2. Being hit

Q6. How often do other learners bully you by hitting you in school?		Grade Recoded			Total
		4	5	6	
Every day Or <u>Always</u>	Count	14	17	12	43
	% <u>within</u> Grade	18.4	15.0	12.4	15.0
	Recoded	%	%	%	%
Once or twice a week	Count	7	25	21	53
	% <u>within</u> Grade	9.2%	22.1	21.6	18.5
	Recoded		%	%	%
Once or twice per month	Count	6	5	14	25
	% <u>within</u> Grade	7.9%	4.4%	14.4	8.7
	Recoded			%	%
Once or twice per year	Count	4	16	15	35
	% <u>Within</u> Grade	5.3%	14.2	15.5	12.2
	Recoded		%	%	%
Never	Count	45	50	35	130
	% <u>within</u> Grade	59.2	44.2	36.1	45.5
	Recoded	%	%	%	%
Total	Count	76	113	97	286
	% <u>within</u> Grade	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Recoded	%	%	0%	0%

As a group, 34% of Grade 6s are hit daily and/or more than once a week while only 27.6% of Grade 4s are hit every day and at least once or twice a week.

Table 3. Being kicked

Q7. How often do other learners bully you by kicking you school?	Grade Recoded			Total
	4	5	6	
Every day Or Always Count	13	11	9	33
% within Grade Recoded	16.9%	9.7%	9.6%	11.6%
Once or twice a week Count	9	24	21	54
% within Grade Recoded	11.7%	21.2%	22.3%	19.0%
Once or twice per month Count	4	9	15	28
% within Grade Recoded	5.2%	8.0%	16.0%	9.9%
Once or twice per year Count	6	18	16	40
% within Grade Recoded	7.8%	15.9%	17.0%	14.1%
Never Count	45	51	33	129
% within Grade Recoded	58.4%	45.1%	35.1%	45.4%
Total Count	77	113	94	284
% within Grade Recoded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

28.6% of Grade 4 learners versus 30.9% of Grade 5 and 31.9% Grade 6 learners are collectively bullied daily and/or more than once a week by being kicked at school. However, the incidence of never being kicked changes among grades, evening out to:

- 58.4% in Grade 4;
- 45.1% in Grade 5; and
- 35.1% in Grade 6.

Table 4. Giving up lunch, snacks or money

13 . How often have you been bullied into giving up your lunch, snacks or money?		Grade Recoded			Total
		4	5	6	
Every day Or Always	Count	6	13	11	30
	% within Grade Recoded	7.9%	11.8%	11.8%	10.8%
Once or twice a week	Count	5	8	11	24
	% within Grade Recoded	6.6%		11.8%	
Once or twice per month	Count	1	2	1	4
	% within Grade Recoded		7.3%		8.6%
Once or twice per year	Count	2	7	8	17
	% within Grade Recoded	2.6%	6.4%	8.6%	6.1%
Never	Count	62	80	62	204
	% within Grade Recoded	81.6%	72.7%	66.7%	73.1%
Total	Count	76	110	93	279
	% within Grade Recoded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		%		%	%

Significantly more Grade 6s (23.6%) are forced into giving possessions to bullies daily and/or more than once a week than Grade 4s (14.5%). This shows that bullying is not just a problem of older children targeting younger ones, but for a number of types of bullying measured in this study, it is actually worse in Grade 6.

SUMMARY ON BEING A BULLY

Chi-square analyses indicated no significant difference in the way that learners in different Grades bully others by hitting them, kicking them, pushing them. Also no significant difference in the way that learners bully others into giving up their lunch, snacks or money and places and times they bullied others at school, as the probability value (P value) is greater than 0.05.

Table 5. Hitting them

15. How often do you bully others by hitting them in school?		Grade Recoded			Total
		4	5	6	
Every day Or Always	Count	6	11	9	26
	% within Grade Recoded	8.0%	10.5%	9.8%	9.6%
Once or twice a week	Count	14	16	13	43
	% within Grade Recoded	18.7%	15.2%	14.1%	15.8%
Once or twice per month	Count	4	4	6	14
	% within Grade Recoded	5.3%	3.8%	6.5%	5.1%
Once or twice per year	Count	3	16	7	26
	% within Grade Recoded	4.0%	15.2%	7.6%	9.6%
Never	Count	48	58	57	163
	% within Grade Recoded	64.0%	55.2%	62.0%	59.9%
Total	Count	75	105	92	272
	% within Grade Recoded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The probability value (P value) is greater than 0.05 so there is no significant difference in the way that learners bully others by hitting them at school. However, the probability value of the times and places where others were bullied, is less than 0.05 which means there is a statistical difference.

Table 6. Places and times bullying others

Q21 The places and times where you have bullied other learners?		Grade Recoded			Total
		4	5	6	
Count		9	10	4	23
on the way to school	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	18.8%	11.6%	5.5%	11.1%
in the toilets	Count	2	4	5	11
	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	4.2%	4.7%	6.8%	5.3%
in the corridors	Count	4	5	10	19
	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	8.3%	5.8%	13.7%	9.2%
during lessons	Count	1	12	15	28
	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	2.1%	14.0%	20.5%	13.5%
on the way home	Count	24	32	32	88
	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	50.0%	37.2%	43.8%	42.5%
on the bus	Count	8	23	7	38
	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	16.7%	26.7%	9.6%	18.4%
Total	Count	48	86	73	207
	% <u>within</u> Grade Recoded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

One can conclude that the highest incidences of bullying occur off the school premises e.g. on the way to school, on the way home and on the bus. 50% of Grade 4 learners reported they have bullied other learners on their way home while 37.2% in Grade 5 and 43.8% in Grade 6 indicated that they have bullied others on their way home.

During lessons there is also a bigger percentage in Grade 6 (20.5%) than in Grade 4 (2.1%) of bullying taking place during lessons.

SUMMARY ON BEING A BYSTANDER

Seen others being hit

Table 7. See others been hit

23	Grade Recoded			Total
. How often have you seen another learner bully others by hitting them?	4	5	6	
Every day Or Always Count % within Grade Recoded	42 55.3%	47 43.9%	52 56.5%	141 51.3%
Once or twice a week Count % within Grade Recoded	8 10.5%	26 24.3%	17 18.5%	51 18.5%
Once or twice per Count month % within Recoded Grade	3 3.9%	6 5.6%	5 5.4%	14 5.1%
Once or twice per year Count % within Grade Recoded	7 9.2%	10 9.3%	5 5.4%	22 8.0%
Never Count % within Grade Recoded	16 21.1%	18 16.8%	13 14.1%	47 17.1%
Total Count % within Grade Recoded	76 100.0 %	107 100.0 %	92 100.0 %	275 100.0 %

In the category “what you have seen or heard”, the responses to the first question “How often have you seen others being hit?” reveal that there is a statistically significant difference by Grade as to how often learners have seen another learner bully others by hitting them daily and/or more than once a week:

Primary School Learners' Understanding and Experiences of Bullying

- 75% in Grade 6;
- 68.2% in Grade 5; and
- 65.8% in Grade 4.

Looking at the results, one can conclude that Grade 6s has seen others being hit more often than the other two Grades.

Another difference occurs where learners indicated they have never seen others being hit. The incidences reported represent:

- 21.1% in Grade 4;
- 16.8% in Grade 5; and
- 14.1% in Grade 6

Compared to the other two Grades, the results show that mostly Grade 4s have never seen others being hit.

Heard about others being teased

Table 8. Hear others been teased

Q24. How often have you heard another learner bully other by teasing them?		Grade Recoded			Total
		4	5	6	
Every day or always	Count	44	42	52	138
	% Within Grade Recoded	58.7%	38.9%	56.5%	50.2%
Once or twice a week	Count	3	23	17	43
	% Within Grade Recoded	4.0%	21.3%	18.5%	15.6%
Once or twice per month	Count	4	9	3	16
	% Within Grade Recoded	5.3%	8.3%	3.3%	5.8%
Once or twice per year	Count	5	8	6	19
	% Within Grade Recoded	6.7%	7.4%	6.5%	6.9%
Never	Count	19	26	14	59
	% Within Grade Recoded	25.3%	24.1%	15.2%	21.5%
Total	Count	75	108	92	275
	% Within Grade Recoded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The responses to the second question “How often have you heard about others being teased?” reveal that there is a statistically significant difference by Grade as to how often learners have heard about another learner being teased daily and/or more than once a week:

Primary School Learners' Understanding and Experiences of Bullying

- 75% in Grade 6;
- 62.7% in Grade 4; and
- 60.2% in Grade 5

The older learners (Grade 6s) are the ones who mostly heard about others being teased.

What you have done

When looking at the results for this section, it was found that most learners indicated that they have reported incidences to teachers:

- 48.5% in Grade 5;
- 44.3% in Grade 4; and
- 39.8% in Grade 6

Table 9. What have you done?

Q25 What have you done when you have heard or seen another learner being teased or called names in the school?		Grade Recoded			Total
		4	5	6	
report the incident to a teacher	Count		48		114
	% within Grade Recoded	31 44.3%	48.5%	35 39.8%	44.4%
walk away and ignored it	Count	10	9	18	37
	% within Grade Recoded	14.3%	9.1%	20.5%	14.4%
I helped the bully	Count	2	1	3	6
	% within Grade Recoded	2.9%	1.0%	3.4%	2.3%
helped the person being bullied	Count	20	25	15	60
	% within Grade Recoded	28.6%	25.3%	17.0%	23.3%
I laughed	Count	1	5	5	11
	% within Grade Recoded	1.4%	5.1%	5.7%	4.3%
I watched	Count	6	11	12	29
	% within Grade Recoded	8.6%	11.1%	13.6%	11.3%
Total	Count	70	99	88	257
	% within Grade Recoded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Grade 5s mostly reports an incident to a teacher compared to Grade 4s and Grade 6s. Of significance, is a few who indicated that they actually laughed and watched the incident happening instead of reporting or helping the victim. Others walked away and ignored the bullying:

- 20.5% in Grade 6;
- 14.3% Grade 4; and
- 9.1% in Grade 5

The Grade 6s show a higher percentage of walking away and ignoring the bullying.

SUMMARY ON THE INTERVIEW

A focus group interview was conducted with six Intermediate Phase learners, who were selected depending on the frequency of their responses, to delve into their understanding of bullying experiences. An even mix of bully, victim and bystander were selected in relation to the category “how learners treat you” on the questionnaire. Respondents are as follows:

- Respondent 1 and 2 (two girls in Grade 4)
- Respondents 3 and 4 (one girl and one boy in Grade 5)
- Respondents 5 and 6 (one girl and one boy in Grade 6)

The interview with the focus group included aspects to research different types of bullying and learners' understanding of being a victim, bully or witness. Before the research was conducted, it was assumed that the older children bully the younger children more than they are bullied themselves. Respondents confirmed this perception in the interview, reporting that the older children bully the younger ones with much greater frequency. The Grade 6s (36.1%) are hit less frequently while the Grade 4s (59.2%) are hit more often. Of significance is the fact that the main kind of bullying that occurred was that of physical assault by mostly boys and name calling by mostly girls. Pushing occurred mostly of all the physical bullying. There is also an indication that many victims are suffering in silence because only some of the learners (44.3%) reported the name calling, the threats and the teasing to an educator or a parent.

While teachers are in a position to assist, it appears during the interview that learners only reported serious incidences where learners are physically injured and less serious cases are kept silent. Learners felt more comfortable telling their parents hoping they would resolve the problem of bullying at school. Parents on the other hand, contacted the school principal to sort out the bullying behaviour at the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations in this study includes suggestions to an anti-bullying policy, strategic planning on bullying, suggestions to manage a classroom, suggestions for working with a victim and bully, peer responsibility, token economy and a whole school approach.

Anti-bullying policy suggestions

To guarantee the protection of all learners within the school it is expected (South African School's Act 84 of 1996) that every school develop a safety policy which includes bullying as a subsection. This study wishes to suggest that schools insert an anti-bullying clause as part of the schools code of conduct which schools could use when they draw up a safety policy. Engaging in an anti-bullying policy formulation at the school where the study was conducted is an important method of reducing bullying behaviour within the school. The purpose

of an anti-bullying policy is to help establish a safe and happy environment by providing clear rules and procedures for dealing with bullying remarks on a regular, consistent and ongoing basis (Squelch et al., 2000). Learners have the right to learn in a safe, secure environment that is free of bullying.

The teachers, learners, and parents need to plan to create a community in which everybody feels valued and protected. They also need to aim to protect children against bullying and racist remarks and provide support for the victims, bullies, bystanders and parents. Schools and classrooms need to establish and stick to rules as outlined in the anti-bullying policy above. The key for educators is to realize that we are all members of a particular ethnic, race, various class, gender, as well as sexual identity. These factors make us diverse and unique as in the case of this school where the study was conducted. Educators therefore need assistance in dealing with, not just bullying and racist remarks, but with diversity because they must overcome the challenge of educating learners. Developing and implementing a no-bullying policy sends a loud and clear message that bullying comments will not be put up with and that the school is a bully-free zone. This will ensure a safe environment for learners. The carrying out of an anti-bullying policy, developed together with the school community, can assist the school to monitor and prevent this kind of behaviour.

Strategic planning on bullying

The South African Child Gauge (2009/2010:25) clearly states that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 Section 12(1) (c) proposes “everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, including the right to be free from all forms of violence” (Smith & Pendlebury, 2010). To achieve this ideal, educators, learners and parents should all be involved and be prepared to work towards developing and implementing strategies to prevent misbehaviour. This can be done through strategic planning. Suggestions for effective implementation of strategies to reduce bullying behaviour at this school with the necessary monitoring of activities and evaluation strategies are reflected in

Table 10. Bullying Strategy

Activity	Responsible Person	Outcome
□ Arrange sessions for Grade 6 learners to be trained as monitors and prefects to assist with reducing of bullying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 6 Educators • Grade 7 Educators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform parents • Assist Grade 6 learners in implementation of Sessions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a committee to plan awareness and prevention of bullying. • Parent meeting to discuss School's Code of Conduct. Monitor learner behaviour. 	□ Principal and all Staff members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve staff, parents, and learners. • Inform School Governing Body and parents. • Form Home-school relations.
□ Group counselling sessions for self-esteem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educator Support Team Co-ordinator • Social Worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform all educators and parents • Monitoring of sessions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop on developing a whole school positive behaviour approach. • Implementation of approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCED officials • Bullying Behaviour Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide educators, parents and caregivers with skills to assist with bullying behaviour. • Monitoring implementation of whole school approach.
□ Evaluation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal • All educators 	□ Evaluating strategies

Suggestions to manage a classroom

Another concern was found in this study that teachers often leave their classrooms unsupervised. Suggestions teachers could use on how to manage their classrooms effectively is to plan the classroom procedure and atmosphere ahead of time to reduce or prevent bullying or discipline problems before they occur. Teachers who are not in their classes and not on playground duty give learners the opportunity for bullying behaviour.

During the interview, respondents revealed that they are intimidated by bullies while the teacher is out of the classroom. The bullies say they will bully the others after school if their name is written on the board, implying that they spoke in the classroom while the teacher was out. For this reason, it would be a good idea to train monitors and prefects (refer to bullying strategy timeline) to assist with bullying behaviour not just in class but in the toilets, the passages or on the playground during break.

Before the lessons begin, teachers could avoid any difficulties by ensuring learners are promptly engaged in useful activities. If the teacher is occupied with putting up displays, distributing materials and searching for equipment there is ample time for social bullying to occur such as chatting and making fun of someone. This builds up disorder and leads to the delay of beginning the lesson. It is therefore important for the teacher to be in the classroom before the lessons begin.

Suggestions for working with a victim and a bully

It is important for this study to highlight a few suggestions for working with a victim and a bully because learners pointed out the problems of bullying they are faced with issue on and off the school premises. Instead of the staff ignoring the learners' complaints or 'passing the buck' to the SGB, HOD and the principal, victims could be encouraged to take a stand and speak openly about the bullying incident by describing the incident in detail and to always remember to report it. Victims could also be encouraged to think of ways to protect themselves, to always shout for help or refuse to fight and to keep away from dangerous situations.

Respondent 1 revealed that some learners are so traumatised and suffer in isolation to the point where they feel like killing themselves, but that other learners (bystanders), feel sorry for the victims of bullying and try to support them. Victims could be taught to remain calm, focused and bystanders should be taught to help or support the victims by reporting the incident. Teachers and parents could encourage victims to seek assistance and speak up and could try to ensure them that they will be protected from further harm. A major challenge for teachers to helping victims of bullying is to unveil the aspect of secrecy surrounding bullying. Fear, embarrassment, and shame make many victims hesitant to tell their teachers or parents about bullying incidences as revealed in the interview results.

When working with a bully, teachers could encourage bullies to treat others with respect. When bullying occurs, the educator could remove the bully immediately to a time-out corner in the classroom from the bullying situation and investigate the incident. The teacher then reminds the bully of the consequences set out in the school's code of conduct. The incident is then to be recorded in an incident book. Thereafter, the educator could try to change the behaviour of the bully with positive reinforcement strategies. All the bullies, followers, defenders and bystanders are to be involved in the intervention plan. The educator could then suggest counselling if necessary or use developmental programmes to help the bullies. Contact with the parents could be made to inform them of the incidences to ensure the school is a bully-free zone.

Token economy programme

Another intervention strategy that educators can implement with younger learners is the *token economy programme* (Burke, 1992:100). A learner earns tokens for displaying a wide variety of appropriate classroom behaviours including task completion, responding to instructions and showing respect to others. Tokens can be used at a later time to buy books, pens, pencils, etc. In addition the learner can lose tokens for displaying disruptive behaviours. Each learner can earn, spend or lose tokens in an individualized manner and therefore

a token economy programme can be a valuable method for promoting positive behaviour and decrease negative behaviour. Considerable planning is necessary that such a programme is successful and maintained.

The Whole School Approach

A Whole School Approach in the form of training workshops can be run by the WCED to prevent bullying behaviour. This approach brings together behavioural and emotional development strategies from a range of approaches to provide educators, parents and caregivers with skills that can assist when working with children who present bullying behaviour. Topics discussed in workshops include: The Conflict Cycle, Self-esteem and behaviour, Code of Conduct and Developing a whole school positive behaviour approach. These workshops are aimed at guiding educators and parents in preventing bullying or challenging behaviour in schools and in the home environment and can therefore also be incorporated into the School Improvement Plan at our school.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A whole community approach is needed to address bullying behaviour. Teachers, learners, and parents could all be involved in developing and implementing a plan they agreed on. Research could therefore look into teachers' understanding and implementation of useful strategies in preventing bullying behaviour in primary schools.

It would also be useful to research whether all primary and high schools do in fact have an anti-bullying policy in place at their schools.

I would also suggest that researchers explore the prevalence of the secrecy element of bullying in the Western Cape primary schools and reasons why victims are afraid to tell. As mentioned already, the earlier that bullying problems are recognised and addressed in constructive ways, the greater the chances of helping learners get out of victim, bystander and bullying roles.

CONCLUSION

Having looked at the phenomenon of bullying, the researcher identified the following issues that warrant attention in the study: (1) educators often seem unaware of bullying; there seems to be (2) a lack of interest among parents and school staff to address bullying and it seems (3) learners don't know they have a responsibility to report or stop bullying. This means that all stakeholders at schools must participate in drawing up an effective intervention plan that will focus on aggressive learner behaviour within schools.

Reflecting on the responses of the questionnaire with Intermediate Phase learners, it is clear that bullying is a matter of concern and cannot be ignored. Based on the evidence, learners indicated that others were directly or indirectly bullying them as well as learners who admitted to being bullies. Of significance is the fact that the main kinds of bullying that occurs among learners are physical assault (53.2%) and name calling (36.1%). There is also an indication that many victims in the school are suffering in silence because only some of the learners reported the bullying incidences to an educator or a parent.

The victims were exposed to the trauma of being bullied while others also mentioned that they themselves have bullied someone at school. Some of these bullies were previously or unwittingly victims. These incidences might play a role in them becoming a bully. Influences from social networks, gangs or groups in the community may also contribute to learners becoming bullies. Violence at home and in the community and in the media also has a negative impact on the learner's behaviour because they model what they see and hear most of the time.

On the other hand, a victim may see bullying as an unpleasant experience while the bully may say that he or she is "only teasing". Teasing, pushing or kicking is only regarded as playing when friends act in a way where they have fun together without hurting each other physically. Bullying, occurs when children are not friends and they act in a way where there is a desire to hurt each other. When the victim does not take pleasure in the playful act, it becomes bullying to the victim.

"Defenders" as they are referred to in the Bullying Circle, do not like bullying and therefore try to help their peers by reporting it. While educators are in a position to assist learners, it appears that learners only reported serious incidences where learners are physically attacked or threatened while emotional and verbal abuse are regarded as less serious and kept silent.

An intervention plan or program that involves all the learners, parents, and school staff could assist to ensure that all learners can learn in an environment that is safe and secure. The following possible solutions are recommended to prevent or reduce bullying at school:

- Teachers can work with learners in class to develop rules against bullying.
- A questionnaire can be distributed to the learners to help them become aware of the bullying problem.
- Establish an anti-bullying committee consisting of staff, parents and learners to plan awareness and prevention activities.
- Different forms of bullying must be identified and described.
- Involve parents who will assist educators to monitor and supervise during interval.
- Appoint learners as monitors to watch for bullying during intervals Train the monitors in what to look out for and to whom to report.
- Educators should establish a positive, friendly, and trusting relationship with the class and each individual child to ensure that victims will report incidences of bullying.
- Ensure that bullying is mentioned in the school's code of conduct.
- Have group counselling sessions to address issues such as self-esteem.

As a researcher I strongly feel that educators need to protect the learners as well as themselves. To ensure this they need to have the necessary policies in place. Each school should compile a written safety policy, which must be made available to every educator and publicly displayed to create and maintain a safe, risk-free environment for learners and staff. Schools could arrange parent workshops, supply resources, and make

genuine attempts to engage parents in important decisions related to diversity education. Educators therefore need to be provided with the tools they need to develop and implement educational and officially valid policies and practices. Once this process is well underway, we stand a better chance in keeping learners safe and secure.

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