appears to have had some advantages in providing a focus for change and periodic points for the agency and the family to 'take stock' of what has been achieved, many families have required a longer service than this.

One of the advantages of internal agency evaluation is that they know the 'inside story' and can explore issues which an external evaluator might miss. For example, this evaluation explores the difficult issues associated with sharing of information about families across staff from different professional backgrounds. However, one of the disadvantages of an internal evaluation is a tendency to accept the agency and funding source limitations on the program model as 'givens' and at times one can clearly detect a marked frustration with families who use more than their 'allotted' episode of intervention and a similar frustration with staff who offer a family a second episode. This also reflects common differences between practitioners and researchers in program evaluation.

It is clear that two years after it was established, the program is facing the challenge of increasing numbers of referrals and an inability to achieve 'efficient throughput' of cases. This is exacerbated by the lack of alternative resources in the area and by referrals from the statutory child protection services which obviously need longer

intervention. There is the ever-present risk of goal displacement in such programs – that what was conceived as a preventive, early intervention service will shift toward the tertiary end of the service spectrum.

The model of evaluation used is a sound one. Questions such as 'Does the program prevent abuse and neglect?' cannot be answered from this type of evaluation and require very large numbers, controlled groups, etc, which are problematic in this field. However, an agency-based evaluation is able to document the characteristics of families and referrers, and assess progress toward case specific goals as perceived by families and the workers or volunteers. Given the short-term focus of the program, it would have been helpful to have known more about the degree to which the gains were sustained after the cessation of service. Another aspect which I am sure other agencies would want to hear more about is how salaried staff and volunteers were able to work together, as elsewhere this has been an obvious source of tensions.

In regard to volunteers, questions such as what is an appropriate level of training and supervision for volunteers in relation to the tasks they carry out is a core issue. Matching what a family wants and what a volunteer is able and willing to offer is a delicate balance, as are the ambiguous norms governing the relationship. Is the

volunteer a 'friend' or a 'worker' and if the former, what does it mean to report back to a supervisor on the family? It would have been good to have had some of these issues explored a little further in the evaluation.

An exciting aspect of the program is its co-location with parish facilities and the Uniting Church Social Justice worker. This provides the potential for a 'communitarian' rather than an 'individualistic' focus in the program, and wonderful opportunities for advocacy and going 'from case to cause'. For example, is the high cost of child care and kindergarten leading to some children being deprived of this opportunity and adding to the pressure on their mothers? While still in its early days, it is to be hoped that these elements become an important part of the program model. Copelen Child & Family Services is to be congratulated on both its innovative program and its evaluation, which will be very useful to others in the field. One hopes that this and similar services secure the funding essential for their survival and continue to reach out to families before they get too close to the edge of the cliff.

Reviewed by:

Dr Dorothy Scott
School of Social Work
University of Melbourne

Bullying and what to do about it

Ken Rigby

Australian Council for Educational Research, 1996, Camberwell, 299 pp.

General concern and debate about violence in the Australian community is increasing. The tragic massacre at Port Arthur in 1996 has, for the first time, led to a degree of control over gun ownership. The media, however, tends to report on extreme, stranger perpetrated and non-gendered incidents, rather than on the everyday and familiar (male) assaults. This pattern of reporting narrows the definition of what constitutes violence and renders some of its manifestations invisible. Most people are aware of the issue of violence in schools, either as memories of being victims themselves or as concerned parents of school-aged children. This grave social issue is so commonplace,

generationally persistent and seemingly intractable that it is often discussed with despondent resignation – 'boys will be boys'. And the popular terms for such institutionally based assault – *bullying* or *harassment* – can downplay the seriousness of the problem.

While using the word 'bullying' in his title, Ken Rigby makes it clear from the start that this is a significant social issue than can and must be decisively responded to. Avoiding a common assumption that violence is purely physical, he includes the equally harmful verbal assaults, threats and social exclusion within his definition of bullying.

Using an accessible, non-academic style, the first part of the book is devoted to establishing the characteristics and incidence of violence in schools based on extensive research. Rigby, who surveyed over 8,500 students from a range of primary and secondary schools between 1993 and 1994, found that '... on average we could expect one or two children in each class to encounter quite frequent physical abuse from peers. Being threatened with harm appeared equally prevalent' (1996: 34). The percentage of children experiencing victimisation once a week or more was 19.3% for boys and 15% for girls. It is alarming to think that, in spite of years of educational reform and specialist programs, violence is being

experienced by one out of every 5 to 7 students in Australian schools in the mid 1990s. (Given that the issue of the unwillingness of students to report violence to teachers is central to his work, Rigby makes much of the validity of the anonymous questionnaires used to gather data about the extent and characteristics of violence.) Rigby makes the bold political statement that schools are not happy and safe places for many young people, particularly if the level of psychological trauma experienced is taken into account. He goes on to describe the adverse effects of bullying, from lowered self-esteem to the extreme of suicide, the latter being the target of current programs.

In his analysis, not only does he recognise a range of behaviours that constitute violence, but more importantly, bullying is seen to be an issue of power, to be distinguished from the commonplace disagreements and interpersonal conflicts between equals.

In analysing the elements of bullying, gender is considered both in terms of victims and perpetrators, with males being over represented in both instances. It is significant, but not followed up, that male victims are almost entirely harmed by other boys, whereas girls report an equal amount of harassment from both genders. Age is also shown to be important, with younger secondary students reporting more victimisation than their primary or senior secondary counterparts.

Common explanations for bullying tend to focus on one factor – (often teachers) blaming parents' poor attitudes or skills, (often parents) blaming poor discipline standards at school or blaming the universal scapegoat, the media. Encouragingly, Rigby moves beyond such a simple, monocausal explanatory framework by recognising six key elements: socio-cultural environment, basic personal characteristics, family experiences, the school ethos, educational climate and school policies.

Rigby still takes an individualistic approach in claiming a bully's personal characteristics to be central, even if rooted in genetics, family and socio-cultural environment. Genetics and temperament may not easily be fixed but parents can be 'counselled', and exposure to the media controlled. 'Poor

family functioning' is given the greatest weight in shaping the 'bullying personality'. This reflects a very common antagonism between schools and families who hold each other responsible for students' problem behaviour. Rigby's study of 644 adolescents, identified as bullies through psychological testing, discovered that they were more likely to come from dysfunctional families. Countering this is Connell et al (1985), whose in depth interviews with students and their parents show a more complex picture. Each of the identified troublemakers proved to come from stable, wealthy, successful and socially responsible families, suggesting that more complex processes are at work.

Socio-culturally, the mass media and the school culture are cited; given the seemingly wide consensus about the influence of television, he does not think it necessary to support his assertion that the visual media 'lead to the practice of aggression towards others' (p.78) in spite of the inconclusive and ambiguous findings of literature reviews (National Committee on Violence 1990).

Both the educational climate and the school ethos are considered significant factors. Boredom, competition and authoritarian teachers (it is significant that they are not also called bullies!) are named, which one can readily identify as constitutive to resistance. The school ethos most detrimental to violence is one that values toughness, having power, gaining prestige, hating softness. That this describes a dominant form of masculinity does not go unnoticed and is called the 'tough macho view'. Also of concern is the common school ethos of students not to inform or seek help from teachers, highlighting the distant and distrustful relationship between many students and teachers. There is no acknowledgement, however, that this school ethos is not simply aberrant or dysfunctional, but could be intrinsic to conventional schooling practice. Rigby's suggestions for combatting violence start with research to describe the problem, and training for staff to gain their support towards developing an anti-bullying policy. Key to the policy's success is winning over students who admire or refuse to report bullies, which is to be achieved through 'moral education' about the evil of bullying.

In terms of classroom teaching strategies, the lesson plan offered is common to all the programs examined, that is, the educator has some moral concepts that s/he wants the students to adopt, but s/he does not want to force them undemocratically onto the students and so uses methods that are symbolic only of student empowerment. Also, in the example of the aim to 'engender a secure environment in which children feel free to speak their mind (p.154), or the suggestion that cooperative educational practices be implemented, the value of a democratic approach is diminished by giving it a rather cursory treatment and, in the case of cooperative learning, offering a rather superficial discussion.

The other suggested didactic strategies, such as videos, essay writing and social skills training, display the shortcomings of an educative approach that assumes that the solution lies in changing students' mistaken or immoral ideas, which reinforces students' feelings of powerlessness vis-à-vis teachers and the school structure, and maintains an arbitrary separation between classroom and outside world.

By considering a wide range of contributory factors, and by providing a quite extensive 'whole school approach', Rigby's book is an impressive and welcome contribution. The limitations seem to stem from: using extensive, but rather superficial, surveys for data collection at the expense of complexity and depth; while gender differences are occasionally included there is no development of their significance in terms of identity construction; and finally the program remains ameliorative by leaving unquestioned the inherently violent contributing aspects of contemporary schooling.

References

Connell, R. W. et al 1985, *Making the difference*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

National Committee on Violence 1990, *Violence: directions for Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Rigby, K. & Slee, P. 1994,

Reviewed by:
Stephen Fisher
Casey Institute of TAFE/RMIT