An Overview of the Evidence on Bullying Prevention and Intervention Programs

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Bullying is a serious and pervasive problem among children and youth in countries throughout the world, with detrimental effects for children who bully and who are victims, both of whom are at risk of experiencing problems that may persist into adulthood. The aim of this article is to provide a brief overview of key points and issues regarding the current state of anti-bullying prevention and intervention programs. The utility and potential of anti-bullying initiatives continue to be highlighted despite inconsistent results. This is perhaps not surprising because the phenomenon of bullying is a complex social issue that is influenced by myriad diverse factors. [Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention 8:327–341 (2009)]

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Bullying is a serious and pervasive problem among children and youth (Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001; O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Olweus, 1994; Rigby, 2000). Large-scale surveys on the prevalence of bullying in schools have been conducted in countries throughout the world, including, for example, Sweden (Olweus, 1994), Norway (Roland, 2000), the United States (Nansel et al., 2001; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007), England (Whitney & Smith, 1993), Canada (Paetsch & Bertrand, 1999; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1993, 1994), Australia (Rigby & Slee, 1991), Ireland (O’Moore & Kirkham, 2001), Italy (Gini, 2004), and Japan (Rios-Ellis, Bellamy, & Shoji, 2000). Although the pervasive-
and psychiatric problems that may persist into adulthood (Nansel et al., 2001; O’Connell et al., 1999). Evidence suggests that many areas of children’s lives can be affected, including, academic, social, emotional, psychological, and physical health (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Olweus, 1984, 1993; Rigby, 2000). Bullying is a complex phenomenon for which an ecological systems framework, whereby the dynamics are seen to extend beyond the children who bully or who are bullied, is considered crucial. Individual characteristics, social interactions, family dynamics, and ecological and cultural conditions all are seen to contribute to social behavioral patterns (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Cairns & Cairns, 1991).

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief overview of key points and issues to inform practitioners/clinicians about the current state of anti-bullying prevention and intervention programs. It is beyond the scope of this article to review the numerous anti-bullying programs and evaluations of their effectiveness. There are several excellent sources that provide comprehensive and systematic descriptions and reviews of anti-bullying interventions including examination of their effectiveness/efficacy. For detailed reviews of anti-bullying programs and their effectiveness, the reader is directed to Smith, Cousins, & Stewart (2005), Smith, Pepler, & Rigby (2004), Tutty (2008), Tutty et al. (2005), and Whitted & Dupper (2005).

**Prevention and Intervention Programs to Address Bullying**

“At the end of the day all violence prevention programs come down to relationships: our ability to listen to ourselves, to recognize others’ experience and use this information to solve problems, to learn and be creative together” (Twemlow & Cohen, 2003, 121).

Innumerable prevention/intervention programs to address bullying have been developed in countries throughout the world. There are diverse programs that address various components associated with bullying and that have different targets, including the children who are bullied and who bully, peers, teachers, and the entire school. There is a lack of rigorous research on the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programs (Smith et al., 2005; Smith, Ryan, & Cousins, 2007; Stevens, Van Oost, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2000). Further, findings regarding effectiveness of the programs are inconsistent (Smith et al., 2005, 2007; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004).

**Overview of Anti-Bullying Prevention and Intervention Programs**

Despite consensus that anti-bullying programs must account for the multiple causes of bullying at various levels of the ecological system, there is considerable variation with respect to which levels of the system are addressed by particular programs. Targeted levels include some combination of peers, the classroom, teachers and administrators, parents, and the whole school. Anti-bullying programs vary a great deal in their scope and objectives, including interventions that target children who are victimized or who bully others (Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003); interventions that target peers along with the children and youth directly involved in bullying, which may be led by peers (Crothers, Kolbert, & Barker, 2006; O’Connell et al., 1999; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004); interventions that are curriculum-based (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004; Stevens et al., 2000); and interventions that target the whole-school community including the children directly involved in bullying, peers, the curriculum, teachers, administrators and parents, and the school climate (Menesini, Codecasa,
Benelli, & Cowie, 2003; Olweus, 1994; Roland, 2000). Variation is also evident in how programs are implemented, for example, they may be delivered by teachers, administrators, or peers (Smith et al., 2005; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004; Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004). Smith, Pepler, and Rigby (2004) observe that there is the greatest degree of variation among anti-bullying initiatives that target students who bully. Typically, rules against bullying are developed along with consequences. This approach is considered punitive, with consequences that range from nonphysical sanctions, for example, withdrawal of selected student privileges to school suspension and expulsion. This type of strategy is often recommended as a last resort and differs in fundamental ways from nonpunitive approaches. Most particularly, nonpunitive approaches focus on building the relationship ability of students through problem-solving activities, for example, mediation or programs such as the No-Blame approach (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004).

**Common Elements**

Dan Olweus (1991, 1992, 1993) first introduced the notion of integrating common elements into anti-bullying programs, which has become standard (Pepler & Craig, 1999; Tuttty, 2002). Nevertheless, “the research is not at the point where we can reliably point to specific elements of interventions that are known to be the active and essential elements associated with change” (Pepler, Smith, & Rigby, 2004, 313). A review of the key elements follows.

The objectives of school-based anti-bullying programs should go beyond the children who are victimized or who bully but rather, aim to shift the school culture. This perspective corresponds with the viewpoint that bullying is the result of the interaction of multiple complex factors at different levels of the system, including individual, social and larger contextual variables. This approach entails inclusion of some activities and programs that involve individual students, the classroom, peers, parents, and the entire school community (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 1997; Heinrich, 2003; Salmivalli, 1999; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004; Tuttty, 2002; Tuttty et al., 2005; Twemlow, Sacco, & Williams, 1996). Ultimately, however, the outcome of anti-bullying programs is largely due to the degree of commitment by teachers and school principals (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004). This commitment must be supported by broader structural initiatives, for example, financial resources and integration of the program into the school curriculum (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

School policies and protocols that address bullying and violence must accompany anti-bullying initiatives and must model adaptive conflict resolution as well as respect for diversity. For instance, school administrators must ensure that there is increased adult vigilance and supervision in the school and that all members of the school community know how to respond effectively. It must be clear to students and to their parents that teachers and school administrators will take seriously the reports of bullying and that they are committed to solving bullying problems in a timely fashion (Cummings, Pepler, Mishna, & Craig, 2006; Smith et al., 2005; Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Tuttty, 2002) and that, for example, they will make use of incidents that arise as “teachable” moments or moments of support (Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2007).

Multiple disciplines and components must be incorporated (Leff, Power, Manz, Costigan, & Nabors, 2001), including cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Tuttty, 2002; Tuttty et al., 2005). Specific elements include skill development and education for all students; identification of and intervention with students identified as “at risk”; problem solving and
other strategies to foster a positive and culturally appropriate and sensitive social and learning environment; and interventions that promote a safer, more caring and responsive school climate (Dusenbury, Falco, Lake, Branningan, & Bosworth, 1997; Twemlow & Cohen, 2003).

A needs assessment of the school is essential to estimate the extent of bullying taking place, to raise awareness of bullying and its impact (Heinrich, 2003; Whitted & Dupper, 2005), and to identify a school’s strengths and resources. Indeed, adults’ lack of responsiveness to bullying incidents can be partly attributed to school personnel’s lack of awareness of the extent of bullying (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1991; Smith, 1991) and partly to the difficulty in determining whether an incident constitutes bullying, for example, differentiating playful and aggressive fighting (Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2006). Lack of guidelines and training in responding to bullying also contributes to minimization of the seriousness of a bullying interaction.

A developmental perspective must be implemented. This entails initiating anti-bullying prevention programs with students as young as kindergarten and perhaps preschool, sustaining involvement through adolescent grades, and ensuring that programs are tailored to children’s needs and capacities, which vary by factors such as age, gender, skills, and background (Cummings et al., 2006; Tuttty, 2002; Tuttty et al., 2005). For example, children as young as 4½ years of age tend to use gender stereotypes to justify excluding a peer from play but can demonstrate a well-developed sense of fairness and the capacity to use moral reasoning when adults provide prompts to respond inclusively (Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001). As children develop, their understanding of bullying can be broadened and deepened by introducing concepts such as human rights (to be safe and have one’s dignity respected), responsibilities (to respect oneself and others and protect those who are vulnerable), positive versus negative use of power, strategies for assertive communication and conflict resolution, the harmful impact of stereotyping and bias, and the promotion of equity, diversity, and social justice. These early primary prevention efforts are informed by research, which indicates that few students assume stable victim roles before the age of 8 or 9 years and by the recognition that bullying among elementary school-age children may be a precursor to more violent behavior in later grades (Pepler et al., 2004). Moreover, the form bullying takes changes with development, for example, sexual harassment and dating violence may become more prominent in early adolescence.

Bullying prevention programs must be ongoing and seamlessly integrated into the school curriculum throughout the year, formally and informally. This involves holding formal classroom discussions about bullying when the school year begins followed by frequently revisiting bullying issues. Aims are to reinforce and broaden students’ understanding and to keep bullying issues front and center. Maintaining a positive climate is vital and occurs through an ongoing effort rather than a single classroom discussion or school-wide assembly (Cummings et al., 2006).

Interventions must include peers and with the support of adults must restructure children’s roles in bullying interactions (Pepler et al., 2004; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Voeten, & Sinisammal, 2004). Peers are integral both to bullying problems and to bullying solutions. Compelling evidence highlights the roles of peers in bullying interactions (Salmivalli, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 2004).

Utilizing peers to lead interventions can benefit students in all grades and particularly adolescents, who may be more likely to accept the guidance of same-age or high-status peers than...
adult direction and authority (Englander & Lawson, 2007; Pepler et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2005). Most school-based anti-bullying programs are delivered by teachers through the curriculum (Tutty, 2002).

Programs should be carried out and implemented as they were designed. It is not uncommon to partially implement an already designed program. There are good reasons for altering programs, including time and financial constraints (Everhart & Wandersman, 2000). Still, the general belief is that when all components of a whole-school anti-bullying initiative are in place and that there is awareness throughout the school community, bullying problems can be identified and effectively addressed early (Olweus, 1994; Pepler, 2006; Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004).

**Anti-Bullying Interventions**

**Whole-school approach**

Anti-bullying prevention programs that target the whole school have long been advocated to reduce school bullying (Olweus, 1991; Pepler, 2006; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004). These initiatives typically share core elements, which were previously reviewed. Despite differences in the manner the whole-school approach is developed and implemented across programs (Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007), such initiatives usually comprise several activities throughout a school. Accordingly, programs are implemented in combination with formal bullying policies that are communicated to the whole community (students, parents, administrators, teachers, and adjunct school staff members such as office personnel, bus drivers, and lunch and playground supervisors). School administrators are critical in leading bullying prevention initiatives and ensuring that the community is educated about bullying. Education includes exploring the power imbalances that define bullying, the rights of all students to feel safe and included, the many forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, social, cyber), gender differences and other factors associated with bullying, and the responsibilities of the bystander. The intent of education is to shift positive attention away from those who bully and to support those who are victimized, through changing attitudes that underlie bullying behaviors and thus increasing tolerance for differences among the community members (Cummings et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2005; Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Tutty, 2002). Parental involvement is considered critical to the development of individualized interventions for children and youth involved in bullying as the victimized child or the aggressor (Marini & Dane, 2008; Smith et al., 2005).

Programs vary considerably with respect to several variables such as the specific objectives, which, for example, may include decreasing bullying behaviors or changing children’s attitudes toward bullying, and methods and interventions and target groups. Underlying theoretical frameworks also vary and include an systems ecological framework (Pepler et al., 1994, 2004), behavioral interventions (Evers, Prochaska, Van Marter, Johnson, & Prochaska, 2007), peer interventions (Crothers et al., 2006; Englander & Lawson, 2007; Menesini et al., 2003), and restorative justice (Morrison, 2002).

**Other Anti-Bullying Interventions**

Other anti-bullying initiatives typically include one or more activities but do not target the whole school.
has been suggested that prevention programs are most effective when incorporated into the curriculum within a school’s regular program of studies (Tutty et al., 2005).

Curriculum programs incorporate anti-bullying content, which involves formal curriculum programming and discussions to provide information to students on bullying and its effects. Most curriculum-based programs are informed by social cognitive principles of behavioral change and have as their aim changing students’ attitudes, altering group norms, and increasing self-efficacy (Heinrich, 2003; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004). Examples of curriculum programs are Second Step, Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents, and Peacemakers.

An appealing feature of curriculum programs is the relatively smaller commitment required with respect to resources, personnel, and effort (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Another advantage is that teachers can combine violence prevention concepts with other relevant topics, such as self-esteem and conflict resolution, which can be addressed in the moment as issues emerge among students (Tutty et al., 2005). A difficulty related to school-based curricula is that some teachers may feel the topic of anti-bullying is beyond the scope of what should be included in the curriculum (Tutty et al., 2005). In addition, teachers’ discomfort presenting the material may be inadvertently communicated to students and thus influence the impact of the program.

**Peer-led Interventions.** Peer support models focus primarily on improving student relationships and include such forms as peer counselling, peer mediation, befriending, and participant role approaches (Menesini et al., 2003). Peer-led interventions typically comprise teaching peer helpers skills such as active listening, empathy, problem solving, and support (Smith et al., 2005). These interventions involve the active participation of many students with the aim of fostering communication rather than blame among students involved in bullying, and these interventions involve creation of roles and structures that enable students to act responsibly and empathically (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000). Peer-led approaches may be amenable and beneficial for teenagers who are less accepting of adult authority and direction than younger students (Englander & Lawson, 2007; Pepler et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2005). There is some debate, however, about the benefit of employing students to facilitate and intervene in bullying situations because of the view that adult authority is necessary to address bullying problems (Pepler et al., 2004).

Several factors must be considered when developing peer interventions to counter bullying (O’Connell et al., 1999). First, children must be given transparent authorization and support to attempt to change entrenched dynamics and behavioral patterns evident among children in bullying incidents, for example, the aggressor, victimized child, and bystanders. Second, children require strategies to help them intervene effectively. Peer interventions, for instance, must not be aggressive or hostile, which could elicit aggression and place the child intervener at risk of victimization. Importantly, student interventions in bullying situations must be actively promoted and supported in the context of a whole-school anti-bullying initiative (O’Connell et al., 1999).

Peer counselling involves student helpers who are trained and supervised to use active listening skills in order to provide support to peers who are distressed. Peer counselling has been widely used in health education, teaching academic skills, and fostering social skills (Garner, Martin, & Martin, 1989) as well as in preventing and reducing bullying (Salmivalli, 1999). With respect to bullying, peer counselling is typically employed to support victimized children (Salmivalli, 1999). Although support provided by teachers and
parents is undoubtedly important for victimized children, they also need positive peer experiences. Peer counselling is one way of providing a positive peer experience (Salmivalli, 1999). A disadvantage of peer-led approaches is the high level of commitment required by school staff involved in recruiting, training, and supervising student peer counsellors (Price & Jones, 2001). Peer counsellors must have adults backing them.

Peer mediation entails teaching students a nonviolent method through which to resolve conflicts. Students trained in mediation act as neutral third parties in resolving nonphysical disputes among students. The aim is to reduce violence by enabling students to resolve disagreements and misunderstandings before these escalate into full-blown conflicts. Peer mediation provides students with important tools and skills, including cooperation, communication, tolerance, positive emotional expression, and conflict resolution with the overall goal of developing a peaceful and respectful school (Tutty, 2002).

Employing peer mediation may be contraindicated in certain situations (Englander, 2007; Theberge & Karan, 2004). Bullying is often regarded as unsuitable for mediation due in large part to the power differential between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized. The tendency in the literature to assume that bullying prevention and conflict resolution are indistinguishable goals has been identified as problematic (Englander, 2007). The power differential in bullying situations differentiates such incidents from other forms of conflict. Educators and researchers must appreciate the distinction and significant psychological differences between relatively equal power conflicts between children and the power differential that exists in bullying behaviors. Distinguished by an unequal power structure bullying is consequently more abusive.

Factors that impede successful peer mediation include supervision by adults that is not regular, insufficient numbers of peer supporters to address the problems, and bullying problems that are particularly severe (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000). Another difficulty is the unequal participation by gender, whereby the majority of peer supporters are female as are the teachers who run peer mediation programs (Smith et al., 2003). Other problems with peer mediation programs include students’ fears that they will be ridiculed by their peers should they participate as participating in mediation might not be considered “cool,” self-consciousness about exposing problems to peers, or fear that initiating mediation will lead to retribution by the aggressor (Theberge & Karan, 2004).

Similar to the other peer led interventions, “befriending” entails teaching peer helpers the basic skills of active listening, empathy, problem solving, and providing support to vulnerable peers (Naylor & Cowie, 1999).

The “participant role approach” targets all the individuals involved in a bullying incident. This approach is informed by the principle that effective intervention must target the whole group because most children are involved to some degree in bullying situations and assume roles supported by the peer group (Salmivalli, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 2005). The participant role approach aims to utilize the children in each of the bystander roles, (e.g., outsider, assistant, or reinforcer) to stop bullying behaviors. With peers participating in clear ways intended to end bullying, the children who bully may be less likely to sustain the bullying behavior should he or she lose the audience and support. Thus, involving peers to end bullying might subsequently influence the behavior of the children who bully (Salmivalli, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 2005). Helping students acquire anti-bullying roles involves activities such as awareness-raising and the opportunity to self-reflect as well as to practice behaviors that differ from previous ways of acting and responding (Salmivalli, 1999).
Restorative Justice Approach. Restorative justice is the process of restoring relationships through forgiveness and reconciliation (Ahmed & Brathwaite, 2006; Morrison, 2002). This approach is thought to strengthen self-regulation and the regulation of civil society through empowering the powerless and rebuilding relationships between the victimized and the victimizer. The restorative justice approach corresponds with the view that forgiveness reduces destructive behaviors (Morrison, 2002).

The process of restorative justice involves members of the community—the victimized person and his or her family and support group, school community, and police when appropriate—to work through the problems created by the offender’s behavior (Ahmed & Brathwaite, 2006). Support is typically offered by the child or youth’s natural network, for example, aunts, uncles, and even grandparents. Restorative justice is thought to help a child or youth assume future adaptive positive behavior. Ensuring that the child or youth does not lose his or her social ties and that the child is not stigmatized or humiliated is integral to restorative justice. Rather, the child is surrounded by positive social influence. Rather than losing social connections, these social ties are reinforced, and the child is reconciled with significant others who can help them alter their behavior (Ahmed & Brathwaite, 2006).

Research Findings: Anti-Bullying Prevention/Intervention Programs

Whole-School Interventions

Dan Olweus (1991, 1992, 1993) developed the original whole-school anti-bullying program, which was a nationwide campaign in response to the suicides of several children in Norway during the early 1980s, in which bullying was considered an important factor (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). His program, entitled the Bullying Prevention Program, was a comprehensive whole-school program from kindergarten through grade 12. School-based anti-bullying programs that have been developed in a number of countries are typically informed by Olweus’ program (Pepler et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2003; Tutty, 2002). Highly successful in reducing both victimization and bullying Olweus’ anti-bullying program has not however, been as effective when implemented in other countries (Pepler et al., 1994, 2004; Roland, 1993, 2000).

Research findings on school-based anti-bullying interventions are mixed and inconsistent (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004; Smith et al., 2005, 2003; Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004). Some programs demonstrate positive albeit modest outcomes (Ertesvag & Vaaland, 2007; Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2005; Thompson, Whitney & Smith, 1994), whereas others report very few positive changes (Pepler et al., 1994), or even negative overall effects (Munthe & Roland, 1989). At times the findings are contradictory even within studies, whereby different outcome measures reveal inconsistent conclusions. For instance, it may be that the rate of students reporting being victimized decreases whereas the rate of students reporting bullying others concurrently increases (e.g., Pepler et al., 1994). The outcome of an intervention may also depend on particular student characteristics. For instance, a program implemented in four Dutch secondary schools with relatively high levels of student aggression seemed to positively affect the aggressive behavior only of students that were not identified as offenders during the pretest. The program had no effect or had a negative effect, however, on students who had higher pretest scores (Mooij, 1999).

According to a meta-analysis of 12 interventions implemented and delivered between 1986 and 2001 in various countries, the programs had on the whole significant but relatively
small effects in decreasing victimization and little or no effect in reducing the rate at which children bully others (Rigby, 2002).

Smith, Schneider, et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 14 studies of published and unpublished evaluations of whole-school anti-bullying interventions implemented in North America, Europe, and Australia. These interventions comprised between three to five programs that were part of a large whole-school intervention. The effects were almost entirely small, negligible, or negative. The conclusion was that although in some instances bullying was reduced, “the effectiveness of these widely implemented programs has not yet been empirically established” (Smith et al., 2007, 121). Smith, Schneider, et al. (2004) suggest that endorsing the whole-school approach as preferred or as “best practice,” “can be based only on the perceived urgent need to intervene and on the few studies indicating success” (557). There is clearly a need to conduct rigorous evaluations of anti-bullying interventions (Smith et al., 2007).

A systematic review of 26 studies of anti-bullying interventions was conducted, 10 of which evaluated whole-school interventions with multidisciplinary involvement and a combination of activities such as school wide policies and consequences, curriculum content, conflict resolution, and individual counselling (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Targeting the whole school through various levels was overall more effective in decreasing victimization and bullying than targeting one level such as classroom curriculum or social skills groups. Vreeman and Carroll (2007) conclude that this finding provides support for the view that bullying is due to factors external to the children directly involved in bullying and that these factors involve complex social relations. Nevertheless, Vreeman and Carroll caution that their review demonstrated that not all anti-bullying programs are effective and that positive outcomes tended to be quite small.

Other

There are countless anti-bullying programs that target one or more levels without addressing the whole school. A brief overview of these programs follows.

Curriculum. Vreeman and Carroll (2007) argue that despite the success of some curriculum programs (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2007; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007), curriculum alone is not sufficient to decrease bullying, as demonstrated by their systematic review of 10 anti-bullying curriculum interventions, in which no overall significant improvement was found. Vreeman and Carroll (2007) report that although 4 of the 10 studies demonstrated a decrease in bullying postintervention, four studies revealed an increase in bullying or victimization with respect to certain populations in the study. The study of Andreou et al. (2007) on an anti-bullying intervention program, comprising particular curricular activities, found that the program contributed to a positive change in particular behaviors and beliefs and attitudes among students.

Peer-led Interventions. Evidence suggests that over time, peer-led interventions improve a school’s social climate (Naylor & Cowie, 1999) and that individuals who use these programs find them helpful. Peer-based programs have demonstrated positive social outcomes both for students who implement the programs and for those who are recipients (Dearden, 1998).

Peer counselling has numerous benefits for the individuals who receive and offer the program and for the overall school (Henriksen, 1991). Peer counselling excels, however, in settings in which there is already an established structure for working cooperatively and in which there is emphasis on the values of sharing, trust, and mutuality (Price & Jones,
Evidence suggests an overall high level of satisfaction with peer mediation and befriending programs in schools (Burrell, Zirbel, & Allen, 2003). In particular, befriending programs have positive outcomes (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Menesini et al., 2003). Salmivalli et al. (2005) found positive effects on several variables in an intervention based on the participant role approach. The overall outcome was inconsistent however. Some research suggests that students do not prefer anti-bullying strategies comprising peer support, which may partly explain the mixed results of these approaches (Crothers et al., 2006). The mixed results add support to the view that bullying prevention requires a comprehensive, systemic approach, and that peer support would be more effective with increased adult support (Crothers et al., 2006).

**Restorative Justice.** Ahmed and Brathwaite (2006) found links between forgiveness, reconciliation, and reduced bullying. This data correspond with the premise of restorative justice that relationships in which there is support, concern, and care contribute to less offending (Ahmed & Brathwaite, 2006). The findings also revealed the central role played by positive shame management in preventing bullying, which supports the restorative justice contention that shame in offenders deters crime when managed in a reintegrative rather than a stigmatized manner. These data also suggest that an absence of forgiveness and reconciliation destroys the chance to build the emotional scaffolding needed to boost self-regulation (Ahmed & Brathwaite, 2006).

**Conclusion**

The utility and potential of anti-bullying initiatives continue to be highlighted despite inconsistent results (Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Pepler et al., 2004). Perhaps it is not surprising that the evidence regarding the effectiveness of anti-bullying prevention/intervention programs is inconclusive because the phenomenon of bullying is a complex social issue that is influenced by myriad diverse factors (Hunt, 2007). These results must therefore be interpreted cautiously.

Reasons for the inclusive findings may be due to a number of factors: (a) the lack of consistent institutional and societal commitment for interventions (Eslea & Smith, 1998; Pepler et al., 1994), influenced by factors such as prohibitive time and personnel demands, as well as teacher and school variables (Eslea & Smith, 1998; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Mooij, 1999; Pepler et al., 1994; Roland, 1993, 2000); (b) the innumerable ways measures are employed to determine level of bullying (for example, self-report questionnaires, observations), and differences in program implementation, which makes it confusing to synthesize and compare results across programs (Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Tutty, 2002); and (c) the need to tailor interventions to particular schools and students.

The inconclusive findings can also be attributed to other trends, such as increased awareness and knowledge regarding what constitutes bullying, which may encourage more children and youth to identify their experiences as bullying. A negligible change or an increase in victimization or bullying may represent increased awareness of bullying within a school (Smith, Schneider, et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2003), and thus, paradoxically might mask a positive effect. Students’ reporting of bullying may be further influenced by the growing recognition and reporting of indirect bullying (Crick & Grotter, 1995, 1996; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). Finally, some positive outcomes may not appear in the short term, which may further contribute to what appears to be none or minimal program effect and which points to the
need for a longer time period in which a program can permeate the school environment (Smith et al., 2003).

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References


