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Bullying in schools: An evaluation of the use of drama in bullying prevention.

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Abstract

Bullying can have a severe effect on the physical and mental health of young people. This qualitative descriptive research aimed to develop an understanding of young people's experiences of an educational, interactive theatre-based workshop (the Bullying Prevention Session) which focused on developing strategies to address school bullying. Focus group interviews were conducted with students from six schools. Students reported that the workshop helped to improve their understanding of the complexities of bullying, including appreciating the situation from the perspectives of both bullies and bystanders. Dissatisfaction was noted with the schools' efforts to implement bullying reduction strategies suggested by students present at the workshop.

Keywords:

Adolescents; Bullying; Drama; Mental Health; Theatre-in-education; Young People

Bullying in Schools: An Evaluation of the Use of Drama in Bullying Prevention

Bullying is defined as intentional negative behavior directed against a person (or persons) who has difficulty defending themselves and typically occurs with some repetitiveness (Olweus, 2013). Bullying can be further subdivided into direct bullying, such as overt aggressive acts, and indirect, which includes exclusion and cyber bullying (Hicks, Le Clair & Berry, 2016). It was once thought that physical bullying was the most common form of bullying, but it has now been recognized that verbal indirect forms of bullying can occur with even more frequency. Increased indirect bullying can be even harder to detect with the advent of social media (DePaolis &Williford, 2015). However, in terms of overall negative effect on the person, students view indirect bullying as being as bad as physical aggression (Eslea, 2010).

Half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years, with more than 10% reporting being bullied regularly (Bingham, 2010), and between 14% and 59% being bullied at least once (Klocke, Clair & Bradshaw, 2015). This is a global phenomenon, affecting children of both genders, with studies reporting on children aged nine to seventeen (Layte & McCrory, 2009; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2014). In Ireland, Minton (2010), reported that 36% of post-primary students had experienced bullying, or had been involved in bullying problems, an increase of almost 10% since 1997 (see also O'Moore, 2010). It has been theorized that the increase of bullying being reported in secondary schools has been attributed to a lack of acceptance of diversity, with Juvonen and Graham (2014) observing an increase in bullying against children from minority groups such as LGBT children and obese children. Furthermore, students who experience bullying in schools are much more likely to perceive the school environment more negatively and as less safe (Rigby, 2017).

On-going, unchecked bullying behavior has been found to have negative impacts on a person's social and emotional development and academic performance, (O'Brennan, Bradshaw & Sawyer 2009) with potential loss of self-esteem, high levels of anxiety, stress, depression, school avoidance, poor relationships skills, self-harm and suicide (Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel & Loeber 2011; United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2012). Furthermore, people bullied in childhood are more likely to experience mental health problems in their adult years (Lereya, Copeland, Costello & Wolke, 2015), specifically in relation to depression and anxiety but also psychotic symptoms and attempted suicide (Bang & Park 2017).

School Bullying Prevention Programs

Globally, there has been an increasing amount of school based anti-bullying programs, many developed from the intervention designed by Olweus (1993). However, these programs have had varying degrees of success, from reducing levels of bullying behavior to exacerbating the problem (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). With regards to exacerbating the problem, the main reasons these programs fail may be due to lack of fidelity on the roll-out of the initiative, lack of support to teachers and staff, and/or no long-term follow-up.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPS) was the first whole school anti-bullying program developed in Norway (Olweus, 1993). Olweus' program included providing teachers and parents with information on bullying, a recorded video on school bullying and having students complete a bullying-victim questionnaire. Since the completion of the initial project, the OBPS has been developed and evaluated numerous times (Limber, 2011). Findings have revealed consistently positive effects (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

Further programs of note that have been evaluated include the Be-Prox Program in Switzerland (Alsaker & Nagele, 2008), The KiVa Program in Finland (Salmivalli, Kärnä &

Poskiparta, 2009) and the Kia Kaha Program in New Zealand (Raskauskas et al., 2010). In Ireland, programs such as Stay Safe (MacIntyre &Lawlor, 2016) have been introduced. Findings of evaluation studies have emphasized the important impact of these programs on empathy (Alsaker & Nagele, 2008; Raskauskas et al., 2010). Furthermore, the adoption of a whole school approach is seen as an essential component (Biggs, Verberg, Twemlow, Fonagy & Dill, 2008). Brendgen and Poulin (2017) noted that bullying prevention programs would benefit from additional interventions that are specifically aimed at fostering social skills and establishing a supportive network.

Bullying Prevention Programs Involving Drama and Theatre

There is a high level of support for the use of theatre and drama as bullying prevention aids (Bradshaw, 2015; Joronen, Häkämies & Åstedt-Kurki , 2011; Polanin, Espelage & Pigott,. 2012). The medium of drama can have a powerful effect on the viewer's emotional and cognitive states, and when combined with forums for discussion, can enhance the perspectives of those involved in and who witness bullying. This process of examining conflict from multiple perspectives (Bagshaw et al., 2005) can allow the group to come to a deeper understanding of the bullying happening in their school. This social construction of knowledge can help students come to know what bullying is, how it affects the individual and the group, and what can be done to stop it. The following is a review of some high-profile interventions that have included drama elements and theatre.

Several bullying prevention programs incorporate drama elements, with varying degrees of success. The Friendly Schools Program, implemented in Australian schools, included elements such as role modelling, drama activities, skills training, and observational learning (Cross et al., 2004). In its evaluation, Cross et al. (2011) reported mixed results following its implementation, with children in fourth and sixth grade less likely to be bullied, and no change for the fifth grade students. Furthermore, there were no reductions of student

reports of bullying others across all class groups. The researchers recommended the program may have benefited from a whole school approach. Also in Australia, Burton and O'Toole's (2009) Acting Against Bullying Program used drama to allow students to discover more about the motives and instincts of particular bullies. The audience was given the opportunity to de-escalate the conflict. Following a mixed-method evaluation (viz., surveys, focus groups, one-to-one interviews), the researchers found that there were significant increases in students' knowledge about bullying, a heightened awareness about the nature and consequences of bullying amongst both students and teachers, observable declines in the amount of bullying behavior in the schools involved, and increased self-confidence and self-esteem amongst those being bullied.

In Canada, the Dare to Care: Bully Proofing Your School (Beran & Tutty, 2002) Program also encouraged the creation of solutions to prevent bullying among all parties involved in the education system. The program included discussion, role-plays, artwork, books, videos, and 'skits' presented to school staff, parents, and children. Within three months of program implementation, students reported that the frequency of witnessing bullying incidents decreased significantly at the research schools compared to the control schools.

In Ireland, the Bullying Prevention Pack is a bullying prevention resource, incorporating role-play, that proved efficacious in reducing bullying (Donohoe & O'Sullivan, 2015). During the program, teachers enter into a dialogue with students on the topic of bullying. Students are then presented with literature on the subject. Subsequent sessions focus on drama games and role-plays with students asked to write up contracts comprising bullying prevention strategies. The 2-year study of its efficacy demonstrated that there was a 53% reduction in victimization by bullying at the intervention school, while there was an increase

at the control school. Of note, only one school was included in the study; however, findings illustrate the potential of drama in being efficacious in preventing bullying (Donohoe, 2016).

Rationale for the Current Study

From the review of the literature, it can be concluded that when developing anti-bullying interventions, a whole school approach with strong, empathetic, supportive leadership, that is of sufficient longitudinal duration is needed. Evaluation of program efficacy is crucial, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Many programs focus on bystanders, encouraging other children to intervene. Such an approach is often cited as an effective strategy to prevent bullying by isolating bullies from their audience and social supports. Although numerous researchers and practitioners have emphasized the positive effect drama in education can have on child's cognitive and affective development (Bagshaw et al., 2005; Bradshaw, 2015), there still exists a gap between understanding its value and actually applying it (Furman, 2000).

Unfortunately, while drama is often cited as a component to aid bullying prevention (Polanin et al., 2012), research evidence of its effectiveness is limited (Joronen et al., 2011). This may due to the fact that drama elements are often given as an optional element for inclusion in interventions (Cross et al., 2011; Kärna et al., 2009), but as there can be a plethora of elements to consider in an intervention, often drama elements may be left out (Donohoe, 2016).

Method

Aim

This research used a qualitative descriptive design to evaluate the effectiveness of a drama based Bullying Prevention Session (BPS) in a sample of highschools (n=6)

The aims of this research were:

1. To explore the experience of BPS attendance and engagement from the perspective of young people who have participated in the intervention.

2. To ascertain if recommendations from BPS workshops are enacted in the life of the school post-BPS, from the perspective of young people.

Ethics

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the relevant university ethics committee (Log: 2016-043). Participation in the study was voluntary. Information leaflets, outlining the aims of the study and the details of the focus group process were provided to students and their parents/guardians. As all participants were under the legal age of consent, signed consent was obtained from parents/guardians, and signed assent obtained from students.

Before taking part in the focus group, participants were encouraged to raise any queries about the study. It was explained that, although confidentiality was guaranteed by the researchers, the confidentiality of the other group members could not be guaranteed. However, *ground rules* of the group were discussed, and each participant was encouraged to honour the confidentiality of the other group members.

Sampling

Data were collected in schools who had completed the BPS within the past 12 months, and purposive sampling was used. School teachers were contacted, informed about the study, and invited to act as the gatekeepers. Six schools were included in the study, comprising mixed gender schools (n=3), all male (n=2), and all female (n=1). Geographically, schools were located in urban (n=4), suburban (n=1), and rural (n=1) areas. Students were aged from 12-15 years. In total, 50 students participated in the focus groups, which comprised both male (n=38) and female (n=12) participants.

Bullying Prevention Session (BPS) Intervention

The BPS, developed by CycloneRep Theatre Company, is a resource designed specifically for schools to encourage students and staff to devise strategies to tackle the problem of bullying.

Firstly, students viewed a one-act scripted performance based around a schoolyard bullying incident. Due to the high percentage of bystanders involved in bullying (Coloroso, 2004) and the influence that they can have on a bullying event (Thornberg et al., 2012), the role of the bystander was highlighted. Next, students were provided with an interactive slideshow presentation, and encouraged to share their conceptualisations of bullying. Lastly, students participated in a workshop where they were encouraged to formulate strategies that they think could help prevent bullying in their school. All presented ideas were discussed further, and through consensus, an ordered system of popular strategies was developed. These were then given to the co-ordinating teacher so that the feasible strategies could be enacted. At least one teacher was required to be present at all times; although it was requested that the school principal would attend, this was not always possible, and in several instances, the career guidance counselor fulfilled this duty. After a period of one month, each school was sent a follow up email to enquire as to how well the actions were working, as well as offering any follow up assistance they might need.

Data Collection

Data were collected using focus group interviews that were facilitated by two researchers. Each focus group was informed by an indicative schedule and audio recorded. Each focus group lasted between 40-60 minutes and took place within the school. Digital audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. In order to ensure anonymity of participants, once transcription was completed, audio recordings were destroyed..

Data Analysis

The overall analytic process was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis. The rigor of the analysis was enhanced through investigator triangulation, with multiple analysts comparing and defining the themes (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). The first phase of the analysis began with the raw data being coded. After becoming familiar with the transcripts through multiple readings, an initial coding framework was identified between two researchers. The second phase involved attempting to extract meaning by identifying major themes and patterns from the identified codes within the coding framework. The third phase of the process involved discussing, debating, and refining the emerging codes and themes. The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes/subthemes by putting them in relationship with each other; a third analyst reviewed the analysis at this stage. Themes/subthemes were refined until consensus was reached regarding their scope and content (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Findings

Two main themes emerged from thematic analysis of the focus group data. The first theme focuses on the initial impact of taking part in BPS: how students were affected by the experience, and what enhanced their engagement. The second theme focuses onstudents' suggestions on how the impact of the workshop could be increased in future through delivery of education across all grades, and by strengthening teacher involvement.

Impact of BPS Drama/Workshop

The students generally reported positive experiences of the BPS. Students recognised the effort, commitment, and expertise of the actors from Cyclone Rep, and highlighted differences between the BPS and methods of bullying prevention they had encountered in the past. Students identified that the drama section of the BPS was realistic and similar to their

experiences of bullying in school; such was the level of realism that it could provoke an emotional response:

> the anti-bullying was… actually upsetting…. you actually know later on that really does happen to people and you don't even know, you want to help but you can't.

Students contrasted this realism with existing bullying resources in school (e.g., books) that had dated over time and so struck them as 'out of touch' with the reality of their contemporary experiences and/or observations of bullying:

> Yeah, they all [books in school] show like pictures of nokia blokias… like you know the old nokia phones? And they've like a text with, "everyone hates you", but that's not what like cyber bullying is… like. It's a lot more, not in a nice way.

Although it was noted that the performance was realistic in how it portrayed bullying, students expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the performance. The traditional image of the physically imposing bully and the smaller, meeker victim was criticised for its oversimplified and stereotypical presentation of bullying.

> Yeah, that's kinda stereotypical like, the small fella against the big fella.
>
> That's why it's kinda cringey because the bully was all a big black beard and big muscly like.

The use of humor within the drama encouraged initial engagement and was positively commented upon. As the drama developed, students described being more drawn into the drama and that a tension between humor and pathos began to unfold. Students began to see more of the complexities of bullying, that situations were not just 'black and white'; they began to understand that there were multifaceted issues at play. Students described clear learning from the experience of having attended the BPS. They described being more

conscious of the different possible types of bullying, and becoming more sensitised to what they may have previously viewed more as just “messing about”. Students also reported a heightened awareness as to why people bully, developing an understanding of issues from the perspectives of those who engage in bullying behaviors:

> Like the audience is reacting to it, it's like weird to watch 'cause like people were like laughing at the parts that like weren't really funny.

> it is interesting though because it really did like show the different types. Like I didn't realise there were that many types of bullying out there and then.

> it’s about you know all the different people’s back stories… they didn't only show you from like the victim's side, they show you like why the bully's a bully.

Students identified the most lasting impacts of the BPS were encouraging more confidence in someone suffering from bullying to speak up and address issues (i.e., to not suffer in silence), and more confidence in coming to the aid of fellow students who were being bullied:

> I think that like some people who are like a bit more confident than them would see it and then they would go to the teacher, so I think like it does give some people more confidence.

However, students also identified that any such improvement was generally not maintained over time within the wider school culture:

> After a little while like, you just start kind of forgetting what happened… after, it was all grand like, there was less[bullying]… a month later then it was started again...

Suggested Improvements to Increase Impact of BPS Drama/Workshops in Schools

If the ongoing personal impact of attending the BPS is best described as ‘mixed’, then the long-term impact in terms of lasting influence in schools must be evaluated as generally

low. The students' views were that the suggestions for improvements within their schools – which they contributed during the workshop phase of the BPS – were not followed up and implemented, or at least, students were not made aware as to whether the school had sought to act upon their suggestions:

> And then we were… put into groups and we had to think of ways that we could like stop bullying… we like wrote down loads of ideas but it never happened…

> it's hard for like thirty… people in second year to kinda like change the whole school just from seeing that… if they took more of our suggestions on board like with and stuff then people might speak up about it more and not like just see it and not like ignore it…

Students were concerned that only offering the BPS to one grade at a time lessened impact. It was suggested that more time be dedicated to bullying prevention within schools, and that, bullying prevention should be an integral component of the school curriculum. Students suggested that having an annual anti-bullying day at the beginning of each academic year might 'set the tone' for the year, demonstrating that the school took the topic 'seriously'. However, students emphasised that the time spent discussing bullying prevention should be separated from wider discussions around mental health.

The BPS appears to have an effective initial impact on student learning concerning the issues around bullying and bullying prevention. However, this impact is lessened and/or not maintained if it is not followed up within schools as part of an overall strategy.

> School doesn't do that much to help… they don't take responsibility or care for the students in school… what they're doing at the moment is like really nothing. You tell the teacher and they say, "oh yeah, I'll sort it out", and then it's like still going on and then they say, "oh yeah, I'll sort it out", again but nothing's happening…

Students described ways in which they would recommend the BPS might fit within a whole school approach to bullying minimization. In order to be more equipped to deal with bullying, students felt that teachers needed more training in this area or to take a stricter approach. It was suggested that teachers attending the BPS and actively taking on board the suggestions that the students developed would be a positive development. Students expressed that the teachers who attended the BPS should disseminate what they had learned at the workshop to their colleagues.

> I think that like the teacher's more look at the, the more physical bullying rather than mental or the cyber bullying, they don't really understand the cyber or the mental bullying what it actually can do instead of, they look at the physical like a fight or someone pulling hair or pushing or stuff like that.

For example, having a stronger teacher presence within the schools, particularly in communal areas, would help to reduce bullying, as well as having an awareness that issues might well develop at/around the ‘school gates’:

> Teachers like in the areas… by the lockers or at lunch breaks and the toilets… that there's teachers like around the place to watch over the students

> Teachers should take more care of what happens outside school as well…

Discussion and Recommendations

The aims of this research were to explore the experiences of young people who attended a drama-based bullying reduction session and to explore their perspectives about bullying strategies that they suggested being put in place by their school. Adamle, K. N., Chiang-Hanisko, L., Ludwick, R., Zeller, R. A. & Brown, R.

Students commented that the actors’ use of humor helped to make the performance enjoyable, but also helped to engage them in the material. Humor is often an appropriate tool

to use in creating a relaxed, safe space in which people can express emotions (Adamle, Chiang-Hanisko, Ludwick, Zeller & Brown, 2007). In education, teachers who incorporate humor in the way in which they communicate information foster a sense of commitment to learning, as well as enhancing reflection for students (Chabeli, 2008). Ulloth (2002) reported that humor used within a classroom setting can also enhance students' recall of material; this is important in terms of the concept of bullying, in order to educate individuals and promote awareness.

Another achievement, as viewed by students, was a departure from traditional teaching methods. Traditional education strategies do not always hold adolescents' attention (Fredland 2010). PowerPoint presentations, for example, are not always effective in isolation, as they do not hold students' attention (Hill, Ardford, Lubitow & Smollin 2012). Students in the current study commented on how the combination of PowerPoint, theatre, and discussion assisted in their comprehension of the subject, engaging them in an interactive way.

Students associated previous exposure to bullying prevention with out-dated teaching strategies, such as older styles of mobile phones being used to demonstrate the concept of cyberbullying. The BPS was viewed as presenting more realistic depictions of school-life (e.g., more current use of smartphone technology made the drama more relatable to the students). Such realism in bullying intervention strategies has been noted to enhance engagement and to facilitate students in developing deeper insights about bullying (Ortiz-Bush &Schultz, 2016).

Such deeper insights were reported around knowledge of bullying types; students commented that the BPS gave them a heightened sense of awareness about the variety of ways in which bullying can manifest itself. This is important, as bullying can take many forms. For example, students interviewed by Asimopoulos, Bibou-Nakou, Hatzipemou, Soumaki & Tsiantis (2014) reported that racist comments were amongst the most common

forms of bullying that they had experienced/witnessed. Students also demonstrated an awareness as to the indiscrete nature of cyberbullying after the BPS. Cyberbullying can often be difficult to detect (DePaolis & Williford, 2015), can remain posted in electronic spaces for extended periods, and can have long lasting psychological damage (Hicks et al. 2016), thus is an important issue to be addressed within bullying prevention strategies.

After being exposed to the one-act play, students also reported a heightened awareness of the position of the bully, which demonstrated an understanding of the complexities surrounding bullying behaviors. Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2007) found that almost 20% of children engaged in both the role of the bully and the victim. The child who bullies can also suffer from stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation (Rigby, 2017). Over the course of their lifetimes, children who bully, those who are victimized by bullying, and those who play both the roles of bully and victim are susceptible to higher levels of depression, low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, illness, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide and self-harm with bully-victims at an even higher risk of such symptoms (O'Moore, 2010). Through delving into the backstory of the bully, a more comprehensive overview of bullying was presented giving students a sense of not just the ways in which bullying can be prevented, but the reasons for why such bullying takes place.

Students also noted that the BPS would give them the confidence to stand up for one of their peers who was experiencing bullying. As many as 35-40% of school-age children take on the roles of bully, follower, and supporter, with a further 25-30% composed of silent bystanders who ignore (Salmivalli & Voeten 2004) or even encourage bullying (Rigby, 2017). However, it has been shown that, if influential social supports for those engaging in bullying are taken away, then it could have a significant effect in reducing bullying behavior in general (Thornberg et al., 2012). Raising awareness of how bystanders may influence bullying events is a key element of BPS and developing an awareness about the various

elements associated with bullying may give students the confidence in challenging future episodes of bullying that they witness. Gourd and Gourd (2011) found that exposure to a drama-based intervention gave students more confidence in standing up for their friends in the event of bullying behaviors taking place. A longitudinal approach may be required to investigate the effectiveness of BPS in inspiring confidence in students.

After the drama and presentation, students suggested strategies to be used within the school to reduce bullying in future. These suggestions were then sent to the school by representatives from CycloneRep. Students commented that the schools had not put these suggestions into practice. However, they were given an opportunity to discuss these suggestions at the focus groups. Several students suggested that more teacher vigilance was required within the schools. It was noted that bullying frequently takes place in areas where staff presence may not be as strong. Other studies have noted that bullying occurs in areas where supervision is not as robust, such as bathrooms and lunchrooms and at times when teachers were not present, such as lunchtime (Asimopoulos et al., 2014). It is noted that, in schools where students can identify teachers' commitment, there is more success in reducing bullying (Biggs et al., 2008).

It was also noted that teachers should be more aware of what occurs outside of the school grounds. Bullying often takes place just outside school premises, as students make their way to and from school (Asimopoulos et al., 2014). Cyberbullying is also more likely to occur at home rather than in schools; however, cyberbullying is still most likely to originate in the school setting (Olweus, 2012). Additionally, students suggested the dissemination of what was learned at the BPS by teachers to other teachers. The transfer of knowledge and exchange of training is important in communication of the effects and significance of bullying (Craig, Pepler & Blais., 2007). Although professional development in education often takes the form of short-duration workshops, there are several other ways in

which such information can be exchanged, such as online platforms and video conferencing, which can reduce barriers to communication and foster a sense of community among educators (Tseng & Kuo, 2014).

In terms of how discussions around bullying should be conducted, it was suggested that future discussions should remain separate from discussions about mental health. Although a crossover between mental health issues and being bullied was acknowledged, students commented that these are also distinct issues. Bullying often takes the form of physical abuse or damage to property (O'Moore. 2010), and although it may have long-standing psychological effects for victims, the physical effects should also be addressed. For example, bullying may lead to poor physical health outcomes later in life (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010).

Students had several suggestions on how to improve the BPS itself. It was suggested that the drama should be performed for the whole school, and not just for one year group. The whole-school approach acknowledges that bullying is systemic: therefore, intervention efforts must be directed at the entire school context rather than just at individual bullies and victims (Richard, Schneider & Mallet 2012).

Finally, students suggested that the stereotypical image of the large bully and the physically less imposing victim should be challenged. Power imbalance does not imply physical dominance: social power can manifest itself indirectly through social exclusion, rumour mongering and ignoring (Rose & Swenson, 2009). Drama-based bullying prevention strategies may benefit from presentation of subtler and less stereotypical depictions of bullying behavior. The fact that students commented on these stereotypes demonstrates that they are well-attuned to the complexities of bullying, and the reality of how bullying can manifest itself. This is important, given the effects that indirect bullying (i.e., cyberbullying) can have on young people (Eslea, 2010).

Limitations

Focus groups can only capture what students communicate at one point. It is not clear what the long-term implications of the BPS are; a longitudinal study is warranted to ascertain if the impact of this type of intervention is sustained over time. Although students stated that the intervention helped develop their understanding of bullying from multiple perspectives, no pre and post questionnaires were employed to evaluate specifically how their understandings have changed as a result of the intervention. As such, future research should use a mixed methods design, pre and post intervention.

Directions for Future Research

The students generally reported positive experiences of the BPS, but expressed the desire for anti-bullying strategies implemented around the session to be further developed. Future research should focus on how drama-based bullying reduction interventions can be enhanced through initial preparatory work and follow-up anti-bullying material. It is necessary for schools to re-evaluate anti-bullying strategies on an ongoing basis, with involvement of students, to assess if existing strategies are making an impact in reducing bullying or not (i.e., further longitudinal work is warranted).

Conclusion

Drama is a useful pedagogical tool to use in preventing bullying. The BPS allowed students to explore a sensitive subject in a non-threatening fashion. Non-traditional teaching methods, such as drama, should be employed in the classrooms in order to enhance students' understandings of complex phenomena, such as bullying. It was recommended that the BPS should form part of an overall whole school approach to bullying prevention, minimization and/or management. Whenever possible, bullying prevention strategies, such as the BPS, should be offered to multiple years within a school, not just a one-off to one particular year.

This way the entire school body would be more likely to be ‘on message,’ with the aim of changing whole school cultural attitudes regarding toleration/acceptance of bullying behavior. Students have communicated deep insights into bullying as a result of engaging in the BPS and have suggested strategies which may be used to reduce bullying in schools. It is important that schools make visible to students that their recommendations are taken seriously by the school, that recommendations are considered, and wherever possible, implemented, within the school’s anti-bullying policy.

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