1.5 Roles in Bullying and cyberbullying

Given the social and transactional nature of bullying as a phenomenon, researchers had explored the differing roles of CYP who participate in or experience incidences of bullying (Olweus, 2013). This had traditionally been divided into two categories or roles i.e. bully and victim, with an additional category of participant being added more recently (Gumpel, 2008; Olweus, 2013; Yen, Ko, Liu, & Hu, 2015). In terms of more recent work on bullying prevention programmes the terms and roles of ‘target’, ‘CYP engaging in bullying behaviour’ and ‘by-standers’ are being used.

Bullying Roles

In developing bullying prevention programmes it is important to consider the language, terms and roles within the bullying dynamic. Programme design, development and implementation should speak to the characteristics of these roles. The terms ‘bully’ and ‘victim’ tend to label individuals whereas the term ‘target’ and ‘those engaging in bullying behaviour’ emphasises the behavioural elements and the possibility for change. Recent programmes have incorporated the role of by-standers as part of the school bullying prevention strategy e.g. FUSE, DCU. Teaching bystanders to respond appropriately (by discouraging, intervening in or reporting bullying) can be an effective way to limit and prevent bullying.

CYP engaged in bullying behaviour

Students who bully others often do so to gain status and recognition from their peers. Their bullying behaviour is reinforced when they intimidate their targets and when the peer group colludes by not challenging the initiator or reporting the bullying to staff.

Bullying can be rewarding, increasing the initiator's social status while lowering the social status of their target. The culture of a school will strongly influence the extent to which this occurs.

Targets

Students of all ages can be at risk of being bullied (that is, being targets) for a whole host of reasons, including:

- differing from the majority culture of a school in terms of ethnicity, cultural or religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic status; having a disability, special education needs or mental health issues
- being unassertive or withdrawn (for example, isolated students with low self-esteem)
- academic achievement (being perceived as a high or low achiever)
- having recently transitioned into a school (through natural progression through schools, changing to a new school because of behavioural issues at a previous school, or moving to the area from another city or country).

Bystanders

Bystanders are students who witness bullying. They can be powerful influencers — how they react can either encourage or inhibit those who bully others. There are different types of bystanders:

- followers (assistants) - do not initiate, but take an active role in the bullying behaviour
- supporters (reinforcers) - do not actively attack the target, but give positive feedback to the initiator of the bullying behaviour, providing an audience by laughing and making other encouraging gestures
- defenders - dislike the bullying and try to help the target by intervening, getting teacher support (using safe telling) or providing direct support to the target
- outsiders - stay away, do not take sides with anyone or become actively involved, but allow the bullying to continue by their 'silent approval'.

Bystanders can play a number of different roles:

- helping students who are engaged in bullying behaviour and actively joining in
- encouraging or showing approval to the students who are engaging in bullying behaviour
- doing nothing or being passive
- defending or supporting the target (the student who is being bullied) by intervening, getting help or comforting them.

Bystanders who take no action or behave in ways that give silent approval (watching, nodding, turning a blind eye) encourage the bullying behaviour to continue. Teaching bystanders to respond appropriately (by discouraging, intervening in or reporting bullying) can be an effective way to limit and prevent bullying.

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