RESEARCH PAPER

Tackling bullying, using evidence, learning lessons

Report of the CfBT/Coventry Anti-bullying Development and Research Project

Research by:

Mark Rickinson, *Independent Researcher*
Lisa Batch, *Corley Centre*
Laura Bell, *Corley Centre*
Viv Blinco, *Coundon Court School and Community College*
Debbie Brundrett, *President Kennedy School and Community College*
Bev Chapman, *Finham Park School*
Susie Edwards, *Caludon Castle School*
Teresa Johnson, *Barr's Hill School and Community College*
Alison Perkins, *Foleshill Church of England Primary School*
Debbie Russell-Dudley, *Moat House Primary School*
Pat Scott, *Coventry City Council*
Janet Waters, *Learning and Behaviour Support Service*

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Contents

About the Authors

Mark Rickinson is an independent educational researcher (www.markrickinson.co.uk).

Lisa Batch is the Deputy Director of Corley Centre, Coventry.

Laura Bell is a Graduate Teacher Trainee at Corley Centre, Coventry.

Viv Blinco is an Education Welfare Officer at Coundon Court School and Community College, Coventry.

Debbie Brundrett is a Youth Worker at President Kennedy School and Community College, Coventry.

Bev Chapman is a Learning Mentor at Finham Park School, Coventry.

Susie Edwards is a Year Manager at Caludon Castle School, Coventry.

Teresa Johnson is the Extended Schools Manager at Barr's Hill School and Community College, Coventry.

Alison Perkins is a Learning Mentor at Foleshill Church of England Primary School, Coventry.

Debbie Russell-Dudley is a Learning Mentor at Moat House Primary School, Coventry.

Pat Scott is Anti-Bullying Strategy Manager for Coventry City Council.

Janet Waters is a Learning and Behaviour Support Service Worker for Coventry City Council.

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Foreword 1

This is a refreshing practical addition to the literature on bullying prevention. Reflective and participative, this research addresses the real day-to-day experiences of teachers and support staff who work with the complexity of bullying behaviour.

The development and research (D&R) model brings a new focus to the study of behaviour, which has traditionally been the domain of psychologists and sociologists. All too often in schools, approaches to prevent or respond to bullying are adopted off the shelf by unsupported teachers who have little help in choosing what is appropriate and then still less in implementing them. How different this model is.

By asking practical questions and using a process that was both supportive and challenging, it has encouraged the participating schools to grow and learn – adjust and analyse. The D&R model values a questioning approach among participants and a curiosity about other people's practice. It brought a group of professionals together to work collaboratively on problem solving and then allowed them the leeway to explore.

This model could usefully be adopted in schools elsewhere: it enables the teachers to take hold of effective approaches and initiatives and individualise them to suit their needs.

Reflective processes and group meetings forged the confidence to admit that sometimes an intervention or the training for it needed changing. The length of time allowed – two years – realistically recognises how long this type of work actually takes.

It is likely that with another group of schools the findings might be different using the same process. This is an entirely good thing. While approaches to the problem of victimising behaviour are described and sometimes evaluated in the literature, there is more to add. The principles should be carefully followed and the sound basis of the psychological underpinning of the approach should be well understood – but the method may need adapting for the needs of children with special needs, or teachers' strengths, or even the setting. This could lead to a flexible approach with a menu of tools and a set of principles and ethics. It may also result in a how-to literature and a body of case studies. What it will most certainly do is to provoke in teachers and support staff a longing to have the reflective time and support that these participants enjoyed in order to refine their practice.

Adrienne Katz
Director of Youthworks Consulting and founder of Young Voice

Foreword 2

Educational systems have a very poor track record of learning from experience. In most professions and trades new entrants can draw on the accumulated experience and wisdom of previous generations of practitioners. This is hardly the case in teaching. The study reported here starts with a remarkable and yet common finding. Whilst bullying is a very significant problem and has been since schools were invented the project team could not find a ready body of knowledge to draw on to aid the design of anti-bullying initiatives. The term bullying could have been replaced by a very large number of equally significant challenges to educators.

In primitive societies bodies of accumulated wisdom are passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. This process has many well-known limitations. More advanced systems and professions build their knowledge on the basis of systematic evidence-based enquiry – research in short. The professional work process is deeply embedded in systematic learning processes. The capacity to link these two processes, work and learning, is known to lie at the heart of commercial, business and professional success. We in education are sadly wanting in this profound respect.

The Coventry project has made a major contribution to showing us all how this terrible deficiency can be met.

The work has had considerable impact on the lives of participating students and teachers. Many projects have had such impact and yet left no trace for others to build on. The Coventry project has shown us how such a trace can be made and magnified. The strategic lessons for research and professional development are of the utmost significance. Investment in programme design, the deployment and commitment of a wide range of professionals and, crucially, the implementation of a D&R model are richly illustrated here.

The Coventry team and CfBT have exhibited vision and tenacity in this work. Dare we hope that educational researchers and their paymasters hear the sound of a ball rolling? If not I fear that teachers in 50 or 100 years' time will still be finding 'gaps' in their professional literature. Indeed, as now, the literature will be little but gap.

Charles Desforges
Former Professor of Education
University of Exeter

Executive summary

"There is a strategic need for the anti-bullying work of behaviour professionals to be better connected into the mainstream of their schools."

This document summarises the findings of a development and research (D&R) project that focused on tackling bullying in Coventry schools. Funded by Coventry City Council and CfBT Education Trust, this project involved learning mentors, education welfare officers, youth workers, teaching assistants, teachers and school leaders from eight schools across the city. It was coordinated by Pat Scott, Coventry's Anti-Bullying Strategy Manager and Mark Rickinson, an educational researcher.

Over a two-year period (2007 to 2009) each of the participants undertook D&R work on a particular aspect of their school's anti-bullying work. Spanning primary, secondary and special school contexts, these included:

- working with bullying survivors
- tackling girls' bullying
- developing peer support (befriending and peer mediation)
- understanding in-lesson bullying
- improving play during lunchtimes.

The findings emerging from this work can be summarised in four ways: overarching strategic messages about tackling bullying and using evidence; case study learning about tackling specific bullying issues; process learning about combining development with research; and wider lessons for others interested in bullying and/or D&R.

Overarching strategic messages

The main strategic messages that have come out of this project are as follows:

Building a 'how to' literature – our experiences as a project team have highlighted an important gap in the anti-bullying landscape: an easily accessible 'how to' literature that looks critically at the design and development of anti-bullying initiatives.

Valuing the design of interventions – time and again the school case studies highlighted the need to slow down and take time during the early stages of implementation in order to get the design of anti-bullying interventions right.

Moving from battery to mains – in our experience, anti-bullying work in schools can be all too easily 'battery operated rather than connected into the mains'. There is a strategic need for the anti-bullying work of behaviour professionals to be better connected into the mainstream of their schools.

Harnessing the potential of behaviour professionals – this project has clearly demonstrated the need for more and better professional learning opportunities for those staff working directly with bullying and behaviour issues.

Case study learning

Synthesis of the individual case study projects reveals the following key points:

Peer support – the introduction of new peer support schemes was the focus for D&R work in four of the case study schools. Key lessons concerned: not selecting 'the usual suspects'; not rushing the training; valuing the benefits to supporters; and building wider awareness and support.

Improving lunchtimes – both of the primary school D&R projects focused on improving play at lunchtime. Lessons learned here concerned: play equipment (keep it simple and think carefully about skills development); lunchtime play workers (make sure other staff understand their role); and pupil play leaders (provide follow-up support as well as initial training).

In-lesson bullying – one of the secondary school case studies focused on establishing a clearer understanding of bullying during lessons. Key ideas included: the benefits of students designing the school-wide survey on this issue; the surprising level of in-lesson bullying; and the need for whole-school strategies.

Girls' bullying – two of the case study schools carried out work relating to girls' bullying

"The case study experiences flagged up time and again the need for an iterative design process characterised by tailoring, trialling and fine-tuning rather than linear implementation."

(Year 8 friendship conflicts and Year 11 female bullying survivors). Emerging issues included: the need to understand girls' friendship processes; the value of professionals being open to new approaches; and the experiences of bullying survivors finding their own ways of coping.

Process learning

Our learning about the D&R process can be summarised as follows:

Being 'D&R ready' – based on this project, by far the most important attribute for being 'D&R ready' as a practitioner is a questioning attitude about one's own practice and a genuine curiosity about other people's practice.

The contribution of D&R – D&R for us meant being: more systematic in the design of interventions; more focused on using (not just collecting) evaluation data; more open to what others have done; and more thoughtful about who might learn from our work.

Facilitating D&R – enabling and supporting the D&R process in this project involved: being clear in terms of structure and process; being flexible in terms of people's starting points/ contexts; maintaining breadth in terms of wider literature and ideas; and nurturing confidence individually and collectively.

Wider lessons

There are two main wider lessons stemming from this project:

The importance of designing anti-bullying interventions

In relation to tackling bullying, the recurring message from our work is the importance of designing (as opposed to simply implementing) anti-bullying interventions. The case study experiences flagged up time and again the need for an iterative design process characterised by tailoring, trialling and fine-tuning rather than linear implementation. This is about recognising the variability of bullying issues, respecting the need to shape approaches to specific situations and remembering that design is an ongoing trialling and fine-tuning process rather than a one-off pre-implementation planning stage.

The potential of D&R for tackling educational challenges

This D&R project has demonstrated how opportunities for structured collaboration can enhance the skills, understanding and confidence of school-based professionals. And the case study projects have shown how integrating research rigour with practical development can improve the design and impact of anti-bullying interventions. The approach that we have followed is not unique to Coventry or anti-bullying and we see potential for D&R-type projects wherever different kinds of professionals are willing to come together to tackle educational challenges as problems without clear answers and to see educational interventions as designs in progress.

1. Introduction

"Bullying is among the top concerns that parents have about their children's safety…"

This report is about tackling bullying in schools using strategies developed through development and research (D&R). It comes out of a two-year collaborative experiment – the CfBT/Coventry Anti-bullying Development and Research (D&R) Project – involving ten practitioners, a local authority adviser and an educational researcher (Box 1.1 below). Together we set out 'both to develop anti-bullying approaches that are useful to Coventry schools, and to better understand how to combine development with research'.

This project grew out of earlier work undertaken by the National Educational Research Forum (NERF) on the concept of educational D&R.[1] In 2005, NERF established a working group to look into the evidence base relating to student behaviour. This group recommended 'initiating a D&R programme on student behaviour, building on LEA and school developments already underway in specific localities'.[2] In response, the CfBT/Coventry Anti-bullying D&R Project was then established by Coventry City Council with support from CfBT Education Trust.

In connection with the Coventry Anti-Bullying Strategy for Children and Young People, the project was a productive response to three strategic challenges:

- Concern about bullying:
  'Bullying is among the top concerns that parents have about their children's safety and well-being [and] *is a top concern of children and young people themselves.'*[3]

BOX 1.1 CfBT/Coventry Anti-bullying D&R project

Funded by Coventry City Council and CfBT Education Trust, this project involved learning mentors, education welfare officers, youth workers, teaching assistants, teachers and school leaders from eight schools across the city. It was coordinated by Pat Scott, Coventry's Anti-Bullying Strategy Manager, and Mark Rickinson, an educational researcher.

Over a two-year period (2007 to 2009), each of the participants undertook D&R work on a particular aspect of their school's anti-bullying work. Spanning primary, secondary and special school contexts, these included:

- working with bullying survivors
- tackling girls' bullying
- developing peer support (befriending and peer mediation)
- understanding in-lesson bullying
- improving play during lunchtimes.

The approach adopted comprised a combination of: (i) school-based development and research activities relating to the chosen bullying issue; (ii) termly one-day workshops for sharing emerging developments and gaining input from external speakers; and (iii) structured tasks between workshops focused on documenting the school-based D&R activities and findings.

The project was supported by a small Steering Group with representatives of the funding organisations and relevant local stakeholders.

[1] Stanton, G. (2006) *D&R Programmes: concepts and practice. NERF Working Paper 5.6.* London: NERF; and Morris, A. (2004) *Modelling D&R programmes: initial explorations of features. NERF Working Paper 5.2.* London: NERF.

[2] Logan, P. & Rickinson, M. (2005) *Report of the Working Group on Student Behaviour.* London: NERF.

[3] DCSF (2007) *Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools.* London: DCSF.

- Weak use of evidence:
  'Decisions on anti-bullying policy are still being made with very little evidence to guide them.'[4]
- Needs of behaviour professionals:
  'There is still a lack of appreciation of the abilities of the full range of [behaviour and attendance] *professionals that work in schools.'*[5]

In response to these broader issues, we present the findings from our project in four main sections. Section 2 outlines the project's overarching strategic messages about tackling bullying and using evidence. In Section 3, we discuss what has emerged from the case study projects concerned with tackling specific bullying issues. Section 4, meanwhile, considers the D&R process and what we have learned about undertaking development and research in a specific setting. The report ends by considering wider lessons that may be useful for others interested in bullying and/or D&R (Section 5).

The report is written for several audiences: behaviour professionals who are dealing with bullying issues on a daily basis; school leaders who have the potential to support and connect such work within institutions; educational decision-makers who shape the wider policy contexts relating to anti-bullying and evidence use; and researchers and research funders who are interested in practice-based approaches like D&R.

[4] House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2007) *Bullying*. London: Stationery Office.

[5] National Behaviour and Attendance Exchange website:
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/exchange/

2. Overarching strategic messages

"The biggest lesson that we have learned about anti-bullying work during this project is the need to slow down and take time to get the design of interventions right."

This section outlines the main strategic messages that have come out of this project. They are general themes concerning:

- the evidence base on anti-bullying
- the design of anti-bullying interventions
- the role of anti-bullying work in the bigger picture of schools
- the needs and potential of specialist behaviour professionals.

Anti-bullying – building a 'how to' literature

It doesn't take much online searching for 'bullying' to realise that this is a topic with a wide array of information. In England, there are numerous policy guidance documents, good practice guides, research reports, academic articles and national organisations. In sharp contrast to this, however, several of the practitioner participants in this project were frustrated by an apparent dearth of useful information at various stages of their D&R projects (Box 2.1 below).

Clearly there are issues here that go beyond bullying (such as practitioners' access to research-based information and the skills involved in using research and other evidence). **However, we feel strongly that there is an important gap in the anti-bullying landscape – an easily accessible 'how to' literature that looks critically at the design and development of anti-bullying initiatives.**

Anti-bullying – valuing the design of interventions

The biggest lesson that we have learned about anti-bullying work during this project **is the need to slow down and take time to get the design of interventions right**. Quite understandably school staff are working under very real pressures to introduce initiatives quickly. However, we have found that where such pressures lead to a preoccupation with getting a scheme up and running too hastily they can be decidedly unhelpful. Several of our case studies showed how taking time during the early stages of implementation was critical in getting the design of anti-bullying interventions right (Box 2.2 on page 12).

Both of these examples of productive changes of direction or approach could only have been possible in a climate of taking the time to think about early implementation as a critical part of the design process rather than simply a means to getting a new scheme up and running.

Anti-bullying – from battery to mains

It is well known that new initiatives within schools have a far greater chance of success if they are supported by senior and middle leaders and connect with strategic priorities. We certainly saw this in our case study projects where the presence or absence of senior staff support was a strong influence on the kinds of difficulties encountered during the project.

More than this, though, there was a recurring sense during the project that much of the day-to-day anti-bullying work was not well integrated into schools' bigger pictures. It was, to quote a headteacher involved with the project, 'battery operated rather than connected into the mains'. This was

BOX 2.1	Why can't I find what I need?
	When drawing up plans for the introduction of a befriending scheme, Debbie (a secondary school-based youth worker) could find plenty of articles highlighting the potential benefits of such schemes but next to nothing on issues to consider in their implementation. Susie, a non-teaching year manager working with students on bullying during lessons, couldn't believe that there were no good case studies of strategies for tackling this challenge.

BOX 2.2 **Taking time to get the design of interventions right**

Getting peer mentor training right

After 12 weeks of training Year 8 mentors for her school's new peer mentoring scheme, Teresa (a secondary school extended school manager) realised that she had underestimated the time needed for the students to develop the necessary skills and understanding. This led to a revising of the scheme's implementation timetable and a very productive change of direction in the training. The trainees started to assist in paired reading sessions as a way of gaining hands-on experience of something similar to peer mentoring.

Moving away from the tried and trusted

Faced with continual petty squabbles, fallings out and bullying amongst Year 8 girls, Bev's (a secondary school learning mentor) initial response was to set up a girls' group. After reading a book based on research into girls' bullying, however, she came to feel that this method was fuelling rather than challenging the problem. Instead, she moved towards an approach that involved working with the PE staff to introduce elements of social skills into girls' PE lessons.

particularly the case in the secondary schools where, despite whole-school activities as part of initiatives such as Anti-bullying Week, most anti-bullying work rarely seemed to move from the pastoral (support staff, behaviour) into the curricular (teaching staff, learning and teaching). This is in stark contrast to the fact that several of our project case studies highlighted bullying issues that required comprehensive strategies well integrated with mainstream concerns (Box 2.3 below). **We see a strategic need for the anti-bullying work of behaviour professionals to be better connected into the mainstream of their schools.**

Behaviour professionals – harnessing the potential

As well as highlighting the need for better integration of anti-bullying work into the mainstream of schools, this project has also demonstrated the need for **more and better professional learning opportunities for those staff working directly with bullying and behaviour issues**. As recognised by initiatives like the National Programme for Specialist Leaders of Behaviour and Attendance, there is a growing number of specialists who work in the field of behaviour and attendance both within schools (e.g. teaching assistants, pastoral managers, teachers, learning mentors etc.) and local authorities (e.g. education welfare officers, youth workers, family support workers etc.).[6]

The participants in this project have represented exactly this varied community of professionals who are working across many different roles, levels and institutional

BOX 2.3 **The need for whole-school solutions**

Evidence from two of the case study projects showed how it was ineffective to move forward on anything but a whole-school level where:

- in-lesson bullying was found to be widespread across year groups in a large secondary school
- staff expectation and attitudes were a significant obstacle to the embedding of peer support within a special school.

[6] National Behaviour and Attendance Exchange website: **http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/exchange/**

settings. The experience of coming together through this project has made very clear to us the drawbacks of the isolation that behaviour professionals can experience and the significant benefits that can stem from opportunities for discussion, exchange and collaboration. As one participant described:

> *'We're all working on the same issue but from lots of different perspectives and contexts so we're not all bringing the same thing to the workshops. It's the mixture of different skills that keeps us going.'*

What has been significant, and what we feel is needed, is more opportunity for different kinds of behaviour professionals to undertake collaborative D&R-type inquiries on pressing issues in their practice.

3. Case study learning

"…exposing bullying can be a potential threat for schools."

In this section we move into a more detailed discussion of the key messages emerging from the case study projects. What is presented, though, is more than a straightforward summary of each of the school case studies, which can be read in full separately at: **www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/anti-bullying**. Instead it is an analysis and synthesis of the case study findings and relevant research literature in terms of several broad themes:

- the nature of bullying as a problem
- the introduction of peer support schemes
- the improvement of lunchtime play behaviours
- the challenge of bullying in lessons
- the question of girls' bullying.

These relate well to the breadth of anti-bullying interventions in schools, which are often categorised in the literature in terms of 'interventions targeted at the *school* level (whole school policy, classroom climate, peer support, school tribunal, playground improvement), *class* level (curriculum work), and *individual* level (working with specific pupils)'.[7]

Bullying – a sensitive issue and a mutating challenge

The main reason that bullying was selected as the focus for this project was its prevalence as a persistent concern amongst the students, staff and parents of Coventry schools.[8] It makes good sense, of course, to focus educational D&R efforts on challenges that are real and pressing for people in schools. And as a project we certainly benefited from having an easily recognisable focus and remit.

Two complexities, though, are worth noting. The first is that although it is a topical issue, **exposing bullying can be a potential threat for schools**. As noted nationally, it is easy for schools to feel that 'reporting incidents of bullying will damage their reputation'.[9] The schools that took part in this project were all ones that had acknowledged bullying as a strategic challenge and were working to tackle it. There were other schools, however, where a more defensive attitude was evident: 'bullying is no more or less of a problem here than anywhere else'. And even in the case study schools there were instances during the project where concerns were expressed about how certain findings might be seen by the local press.

The second complexity is that **bullying is a continually changing problem**. In the 1980s, for example, the focus was very much on bullying as 'direct physical or verbal attacks' while the 1990s saw a broadening 'to include spreading nasty stories (indirect aggression) and social exclusion (relational/social aggression)'.[10] More recently, the phenomenon has evolved and extended still further with greater awareness of bullying involving particular groups (e.g. girls' bullying, homophobic bullying), methods (e.g. cyber bullying) and locations (e.g. in-lesson bullying). We have found it helpful to think about bullying as a problem that is continually mutating. The challenge then is not so much to try to develop approaches that will eradicate bullying, but rather to be alert to the ways in which it is transforming into new and unexpected forms. The question is not 'Have we stopped bullying?', but rather 'Has bullying moved to another section of school life?'.[11]

[7] Smith, P. K., Ananiadou, K. & Cowie, H. (2003) 'Interventions to reduce school bullying', *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 48: 591–599.

[8] Coventry City Council (2006) *Coventry Anti-Bullying Strategy for Children and Young People*. Coventry: Coventry Partnership.

[9] House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2007) *Bullying*. London: Stationery Office.

[10] Smith, P. K. (2004) 'Bullying: recent developments', *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 9(3): 98–103.

[11] Kling, D. & Gurr, R. (2007) 'Cyberbullying – Harnessing technology to protect students in the e-world', Presentation at the Anti Bullying Alliance Regional Training Day, Birmingham, 8 March 2007

"At both of the primary case study schools, the main bullying challenge was similar: how to reduce play-ground behaviour problems during lunchtimes."

Peer support – getting the set-up right

Peer support is now 'widely used [as an] anti-bullying intervention in both primary and secondary schools' across the UK.[12] Within the schools involved in this project, there were several examples of initiatives of this kind. These included a peer supporters initiative in a special school, a peer mediation scheme and a befriending service in two secondary schools and a lunchtime play leaders scheme in a primary school. While the challenges experienced and lessons learned varied between the individual case studies, there were some common messages that we feel are worth sharing. These concern the importance of:

Looking beyond the 'usual suspects' – all four participants working on peer support had a common aspiration of targeting students who (in the words of one practitioner) 'would not usually be asked to do this kind of thing'.

Not rushing the training – in all the schools, the initial start-up processes took more time than expected but were also more important than originally expected. In particular, the selecting and training of peer supporters took two to three terms rather than one term, but was a more involved and rewarding process for the participants than anticipated by the staff at the outset.

Valuing the benefits for the supporters – while the new peer support schemes were clearly designed to meet the needs of their eventual users, it quickly became clear that there were important benefits for the trainee supporters. As noted in the wider research literature, 'peer supporters report that they too benefit from the helping process, that they feel more confident in themselves and that they learn to value other people more'.[13]

Building wider awareness and support – While much of the early set-up work is focused on selecting and training the peer supporters, the task of building wider student and staff awareness and support was also critical.

Improving lunchtimes – the importance of play

At both of the primary case study schools, the main bullying challenge was similar: how to reduce playground behaviour problems during lunchtimes. This was identified using behaviour tracking (SLEUTH) data at one school, while at the other school informal interviews with pupils and lunchtime supervisors helped flag up the difficulties at lunchtimes. In both cases, there seemed to be issues with boredom and a lack of things to do, as well as with minor conflicts during (particularly boys') games. This matches trends found in a recent national survey of primary and secondary school breaktimes which reported that: 'the main problem at breaktime is poor behaviour but pupils also noted insufficient opportunity and space for fun activities and time to eat'.[14]

In line with this, the focus in the case study schools has been on improving play through a combination of equipment, specialist staff and pupil leaders. The key learning points relating to each of these have been as follows:

Equipment – the introduction of new play equipment was important at both schools. Examples included skipping ropes, bats and balls, hoops, beanbags, target games and skittles. What was significant, though, was selecting equipment that related well to the aims of improving group interaction, teamwork and turn taking. The underlying concern was helping the children to learn new games and develop new skills.

Specialist staff – the introduction of a lunchtime play worker, with responsibility for organising games and activities to encourage team building, turn taking and fairness, was a main strategy at one school. Key to making the most of this new appointment has been ensuring that other lunchtime supervisors

[12] Cowie, H. & Hutson, N. (2005) 'Peer support: a strategy to help bystanders challenge school bullying', *Pastoral Care* June 2005: 40–44.

[13] Cowie, H. & Hutson, N. (2005) 'Peer support: a strategy to help bystanders challenge school bullying', *Pastoral Care* June 2005: 40–44.

[14] Blatchford, P. & Baines, E. (2008) *A Follow up National Survey of Breaktimes in Primary and Secondary Schools*. London: Nuffield Foundation.

> *…levels of in-lesson bullying and intimidation that were greater than staff would have predicted.*

understand the role so that they are not 'calling on the play worker to assist them with situations and taking her away from her play activities'.

Pupil leaders – following a series of interviews with pupils and lunchtime supervisors, a playground leaders scheme (15 children from year 5 with responsibility for organising team games on the playground) was trialled at one school. As well as selecting carefully and training thoroughly (see peer support above), the effectiveness of this scheme has been helped by ensuring good follow-up support, for example staff helping the playground leaders to deal with difficulties during their games by using reward stickers for good behaviour.

In-lesson bullying – is it really that bad?

In contrast to the two primary schools featured above, it was bullying during lessons that was the key focus for one of the secondary schools. An earlier student bullying survey at this school had shown that one in five (21%) respondents had experienced bullying within the classroom setting. The aim of their D&R work was therefore to build up a better understanding of in-class bullying and how it might be tackled. Several useful learning points have emerged.

The power of student involvement – building up a detailed picture of the nature and extent of in-lesson bullying at this school was greatly helped by asking members of the student 'Staying Safe Group' to plan and design a survey for completion by the whole student body. The student involvement meant that the questions were relevant, the language was authentic and the whole exercise had credibility within the school. The questionnaire asked about a whole range of possible forms of intimidation including *physical* (slapping, pinching, hit by thrown items, chair kicking etc.), *verbal* (name calling, homophobic remarks, threats, racist remarks etc.), *written* (notes, texts, emails etc.) and *other* (glares, mouthing, gestures etc.).

The surprising level of in-lesson bullying – the survey results revealed levels of in-lesson bullying and intimidation that were greater than staff would have predicted. This is very similar to the experiences described in an article about student-driven bullying research at another secondary school unrelated to our project:

> The staff were initially both weary and wary about more research on bullying. They assumed that this would simply repeat the results of a previous staff survey some years previous, and would result in calls for more teacher [playground] duty. *However they were surprised and shocked to hear that the student researchers reported that* […] *much of the low key name calling and physical jostling occurred in classrooms, in front of teachers.*[15] [emphasis added]

The need for whole-school strategies – in considering how to respond to the challenges associated with in-lesson bullying, it became clear to the staff directly involved with this project that this had implications for all teaching staff and the ethos of the school as a whole. As noted in the research literature, 'one area of debate is the extent to which school policies and work to prevent bullying should target bullying directly or focus more generally on improvement of relationships within the school'.[16] It would seem that in-lesson bullying is a very clear example of a bullying challenge that requires the latter as much as the former.

Girls' bullying – questioning what we know

A number of researchers and writers have highlighted a lack of attention being given to girls' bullying:

> *The general assumption was that there was no gender difference in bullying behaviour. Recently, we have come to realise there is far more bullying among girls than was previously thought but that it takes a different form from bullying among boys.*[17]

[15] Thomson, P. & Gunter, H. (2008) 'Researching bullying with students: a lens on everyday life in an innovative school', *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 12(2): 185–200.

[16] Smith, P. K., Ananiadou, K. & Cowie, H. (2003) 'Interventions to reduce school bullying', *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 48: 591–599.

[17] Besag, V. (2006) *Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights and Feuds*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

"More attention may need to be paid to girls' bullying, and rumour-spreading and social exclusion…"

> *More attention may need to be paid to girls' bullying, and rumour-spreading and social exclusion; at present, anti-bullying materials often emphasise the more obvious physical and direct verbal forms.*[18]

Two of the case study schools in this project carried out D&R work relating to female bullying. One saw a secondary school learning mentor exploring ways to tackle friendship conflicts amongst Year 8 girls, while the other involved an education welfare officer and a learning and behaviour support professional working with a small group of Year 11 girls who were bullying survivors.

Small group friendship processes – one of the keys to making progress with the bullying amongst Year 8 girls was better understanding of the psychological processes involved in their friendship groups. The difficulties were almost always with other girls in their own friendship groups and there was almost a weekly cycle of one group member being isolated and excluded. The conflicts would continue outside of school (via social networking sites and so on) and most girls had poorly developed skills and strategies for coping with such conflicts.

Questioning the tried and trusted – the school learning mentor's initial response was to set up a girls' group. With a background in youth work, she envisaged a place where girls could come and sit, access support, chat, make friends and develop skills in joining, sustaining and exiting friendship groups. After reading a book based on research into girls' bullying, however, she came to feel that this method was fuelling rather than challenging the problem. Instead, she moved towards an approach that involved working with the PE staff to introduce elements of social skills into girls' PE lessons.

Initiating sharing of experiences – the staff working with the small group of Year 11 bullying survivors had the sense that much could be learned from these girls' experiences. But how do you tackle such an emotive subject? In the end, rich discussions of bullying experiences were possible through creating an informal, relaxed atmosphere with 'tea, toast and support'. It was also crucial to proceed slowly, waiting several sessions until raising the bullying topic. Over a period of a number of sessions the group moved from individual written narratives into stilted first conversations and eventually through to open group discussion.

Learning from survivors – there are no hard and fast rules to surviving bullying. All of the Year 11 girls described some form of 'gritting their teeth' and 'bearing it'. They all confided in a family member in the first instance and didn't feel that telling their teachers had necessarily made a difference. They all talked about having to find 'their own way of coping' and none of them had been able to seek support from their friends at the time. Each felt that a small support group with non-teaching staff would have been helpful during the bullying period. Given the sense of 'the victim being left to get on with it', the role of such a group, as recent writing on girls' bullying has suggested, would be 'to support victims more closely by discussing exactly how they are going to put their own resolutions into practice'.[19]

[18] Smith, P. K. (2004) 'Bullying: recent developments', *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 9(3): 98–103.

[19] Besag, V. (2006) *Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights and Feuds*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

4. Process learning

"…by far the most important attribute for D&R is the questioning attitude and curiosity about wider practices."

As well as developing insights into anti-bullying strategies, this project was also concerned with learning about how to combine development with research. This section shares what we have learned about the process of carrying out D&R in the context of anti-bullying.

Being D&R ready

Reflecting on the process of selecting participants and our subsequent experiences as a project team, we can begin to suggest a number of characteristics that seem to be associated with being 'D&R ready'. In our view, anti-bullying practitioners who are 'D&R ready':

- **are actively involved in anti-bullying work in schools that see bullying as a strategic issue** – this reflects the importance of involving professionals who are dealing with bullying in a direct hands-on capacity, but also are doing so within institutions that have acknowledged that bullying is happening and needs tackling.
- **express an attitude of having 'many questions but few answers' and are genuinely curious about what other schools are doing** – this reflects the fact that D&R only really comes to life when people have problems without clear answers and an understanding that moving forward will require some movement beyond their current thinking and practice.
- **are motivated about taking on something a bit different** – this reflects the fact that moving into the unfamiliar is an important part of D&R.

Of these, by far the most important attribute for D&R is the questioning attitude and curiosity about wider practices. Being D&R ready is about having the capacity to develop a mindset that can be likened to what members of another bullying research project called 'a research-action disposition'.[20] Talking about student researchers, the authors of this study describe 'learn[ing] to ask 'what is going on here?' when confronted with a problem […] rather than assum[ing] that [one knows] enough already to design an intervention' and wanting 'to ascertain […] a more comprehensive view of the problem [and] to get information from other schools and from the literature before [coming] to any decision'.[21] Our experiences of undertaking D&R on bullying issues in Coventry have focused on developing very similar ways of thinking both as individual professionals and collectively as a project team.

The contribution of D&R

D&R was a new process for everyone involved in this project. We made sense of our D&R task as trying to do things in a way that went beyond D without R or R without D. In other words, all of our work sought to have some kind of combination of D activities and R activities. The ways in which this was achieved was different for each of the school case studies but a number of broad features can be identified.

In our experience of working with the topic of bullying, D&R has meant being:

- **more systematic in the design of interventions** – several of the project participants have commented on the fact that this project has involved planning new interventions in more detail and with more thought than usual. In particular, trying to make explicit the why (i.e. the thinking behind the plans) as well as the what (i.e. the actions to be taken) of plans has been significant.
- **more focused on using evaluation data** – not surprisingly D&R has involved a stronger emphasis on asking questions about how new interventions are working and whether they are working as intended. More than this, though, what has been different for many participants has been actually using such data rather than just collecting it; for

[20] Thomson, P. & Gunter, H. (2008) 'Researching bullying with students: a lens on everyday life in an innovative school', *Inclusive: Journal of Educational Inclusion* 12(2):185–200.

[21] Thomson, P. & Gunter, H. (2008) 'Researching bullying with students: a lens on everyday life in an innovative school', *Inclusive: Journal of Educational Inclusion* 12(2):185–200.

"A number of the participants have talked about how, while daunting, this aim has helped them to think about their work in new ways."

example, seeing how evaluation/feedback data can be used quite easily and very productively in deciding whether to change course or continue as planned.

- **more open to what others have done** – almost all of the practitioners who came into this project knew little about what other nearby schools were doing and nothing of wider research. A distinctive feature of this project's D&R process has therefore been increased understanding of what can be gained from speaking with other professionals and exploring ideas in the bullying research literature.
- **more thoughtful about who might learn from our work** – a key aim of this project was always to develop ideas and ways of working that would be potentially useful to others. A number of the participants have talked about how, while daunting, this aim has helped them to think about their work in new ways. Asking 'Who could learn from the work I am doing?' has fostered an outlook on one's work that is both critical ('but that is nothing new, people already know that') and constructive ('but people might learn more from my mistakes than my successes').

Facilitating D&R

The D&R process in this project has not just happened. Rather it has required considerable facilitation. Through this, we have learned some early lessons about how to structure and support D&R. In our experience, four factors have been important. Each of these is explained and also illustrated with a quote from a review of the project undertaken by a member of the steering group.[22]

Being clear

This project deliberately set out to be exploratory and experimental. We were aiming to learn about how to carry out D&R by trying to do it without any clear blueprint or guide. In order to move forward, however, particularly early on in the process, it was critical to have some kind of clarity of structure and process. We achieved this through articulating (i) a clear set of aims and visions for the project; (ii) a definite schedule of one-day workshops over the course of the project; and (iii) a series of structured tasks with clear deadlines.

> The format, style, content and frequency of the workshops were universally praised. Time and again practitioners reported on the value of the personalised support and effectiveness of the workshop series. Specifically, the regular visits to schools by the researcher and the development manager and the prompt follow-up by email and phone calls were crucial in keeping the project alive.

Being flexible

As well as having clarity and structure, it was equally important that the project was flexible and responsive. This played out in various ways including: (i) making clear from the outset that while the broad project aims were in place, the specific approach and focus for the school-based case studies were entirely open; and (ii) taking careful account of individual participants' different starting points, contexts and support needs.

> A steering group member felt that the D&R process had remained distinctive, unlike typical top-down initiatives, and demonstrated how research can be combined effectively with local improvement. […] Alterations of course occurred in almost every school during the D&R process. Practitioners questioned their original ideas, re-thought them in the light of emerging evidence and challenges and redesigned what they were going to do.

Maintaining breadth

Developing a sense of our project as part of something bigger than eight schools in Coventry was another important part of the project facilitation. This involved: (i) inviting national experts on bullying and D&R to speak at our project workshops; (ii) organising visits to schools in other authorities and attending relevant regional and national events; and (iii) making use of wider research literature where relevant.

[22] Morris, A. (2009) *D&R Project Anti-bullying Strategies Project Review*. Unpublished report for CfBT/Coventry City Council.

"Getting the balance right between challenge and support was a delicate issue throughout the project."

Several participants referred explicitly to reading they had undertaken and conferences they had attended which influenced them in deciding what to do or how to change their current direction. The researcher and development manager and others (e.g. a SENCO) had played key roles in suggesting some of this and the space opened up by the project allowed them to read and reflect. The researcher had introduced evidence directly, for example from the parliamentary select committee, and indirectly by selecting speakers for the workshops.

Nurturing confidence

Doing something new like D&R necessarily involves unfamiliar challenges that are both personal and professional. Getting the balance right between challenge and support was a delicate issue throughout the project. This was helped by: (i) ensuring a mixture of whole-group workshops (for mutual support) and individual school visits (for one-to-one support); (ii) gaining supportive feedback from external individuals at various points during the project; and (iii) planning the project outputs and events from early on in the process so as to underline the bigger purpose of our work.

The interaction with other practitioners proved a vital aspect of the scheme. The termly workshops helped people pick up ideas from one another, learn from external experts and understand the process in carefully planned stages. Confidence was built and motivation sparked by seeing others struggling in comparable ways to oneself.

Local Authority involvement

D&R projects by their very nature will involve a wide range of players and there are potentially many different ways in which such collaborations might be structured. In this case, it was a project initiated and led by a local authority, Coventry City Council, with additional research funding from CfBT Education Trust.

The potential contribution of local authorities to school-based research and good practice sharing between schools have been noted in previous studies of 'research-engaged schools'[23] and 'Beacon schools'.[24] The experience of this project, though, has made clear the contribution that local authorities can make to D&R in terms of:

- access to networks of relevant professionals both within and beyond schools
- knowledge of pertinent issues facing local schools and communities and of how these may play out differently across an authority
- well-developed communication channels for dissemination of D&R outputs and events
- capacity to connect emerging findings to broader strategic issues and agendas.

[23] Sharp, C., Handscomb, G., Eames, A., Sanders, D. & Tomlinson, K. (2006) *Advising Research-engaged Schools: a role for local authorities.* Slough: NFER.

[24] Rudd, P., Holland, M., Sanders, D., Massey, A. & White, G. (2004) *Evaluation of the Beacon Schools initiative.* Slough: NFER.

5. Wider lessons

"Evidence from the case study schools has shown how integrating research rigour with practical development can improve the design of anti-bullying interventions."

This final section re-visits the project's two main areas of focus (tackling bullying and using D&R) in order to identify wider lessons that may be useful for others interested in bullying and/or D&R.

In relation to tackling bullying, the recurring message from our work is **the importance of designing (as opposed to simply implementing) anti-bullying interventions**. This is reflected in most of the learning points discussed in sections 2 and 3. Our sense is that while current government guidance places considerable emphasis on developing and implementing anti-bullying policies, the design and implementation of practical anti-bullying interventions does not receive nearly as much attention. We are not in any way wanting to challenge the importance of coherent whole-school policy development in this area. We simply want to urge school leaders, behaviour professionals and local authorities to take a similar strategic interest in the design and development of practical interventions for tackling bullying.

The experiences in this project have flagged up time and again **the need for an iterative design process characterised by tailoring, trialling and fine-tuning rather than linear implementation**. As outlined in Box 5.1 below, this is about recognising the variability of bullying issues, respecting the need to shape approaches to specific situations and remembering that design is an ongoing trialling and fine-tuning process rather than a one-off pre-implementation planning stage.

In relation to D&R, this project has shown **the potential of D&R for tackling educational challenges and improving the design and impact of educational interventions**. The feedback from participants in this project has underlined how opportunities for structured collaboration can enhance the skills, understanding and confidence of school-based professionals. Evidence from the case study schools has shown how integrating research rigour with practical development can improve the design and impact of anti-bullying interventions. Positive impacts were seen in terms of clear reductions in primary school playground bullying, improved attendance amongst Year 11 bullying victims and enhanced confidence amongst trainee peer supporters/mediators. And our project as whole has demonstrated the potential for productive partnerships between schools, local authorities and researchers.

BOX 5.1 Enhancing the design of anti-bullying interventions

The evidence from this project suggests that practitioners wishing to enhance the design of anti-bullying interventions at school level should:

- develop a clear understanding of what they know (and what they don't know) about their specific bullying challenge and/or planned intervention
- create opportunities to find out about how other schools/professionals have tackled this type of bullying challenge or used this kind of intervention
- think carefully about the kinds of perspectives (student, staff, other) that can best inform the design process
- get down on paper not only what the intervention will involve but also why they think it will work
- collect and analyse baseline and early implementation evidence so as to find out early on whether or not the intervention is working as hoped
- foster a working culture that supports discussion of problems and changes of direction as a sign of strength rather than an indication of weakness.

We are confident that the approach that we have followed is not unique to Coventry or anti-bullying. Based on the ideas in Box 5.2, we see potential for D&R-type projects wherever different kinds of professionals are willing to come together to tackle educational challenges as problems without clear answers and educational interventions as designs in progress.

BOX 5.2 Taking a D&R approach

There are many different approaches to combining development with research. Our experience has highlighted the following as helpful features of taking a D&R approach.

Focus

- D&R needs to be grounded in specific, pressing problems of practice.
- The scope, though, needs to be both manageable (i.e. small, specific) and of potential interest to others (i.e. not routine/well-established).

Participants

- The central participants need to be dealing directly with, and have a genuine curiosity about, the practical challenge under focus.
- A wider D&R project team comprising varied players and skill sets (e.g. practitioners, developers, decision-makers, researchers) is also important.

Structure

- The D&R process can be structured around easily-understandable tasks (e.g. What and why? How and why? How did it go? What was learned? How to share?).
- Progress can be helped by whole-project workshops (for mutual support) and individual participant visits/discussions (for one-to-one support).

Support

- Negotiating unfamiliar questions and challenges is integral to D&R, so developing an atmosphere of trust amongst participants is critical.
- So too is building confidence through responding sensitively to individual participants' different starting points, contexts and needs.

Communication

- Developing good flows of knowledge and ideas is crucial: within project (sharing between participants), into project (research literature, external speakers) and out from project (newsletters, presentations, publications).

Appendix 1: Further information

About bullying

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/
Links to Government guidance on anti-bullying

http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/Page.asp?originx_7354is_86064196689501 27l_200682025x
Anti-Bullying Alliance links to summaries of bullying research

http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/Page.asp?originx_321qw_68289564062520 i24i_20071121341g
Anti-Bullying Alliance links to summaries of relevant teaching resources

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmeduski/85/85.pdf
House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee Report on bullying

About D&R

Bentley, T. & Gillinson, S. (2007) *A D&R System for Education*. London: Innovation Unit.
http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/files/pdf/d_and_r_system_for_education.pdf

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http://www.eep.ac.uk/nerf/word/WP5.2D&Rfeaturesfinale42d.doc?version=1

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CfBT Education Trust
60 Queens Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 4BS

0118 902 1000
www.cfbt.com

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