

“Bully Dance”: Animation as a tool for conflict resolution

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Introduction

Studies in the United Kingdom (UK) have consistently found that bullying and violence pose a problem for schools (for example, Cowie, Jennifer, & Sharp, 2003). Whilst high profile incidents of violence in school, such as the fatal stabbing of the headteacher Philip Lawrence outside the school gates in 1995 and the murder of 14-year-old Luke Walmsley by a peer in 2004, receive much media coverage, these incidents are rare. There are more frequent forms of violence, such as bullying, occurring regularly in our schools.

Bullying, defined as a subcategory of aggressive behaviour, is usually considered by researchers to be characterized by the deliberate intention to harm another individual, repetition over time, and, an imbalance of power, that is, the victim has difficulty in defending him- or herself effectively (Smith & Morita, 1999; Olweus, 1999). Often considered the pioneer of school bullying research, Olweus (1999, p. 10) suggests that bullying “is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another”. Negative actions may include three types of bullying: direct physical (e.g., pushing, hitting, tripping up), direct verbal (e.g., name calling, teasing, yelling abuse), and indirect (e.g., spreading rumours, social exclusion) (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Olweus, 1994). Olweus (1999) argues that whilst perpetrators of bullying will vary in their degrees of awareness of what they are doing, most of them will realize that their behaviour is unpleasant for the victim. Furthermore, whilst bullying is recognized as a series of negative acts repeated over a period of time, Olweus (1999) acknowledges that a single incident of aggressive behaviour can be regarded as bullying under certain circumstances (although he does not describe what these might be).

The results of a large-scale study carried out in Sheffield in 1990 in which over 6,700 pupils participated, suggested that 27% of primary school children and 10% of secondary school pupils had experienced bullying sometimes in the current term, and 10% and 4% respectively had experienced bullying once a week or more frequently (Whitney & Smith, 1993). More recently, Glover, Gough and Johnson (2000) reported on the actual nature of direct physical and verbal bullying. In their study, 4,700 11- to 16-year old pupils from 25 schools took part in a questionnaire survey which revealed that, within the current school year, 67% of pupils engaged in “pushing”, 38% engaged in “punching” and 24% were distressed by teasing and name-calling. With regard to gender differences, Whitney and Smith (1993) reported that girls were as equally likely to be bullied as boys, but are only half were as likely to be involved in bullying others. In addition, boys were more involved in physical forms of bullying, whilst girls were more involved in verbal and indirect forms.

Although research suggests that most pupils’ attitudes are opposed to bullying and supportive of victims (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Menesini et al., 1997), in actual

bullying situations many peers behave in ways that reinforce bullying behaviours. Furthermore, the presence of peers has been found to be positively related to the persistence of the bullying episode (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). In research investigating bullying as a group phenomenon, Salmivalli et al. (1996) found that most school children in a class have a definable participant role which maintains bullying behaviour rather than discourages or prevents it. For example, some pupils act as reinforcers of, or assistants to, the bullying. Others withdraw and pretend they do not see what is happening: even these outsiders allow bullying to go on by silently approving of it. Fortunately, there are also pupils who assume the role of defender in bullying situations.

An important practical implication of these findings for addressing bullying is that programmes should be directed towards the whole group in an attempt to try to have an effect on children in all participant roles (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 1999; Sutton & Smith, 1999). Salmivalli (1999) has proposed a model for changing participant roles in the bullying process in terms of general awareness-raising, self-reflection and rehearsal. Raising awareness involves making pupils aware of the bullying problem and its consequences, and of the group processes involved; self-reflection involves engaging children in discussions to encourage pupils to reflect upon their behaviour; and rehearsal offers pupils the opportunity to practice new behaviours in bullying situations through, for example, role-play.

This paper presents the final study of four studies conducted as part of a programme of research looking at children's constructions of school bullying and violence. Based on preliminary analysis of two of the earlier studies, which suggested that the children wanted to know how to deal with bullying if and when it occurred, this study consisted of a four-hour activity day delivered to the whole class centred upon a film entitled *Bully Dance* (National Film Board of Canada/UNICEF, 2000). The overall objective of the study was to explore the outcomes of the activity day and, more specifically, to elicit and explore children's views on:

- their definitions of bullying
- types of bullying behaviours
- new ways of behaving in bullying situations
- positive leadership.

And, for the purposes of this presentation, I shall be presenting the outcomes of the activity day.

Method

Design

This study consisted of a four-hour activity day centred upon a film entitled *Bully Dance* (National Film Board of Canada/UNICEF, 2000). Task-based research activities including brainstorming, poster-making, letter-writing, role-play, and worksheets were conducted. Data were collected both before and after the activity day using the *Children's Attitudes to Bullying* scale (CAB, Eslea & Smith, 2000).

Participants

Participants were recruited from one Year 6 class from a primary school in a London Local Education Authority. Thirty-four children aged 10 to 11 years old participated,

16 males (47.1%) and 18 females (52.9%) (total $n = 34$). It was intended to include a further 32 children from another primary school but the school withdrew access to the children without stating a reason.

Materials

Questionnaire

A 15-item self-completion questionnaire measuring children's anti-bullying attitudes was administered to participants both before and after the activity day (CAB, Eslea & Smith, 2000). The scale was used to provide an overall measure of anti-bullying attitudes and included items that addressed specific attitudes towards the plight of victims (for example, "kids who get picked on a lot deserve it"), the disapproval of bullies (for example, "it's easy to see how some kids enjoy bullying other people") and support for staff involvement (for example, "I hate kids who run to the teacher every time somebody teases them"). The measure was rated by use of a three-point Likert scale: "Agree", "Not sure" and "Disagree", with a range of 14 to 42, with higher scores equivalent to higher anti-bullying attitudes. According to Eslea and Smith (2000), the CAB scale had weak internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha co-efficient of .51. In the current study the Cronbach alpha co-efficient was .68 before the activity day and .65 after. Item number 13, "some of my friends get bullied" had a low item-correlation and was, therefore, removed from the scale.

Film

The activity day centred upon a 10-minute film entitled *Bully Dance* which forms part of the *ShowPeace* series of animated films without words, all designed as tools for conflict resolution (National Film Board of Canada/UNICEF, 2000). Featuring animated, non-human "stick" characters and an arresting soundtrack of percussion instruments the film presents a bullying situation that can be used to provoke discussion and provide opportunities for the exploration of creative problem-solving techniques. The film adheres to three principles: firstly, it is non-verbal, thereby making it possible to use with anyone, irrespective of language ability and literacy levels. Secondly, it incorporates non-human characters which not only serves to remind the audience of the universality of the situation and provides an opportunity for viewers to recognize common traits in themselves that the characters possess, but also avoids specific age, gender and racial stereotypes. Finally, it is non-culturally specific, thereby recognising cultural, ethnic and geographical diversity.

Task-based activities

Task-based activities, including, brainstorming, quizzes, whole-group and small-group discussions, role play, letter writing, poster making and worksheets were employed to promote discussion and generate ideas. The task-based activities were conducted using pencils, felt-tip pens, flip-chart paper, and flip-chart pens.

Procedure

Pre-activity day

A pre-activity day session was conducted in the children's classroom with the whole class ten days prior to the activity day. The aim of this session was to introduce the children to the activity day, to seek volunteers, to gain participants' informed consent, and to administer the pre-test CAB questionnaires (Eslea & Smith, 2000).

Consent to participate was sought at three levels, from the headteacher on behalf of the school and the teaching staff, from the parents/carers, and from the children themselves. A principle of consent was adopted that required the active consent of the child and the passive consent of the adult (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998), thus, once consent had been granted from the headteacher using the Roehampton University Research Participant Consent Form, a letter drafted by the first author was sent to parents/carers by the school outlining the study and seeking their permission for their child to be approached to participate in the study. Parents/carers were requested to contact the school should they not wish their child to be approached; no parent/carer did so. In order for the children to actively consent to participate, they were provided with full information in the form of a Participant Information Leaflet about participation, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and the intended outcomes of the research (Davis, 1998; Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996; Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996; Masson, 2004; Morrow, & Richards, 1996). To enhance the children’s understanding of the study and the notion of informed consent, an Informed Consent Questionnaire was administered (David, Edwards & Alldred, 2001).

Adopting an approach advanced by Thomas and O’Kane (1998) the children were assured that anything they told the researchers during the course of the study would not be repeated to others. However, in the event that any information given by a child raised concerns, for example, that someone was at risk of harm, it was decided that it would be the responsibility of the researchers to support them in telling a third party (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). In terms of reporting the findings, children were also assured of their anonymity such that any information provided would not be identifiable as theirs.

The CAB questionnaires (Eslea & Smith, 2000) were administered to the whole year group. Participants were advised that the questionnaires would take about 10 minutes to complete and that they were free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason. They were asked to refrain from talking and to avoid looking at anyone else’s answers. They were advised that it was important to answer how they felt, and that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the items. The questionnaire was completed one item at a time, each being read aloud to ensure that literacy level did not affect the results. Help was given to any child requiring an explanation about a specific item. Participants were supplied with brown envelopes in which to seal their completed questionnaires to maintain anonymity which were then posted into a “post box”.

Activity day

The activity day took place in the Performance Arts room during school time from 0930-1500 hours and was conducted by the first author with assistance from a female colleague. The task-based activities were scheduled to respect playtime and lunchtime breaks. The activity day consisted of an initial brainstorming session, with the whole class, entitled “what is bullying?” followed by a viewing of the film. In groups of 5 and 6, subsequent task-based activities such as brainstorming, poster-making, letter-writing, role-play, and worksheets were facilitated with the aim of stimulating discussions about definitions, behaviours and changing participant roles. Data were collected using the CAB measure at the end of the activity day (Eslea & Smith, 2000).

The activity day concluded with a detailed debriefing and opportunity for discussion. Participants were presented with a Certificate of Participation, together with a £5 gift token in recognition of their contribution to the research programme, and a “well done” sticker. Participants also received a copy of “How pupils cope with bullying” (Talamelli & Cowie, 2001).

Results

Generally, at the start of the study most children expressed anti-bullying attitudes. However, some individual items provoked a large number of pro-bullying responses. In particular, 69.7% (33.3% males, 36.4% females) of participants agreed that “everybody should be able to stand up for themselves”; 45.5% (15.2% males, 30.3% females) agreed that “a small amount of bullying can be a good thing, because it helps to toughen people up”; only 18.2% (12.1% males, 6.1% females) agreed that “if I see somebody being bullied, I usually try to help them”; 42.4% (15.2% males, 27.3% females) disagreed that “it’s fair that weaker children should get extra help in school”; 22.6% (16.1% males, 6.5% females) agreed that “I hate kids who run to their teacher every time somebody teases them”; 54.5% (18.2% males, 36.4% females) agreed that “some of my friends get bullied”; 39.4% (21.2% males, 18.2% females) agreed that “it’s easy to see how some kids enjoy bullying other people”; and 45.5% (30.3% males, 15.2% females) agreed that “I like to think that I’m pretty tough myself” (see Table 1).

Table 1

Percentages of males and females choosing pro-bullying responses

	Males	Females	Total
Everybody should be able to stand up for themselves	33.3% agree	36.4% agree	69.7% agree
A small amount of bullying can be a good thing, because it helps to toughen people up	15.2% agree	30.3% agree	45.5% agree
If I see somebody being bullied, I usually try to help them	12.1% agree	6.1% agree	18.2% agree
It’s fair that weaker children should get extra help in school	15.2% disagree	27.3% disagree	42.4% disagree
I hate kids who run to their teacher every time somebody teases them	16.1% agree	6.5% agree	22.6% agree
Some of my friends get bullied	18.2% agree	36.4% agree	54.4% agree
It’s easy to see how some kids enjoy bullying other people	21.2% agree	18.2% agree	39.4% agree
I like to think that I’m pretty tough myself	30.3% agree	15.2% agree	45.5% agree

The anti-bullying responses given by males and females were compared. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the two groups. It is evident that females recorded higher anti-bullying responses than males both before and after the activity day. Female anti-bullying attitudes increased after the activity day, whilst male anti-bullying attitudes decreased. The standard deviations show that the two groups had similar levels of variability in terms of anti-bullying attitudes.

Examination of histograms revealed that the distributions were approximately normally distributed and that there were no extreme scores.

Table 2

Participants' mean scores and standard deviations on the CAB scale before and after the activity day

	Before activity day		After activity day	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Males ($n = 11$)	28.55	5.15	28.45	5.73
Females ($n = 15$)	32.00	2.93	32.67	2.82
Total ($n = 26$)	30.53	4.29	30.88	4.70

A mixed between-within participants' analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and time on children's attitudes towards bullying. There was a statistically significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 24) = 6.36, p < .05$, and the effect size was large (eta squared = .21) (see Figure 1). Inspection of the mean scores (see Table 2) indicated that female participants expressed significantly higher anti-bullying attitudes towards bullying than male participants both before and after the activity day. The main effect for time, Wilks' Lambda = .99, $F(1, 24) = .21, p = .65$, and the interaction effect, $F(1, 24) = .36, p = .55$ did not reach statistical significance.

Discussion

In accordance with previous research, the results of the present study suggest that children mostly express positive, pro-social attitudes when asked about bullying in schools (e.g., Eslea & Smith, 2000). However, over one third of the present sample indicated that they could understand how some children enjoy bullying others; nearly half thought that a small amount of bullying can be a good thing; nearly half like to think that they were pretty tough themselves; and nearly three-quarters thought that children should be able to stand up for themselves. These pro-bullying findings are also in line with previous research, for example, Rigby and Slee (1991) found that whilst most children sympathized with the victims of bullying, there was a significant minority who despised victims for being weak and who also admired bullies.

Anti-bullying attitudes did not significantly increase as a result of the activity day and, in the case of the boys, although not statistically significant, anti-bullying attitudes actually decreased. Similarly, previous studies show inconsistent patterns of results. For example, Boulton and Flemington (1996) did not find significant changes in secondary school pupils' attitudes after a single anti-bullying video session. Furthermore, after 2 years of intervention, Smith and Sharp (1994) found less positive change in primary school pupils' bystander behaviour compared with older pupils. On the other hand, Cowie and Sharp (1994) on the other hand found specific curriculum activities such as group discussions, drama and role-play generated positive effects on pupils' willingness to intervene in bullying situations. In discussing these contradictory findings, Stevens, Van Oost and de Bourdeaudhuij (2000) suggest that primary school children do not feel competent in reacting pro-socially against the aggressor in bullying situations and that it may be unrealistic to think that anti-bullying programmes can change this at a young age. Cowie and Sharp (1994) argue that 2 to 3 hours of curriculum time per year will raise awareness about bullying behaviour whereas attitude change requires a prolonged and intensive effort. Thus, it may be that one outcome of participating in the activity day was not that

attitudes as such had been changed, rather that participant knowledge and understanding about bullying had changed (Smith, Madsen & Moody, 1999).

The results also indicate that girls' anti-bullying attitudes were higher than boys', both before and after the activity day. These findings concur with results from earlier studies which suggest there are gender differences in attitudes towards bullying with, for example, Salmivalli (2001) reporting that girls had more anti-bullying attitudes initially than did boys. One reason for the gender differences in the present study may be that the activity day was conducted by two female researchers such that it might be difficult for boys to get seriously involved in an activity day that was led by women only (Salmivalli, 2001). In addition, the methods employed during the activity day, (e.g., small group discussions), may have been perceived as 'girl's stuff' by the boys, which only aroused opposition or macho attitudes (Peterson & Rigby, 1999; Salmivalli, 2001). Another reason might be that whilst anti-bullying attitudes increased in girls because the message of the day was initially acceptable to them, the film may have aroused opposition and strengthened macho attitudes amongst the boys (Salmivalli, 2001). For example, a study by Tulloch (1998) shows how an anti-bullying video was perceived differently by two groups of pupils: those who initially disapproved of bullying, and those who tolerated bullying or considered it amusing. Instead of arousing anti-bullying attitudes in all pupils, the video seemed to reinforce pre-existing dispositions.

As with most research, the present study had its limitations. For example, to learn about attitudes towards bullies and victims, Baldry (2004) argues that measurements should refer to specific bullying episodes otherwise children might respond with reference to their own representation of a particular bully or victim that they have in mind. She further argues that attitudes are context-related and that they vary according to who holds them (male or female), towards whom (boys or girls, bullies or victims) and within which context (bullying alone or in a group). Thus, it could be argued that in the present study the findings would have been more robust if the measure had include a specific bullying episode against which the children's responses could have referred to. It could be that the representation of a bullying episode that the participants had in mind when they completed the CAB scale before the activity day differed to the representation that participants' held when the CAB was completed the second time. It may be that this change was brought about by the activity day, such that participants' different knowledge about bullying resulted in different representations.

Whilst the main objective of the present study was not to offer an intervention per se, the results are in line with findings from earlier studies. In terms of children's views on their definitions of bullying, types of bullying behaviours, new ways of behaving in bullying situations and positive leadership, the analyses of the activity day are ongoing. Until such time as these analyses are available, further discussion is limited and broader conclusions cannot be drawn.

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Figure 1
Plot graph showing the impact of gender and time on children's attitudes towards bullying

