Case Study

The Support Group Method (SGM) used for relational bullying and for SEND (special educational needs and disability) pupils – an extract taken from a case study interview (Thompson and Smith, 2011).

A Year 11 Leader with responsibility for transition found SGM had been particularly effective for Year 9s, as it gave younger pupils an opportunity to discuss and analyse conflict, which often was not bullying. SGM was a process that developed empathy. In her experience, bullying pupils were often unaware that their behaviour was bullying and were often courting popularity by entertaining others ('for a laugh'). The SGM provided time for pupils to examine and analyse their motivation and the consequent impact of their behaviour. Even when used for a bullying pupil with autism, who struggled with empathy and did not fully understand the impact of her words and actions on others, this group intervention stopped the bullying. The SGM gave the bullying pupil's peer group time to gain insight into the effect autism had on the bullying pupil's interpersonal behaviour. They responded by helping to modify the bullying pupil's behaviour by adopting clear boundaries (e.g. 'I don't like you doing this to me, so please stop'). This successfully helped regulate the bullying pupil's behaviour.

SGM worked well with vulnerable pupils (SEND) particularly as pupils with autism had difficulty understanding boundaries and sometimes told 'tall stories' as a defence. SGM provided a supportive, safe group situation, where SEND pupils could become more aware of social cues and rules. She used an adapted version of SGM for the older years. However, she found SGM did not work so well for family-based conflict, as problem lay in the community and was outside the school remit.

Questions

1. The Support Group Method does not involve direct sanctions for bullying behaviour. Is this problematic?
2. Why might the Support Group Method work better for certain types of bullying and certain types of pupil?

Pause for Thought: The Challenge of Cyberbullying

Research is showing that as traditional bullying decreases, levels of cyberbullying remain unaltered or may be increasing (Rivers and Noret, 2010). Although cyberbullying predominantly take place outside of school, the 'fallout' is often brought into school. The DfE guidance clearly extends the school responsibility for dealing with bullying outside the school premises and school day.

Although methods of dealing with traditional bullying may often be helpful for cyberbullying (particularly as the same children are often involved), it is also important to develop different interventions to prevent and respond to cyberbullying. These include updating anti-bullying policies to include cyberbullying; Acceptable Use Policies for the internet; e-safety training for staff, pupils, peer supporters and parents; and using police officers to 'lay down the law' about the legality and illegality of online bullying. Unlike some forms of bullying, cyberbullying produces evidence (texts; videos; images) which can be used to respond to an incident, identifying what happened and who was involved. However, when the sender is anonymous (e.g. Formspring; Little Gossip), it can be the most difficult kind of bullying to tackle.

As pupils' knowledge and competence with new technology often outstrips that of the older generation, it presents a particular challenge for staff and parents. Staff can also be victims of cyberbullying through websites like Rate My Teachers; Formspring; Little Gossip and Facebook.

Organizations that produce resources for schools for e-safety and cyberbullying include: Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP); Childnet International; the Safer Internet Day resources and the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS). Childline provides a helpline and Beatbullying's CyberMentor scheme provides online support for young people.

Content Analysis for School Anti-Bullying Policies [MAY 2008 rev]

School: ………………………………………….. No of pages of policy: ……………

Rater: ……………………… Date: ……………

Type of school: Primary Middle Secondary FE-college CODE NUMBER: ……………

A: Definition of bullying behaviour (13 points)	**Score**	**Comments**

1 have a definition of bullying?
2 does the definition make it clear that bullying is different from other kinds of aggressive behaviour?
3 mention physical bullying (hits, kicks)?
4 mention direct verbal bullying (threats, insults, nasty teasing)?
5 mention relational bullying (rumours, social exclusion)?
6 mention material bullying (damage to belongings, extortion of money)?
7 mention cyberbullying (email, text messages)?
8 mention homophobic bullying?
9 mention racial bullying (or harassment)?
10 mention sexual bullying (or harassment)?
11 as well as pupil–pupil bullying, discuss the issue of adult/teacher–pupil bullying or vice versa?
12 mention bullying due to disabilities?
13 mention bullying because of faith or religious beliefs?

B: Reporting and responding to bullying incidents (11 points)	**Score**	**Comments**

1 state what victims of bullying should do (e.g. tell a teacher; should clearly apply to victims/ pupils who experience bullying)?
2 say how teaching staff should respond to a report of bullying (should specifically mention bullying, and be more specific than just 'deal promptly')?
3 clearly mention the responsibilities of other school staff (teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors etc.) if they know of bullying? (more than simply referring to 'all staff')
4 clearly mention the responsibilities of parents if they know of bullying (this can include knowing if their child has a behaviour problem if bullying is included elsewhere)?
5 clearly mention the responsibilities of pupils (e.g. bystanders) if they know of bullying?
6 state whether sanctions applied for bullying can vary (e.g. by type or severity of incident?
7 mention follow-up to see whether the sanctions were effective?
8 discuss what action will be taken if the bullying persists?
9 suggest how to support the victim? (more than just 'we will support victims')
10 suggest how to help the pupil(s) doing the bullying to change their behaviour (apart from sanctions)? (more than just 'we will support . . .')
11 discuss if, when or how parents will be informed? ('parents will be informed' is sufficient if it clearly refers to bullying)

C: Recording bullying, communicating and evaluating the policy (4 points)	Score	Comments
1 say reports of bullying will be recorded?		
2 say who is responsible for co-ordinating the recording system?		
3 show how records or survey data will be used to know whether the policy is working or not?		
4 mention periodic review and updating of the policy?		

D: Strategies for preventing bullying (6 points)	Score	Comments
1 mention any of encouraging co-operative behaviour, rewarding good behaviour, improving school climate or creating a safe environment?		
2 discuss general issues of peer support (beyond B5)?		
3 discuss advice for parents about bullying (beyond B4)?		
4 mention the preventative role of playground activities or lunchtime supervisors?		
5 discuss issues of inclusiveness (e.g. non-English speakers; pupils with learning difficulties)?		
6 mention the issue of bullying on the way to school or happening out-side school?		

TOTAL SCORE: (34 points)