BULLYING: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CHILDREN?

By

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the meanings for children of bullying and whether children’s own videos can be used to access children’s worldviews.

It used a combination of written work, videotapes of children’s focus groups, and children’s video documentaries to gather data on children’s understanding of bullying.

The participants were a class of boys and girls from an intermediate school in a large city in the North Island of New Zealand. The research was conducted at the school.

It found that gaining access to children in school is problematic but that using children’s videos is a feasible way of conducting research with children. Findings concerning children’s understanding of bullying included that they consider a much wider range of behaviour to be bullying than commonly included and that anyone can bully. Bullying was found to be linked to popularity and through this link to contribute to social integration in children’s peer groups.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a widespread and harmful behaviour that has serious immediate and long-term consequences for both the victims and perpetrators of bullying behaviour. It is a phenomenon that is common amongst children world-wide and is now widely acknowledged to be harmful, yet is found by both children and adults to be difficult to defeat. It has lead in some cases to suicides of children and young people who have been extensively bullied, or to the taking of extreme and destructive retaliatory measures.

In the past, most research into bullying was conducted within a psychological paradigm and focused on the individual characteristics of the bully and the victim. There have been many large-scale surveys investigating the prevalence and incidence of bullying. Other studies have led to profiles of stereotypical ‘bullies’ – confident, aggressive and popular with their peer group, and ‘victims’- passive loners with poor social skills. More recently, some research has looked at the social context of bullying, seeing bullying as situated within a particular social situation. These studies have focused on the particular cultural context that allows bullying to occur.

At the same time, there has developed a new paradigm in the sociology of childhood, one that accepts the existence of children’s own cultures, and children’s activity in the construction of peer cultures. Rather than viewing children as being not yet socialized or not fully developed, that is, looking at what children are not – not adult - children can be viewed as what they are, and seen as actively and collectively producing their own peer cultures. They are active in the construction of childhood and in their contribution to the larger society.

The approach taken in this study is located within this larger paradigm. I look at the meanings that bullying has for children, and in so doing, both
accept the existence of children’s cultures and focus on the question of how bullying fits into children’s worldviews.

The aim of this study was to explore what meanings bullying has for children.

The objectives were:

1.) To explore the use of children’s own videos as a means of accessing children’s worldviews.
2.) To find out whether bullying has different meanings for children from those described by adults.
3.) To find out what children think might work in combating bullying.

In order to explore the meanings of bullying for children, it is necessary to access children’s worldviews. This meant that there were two strands to this research, one to find ways of accessing children’s views as described in the first objective, and the other to discover what are the meanings of bullying for children, and whether they are different from those described by adults. The third objective covers areas of potential application for the research findings and I hope that this research will assist projects combating bullying.

While the terms “children” and “childhood” are used throughout this study to refer to those who are ‘not adult’, when I refer specifically to my participants I have called them “students” or “pupils”. This is in deference to the teacher of the class that participated, who explained to me that the term “children” was not used in the school, and that the students at the school were generally referred to as “young people”. However, the term “young people” may cause confusion with other terms, since it can include young adults. I have therefore chosen to refer to the participants in the study as “students”. 
The second chapter describes the background to this research, looking at what past research into bullying has told us about the incidence and prevalence of bullying internationally. It also tracks the beginnings of a “sociologizing” of bullying alongside the emergence of a new paradigm in the sociology of childhood. Finally, it addresses the imbalance of power between adults and children, and some of the issues raised by my investigations that framed my practical component.

The third chapter outlines the methodology used in this research project. There is a short discussion of my approach to the study of children, then a discussion of the differences between the qualitative and quantitative approaches and the reasons why a qualitative methodology was appropriate here. The question of ethics is then addressed and a summary of the theory behind the methods used. There is then a description of how the methods were applied in this research, followed by an account of how the data was analysed.

Chapter four outlines the findings from the data, firstly focusing on the voices of the participants, then at a deeper level of analysis a description of the meanings of those voices.

Chapter five contains the summary and some implications for further research.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

The term “bullying” has been used in different contexts to describe a wide variety of behaviours. One common description of it is deliberate, repeated and harmful behaviour by a person or group, where there is an imbalance of strength, so that the victims of the bullying have difficulty defending themselves. However, there are examples of behaviour that could be considered bullying which fall outside this definition. For example, most people would describe as bullying a single incident where an older and larger child used threats to demand money from another child, yet this may not be a repeated action. Some studies have used the definition Olweus has used in his work –

“We say that a child or young person is being bullied, or picked on when another child or young person, or a group of children or young people, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child or a young person is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the child or the young person being bullied to defend him or herself. It is also bullying when a child or young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two children or young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel” (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

However, there seems to be little general agreement on what constitutes bullying, and different studies have used different definitions. This can be problematic when comparisons of levels of bullying found in different schools or different countries are made because they are not necessarily measuring exactly the same phenomenon. However, bullying is now beginning to be viewed and studied outside of psychology and beyond the quantitative. In these studies, it has not been necessary to view bullying as a single, carefully defined behaviour,
or range of behaviours, but rather as a flexible concept that is immersed in and arises from a social context.

HARMFUL EFFECTS OF BULLYING

There is widespread acknowledgement of the harmful effects of bullying, for both the victim and the bully, and also for the impact on the bystanders or onlookers of bullying incidents. In a UK study of 723 pupils aged 13 to 16 years Sharp found forty-three per cent reported being bullied during the previous year and 20 per cent said they would truant to avoid being bullied. In addition, 29 per cent found it difficult to concentrate on their schoolwork, 22 per cent felt physically ill after being bullied, and 20 per cent had experienced sleeping difficulties as a result of the bullying. (Smith and Sharp, 1994. P.7). Williams et al (1996) in a London study of 2962 children aged between 7 and 10 years found a positive association between being bullied and symptoms of not sleeping well, bed wetting, feeling sad, headaches and tummy aches.

A United States study of 375 children from middle schools, found that peer victims and peer bullies reported levels of anxiety, tiredness and overall depression at significantly higher levels that those reported by the children not involved in peer bullying. Peer victims reported lower self-esteem, more loneliness, helplessness, shyness, and pessimism, and a sadder mood than did bullies, while peer bullies reported lower self-esteem, more helplessness, shyness and pessimism, and a sadder mood than those who were not involved in peer bullying at all (Renae Duncan, 1999. Pp.871-886).

A Finnish survey (Kaltiala-Heino et al, 1999) of 16,410 adolescents aged between 14 and 16 years, found that depression and severe suicidal ideation are strongly linked to being bullied or to acting as a bully.
In a New Zealand study of 259 Intermediate school children (Maxwell and Carroll-Lind, 1996, P.13), of children reporting direct experiences of violence and abuse, being in a physical fight with other children was rated as having an impact of 4 or 5 by about 30 percent of the children. “Being ganged up on, left out, or not spoken to by children” was rated 4 or 5 by 29 percent of children (on a 5-point scale, 5 being ‘very bad’). When children were asked about “the three worst things that had ever happened to you”, the death of a person close to them was most often mentioned (nearly three quarters of children had experienced this and for half it was among the three worst things that had happened) and physical or emotional bullying by other children came second. This had happened to over three-quarters of children and for about a quarter it was among the three worst things that had happened to them. It is worth noting that this came ahead of parents separating or divorcing. This had happened to over a third of children and for 13 percent it was among the three worst things that had happened to them (Maxwell and Carroll-Lind, 1997).

For many bullies there are long-term associations of early bullying with later juvenile delinquency. Olweus found that approximately 60 per cent of boys who were characterised as bullies in grades 6-9 (based on teacher nominations and peer rating) had been convicted of at least one officially registered crime by the age of 24. Moreover, as many as 35-40 per cent of the former bullies had three or more convictions by this age, while this was true of only 10 percent of the control boys (those who were neither bullies nor victims in grades 6-9) (Smith et al 1999, P. 18).

In a follow-up study of two groups of boys, victims and non-victims, Olweus found that by age 23 lasting consequences for victims of bullying included a greater likelihood of depression and lower self-esteem than for non-victims. (Smith et al., 1999. P.16)
PREVALENCE OF BULLYING

There are now a large number of studies which have looked at the prevalence of bullying in schools, at questions such as where and when bullying takes place, whether it is more common at co-educational schools, more common amongst boys than girls, more frequent at certain ages and so on. Much early research into bullying originated in Scandinavia, some of the earliest studies being carried out by Dan Olweus in Sweden in the 1970s and later in Norway. On the basis of a large-scale study in 1983-4 of 130,000 Norwegian students Olweus estimated 15 percent of primary and junior high school students, (ages approximately 8 to 16), were involved in bully/victim problems, with some regularity – either as bullies or as victims. It was also found that more boys than girls were exposed to direct forms of bullying (relatively open attacks on a victim, verbal or physical), but equal percentages of boys and girls were bullied in indirect ways (social exclusion and isolation). Physical bullying was more common amongst boys than girls, although non-physical bullying was still the most common form of bullying amongst boys. (Olweus, 1993).

In 1993, Whitney and Smith carried out a study in Sheffield in the UK using a modified form of the Olweus questionnaire. Over 6700 pupils took part in the survey, 2600 primary and 4100 secondary pupils. It found that 27 percent of primary school pupils reported being bullied ‘sometimes’ or more frequently, including 10 percent bullied ‘once a week’ or more frequently. For secondary schools the figures were 10 percent and 4 percent respectively. It also found that boys were more likely to be physically hit and threatened than were girls. Girls were more likely to have experienced indirect bullying, such as exclusion and rumours. Smith reports that other surveys in Britain suggest incidence figures and general findings in line with the Sheffield study (Smith et al, 1999. Pp.72, 73).
In the United States there has been little research into the prevalence of bullying using the same sort of definition of bullying as that used by Olweus. One study comparable with others above, is that of Perry, Kusler and Perry. In this study 10 percent of third to sixth grade students report being chronically victimised by peers. Girls appeared to be at risk of victimisation about as much as boys (Smith et al, 1999, P.285). Other studies in the United States give varying rates of bullying. For example, Hazler, Hoover and Oliver surveyed 207 students in grades 7 to 12 and found 77 percent reported being bullied by their peers at some time over the course of their schooling (Renae Duncan, 1999). Note that one reason for the large discrepancy between the rates of bullying in these two studies is because Hazler et al’s study asks about bullying over the whole childhood. Duncan’s own study of 375 children from three middle schools in the United States (using measures similar to those used in Australian studies), found that 25 percent of students reported that they were often victims of bullying at school and 28 percent acknowledged that they often bullied their peers. Males were more likely than females to report bullying their peers but males and females were equally likely to report bully victimisation at school (Renae Duncan, 1999).

In Canada, surveys of almost 5000 elementary and middle school children (aged 5 to 14) found that 38 percent of children report being bullied at least “once or twice” during the term; and 15 percent report being bullied “more than once or twice” during the term. In addition, 29 percent report bullying others “once or twice” and 6 percent report bullying others “more than once or twice” during the term (O’Connell et al, 1999, P.438). In a naturalistic study by Atlas and Pepler using video and audio recordings in the classroom and playground, 22 percent of the 190 students in the study were observed in bullying interactions as either bullies or victims. Verbal aggression was observed in 53 percent of episodes, physical in 30 percent, and a combination of verbal and physical aggression was observed in 17 percent of bullying episodes. They also found that in their classroom observations, boys and girls
were equally likely to bully, while boys were victimised more frequently than girls (Atlas and Pepler, 1998).

An Australian study of 936 children from year 3 to 7 found that an average of 17.7 percent of students reported self-experience of “serious” bullying (that which occurs several times a week or more). More males on average (18.6 percent) compared to females (16.6 percent) reported experiencing “serious” bullying (Slee and Rigby, 1998, P. 207). Other studies by Rigby and Slee have found levels of bullying from approximately 10 percent “commonly subjected to bullying” (Rigby and Slee, 1991), to 22.7 percent of boys and 13.2 percent of girls reporting being bullied weekly (Slee and Rigby, 1998, P. 50). A study by Forero et al. of 3918 children in years 6, 8 and 10 (aged around 11 to 16 years) found 23.7 percent of students bullied other children, 12.7 percent were bullied, 21.5 percent were both bullied and bullied others on one or more occasions in the last term of school. More boys than girls reported bullying others and being victims of bullying (Forero et al., 1999).

In a New Zealand study by Maxwell and Carroll-Lind in 1996 involving 259 children aged 11 to 13 years, children were asked about their exposure to acts of bullying. It found that 49 percent of children reported “being punched, kicked, beaten, hit by children” in the last 9 months; 67 percent reported being “threatened, frightened or called names by children”; 70 percent reported “having tales told, catty gossip or narked on by children” and 54 percent “ganged up on, left out or not spoken to by children” (Maxwell and Carroll-Lind, 1997). The Third International Mathematical and Science Study 1999 with 38 participating countries found that 39 percent of New Zealand students reported the behaviour “Intimidation or Verbal Abuse of Other Students” at least weekly (the international average was 16 percent) (TIMSS1999, P. 247). Eight percent (against an international average of 6 percent) reported “Physical Injury to Other Students” at least weekly (TIMSS1999, P. 246).
Adair (2000), in a New Zealand study of 2066 Years 9 to 13 students, investigated both self-defined bullying and victimisation and students’ responses to a set of behaviours previously defined in research as bullying. According to their own definition 58 percent of all students reported having been a victim and 44 percent reported having bullied others at some time in their school career. Eleven percent of students reported being bullied once a week or more often. Seventy-five percent of students had experienced at least one of the listed bullying behaviours in the past year. According to their own definition of bullying, there was no significant difference between the numbers of boys and girls reporting being victims of bullying, but more boys (49 percent) than girls (39 percent) reported they had bullied others.

Bullying is clearly a widespread and serious problem for children. There is evidence of the immediate and long-term harmful impact of bullying for the victims of bullying, but also for the bullies if the behaviour is allowed to continue. Both victims and bullies are likely to suffer more anxiety, sleeplessness, lower self-esteem, depression and suicidal ideation, than are other children. Long-term consequences for victims include later depression and lowered self-esteem. For bullies long-term consequences include a later association with higher rates of juvenile delinquency and criminal convictions. In terms of the incidence of bullying, it is clear that it is a problem that affects a large proportion of children directly. There is evidence that at least 10 percent of children in many countries are regularly exposed to bullying. New Zealand is no exception to this; in fact studies suggest that the incidence of bullying reported in New Zealand is higher than in many other countries.
APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF BULLYING

Many studies look at bullying from the point of view of the individual psychology of the bully and the victim. Such studies look at an analysis of aggression and victimisation, at the interaction between the bully and the victim, at the family backgrounds of the “typical bully” and “typical victim”. In these studies, bullying is seen in terms of individual personalities rather than in terms of group dynamics. Neil Duncan (1999, P. 146) describes the reasons for the initial upsurge in research into bullying, in the United Kingdom at least, as a ‘safe’ diversion from dealing with structural flaws in society which made life miserable for many children. Anti-bullying initiatives and research funding were influenced by public concern fuelled by media coverage, a coverage that is most effective when dealing in stereotypes of individuals’ personalities. Duncan also claims another reason for the emphasis in research on the individual bully is that in the main, it is school psychologists who are the primary extra-mural professionals dealing with pupil problems in British (and other) school systems. Psychologists, by their training and experience, are oriented to investigations of the individual when confronted with behavioural problems.

However, although the early studies focused on the individual, there was recognition of the social nature of bullying, and many programs developed for schools used a ‘whole school’ approach to combat bullying. Olweus (1993) for example, while analysing bullying in terms of the characteristics of the individual bully and individual victim, advocates an intervention program that involves the whole school. In particular he recommends “that adults at school and, to some degree, at home, become aware of bully/victim problems in “their school”; that the adults decide to engage themselves, with some degree of seriousness, in changing the situation” (Olweus, 1993, P. 66). Beland examines the factors likely to contribute to the aggression or victimisation of children,
such as dysfunctional families, being victims of violence, poor nurturing, substance abuse by mother pre-birth, violent television programmes, and failure to develop reasoning skills. She describes teaching methodologies and programmes that can be successfully used to reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviour in children, and suggests programmes need to be school-wide, should include parent involvement and support, and should be supported by the entire school staff (Beland, 1996). Smith and Sharp (1994) describe a project carried out in Wolverhampton where schools were invited to choose from a range of interventions to combat bullying. Those schools that selected a whole-school anti-bullying policy and introduced interventions as part of this policy were more successful in reducing levels of bullying (P.61).

The psychological approach to bullying which emphasises the characteristics of the individual bully and individual victim and their families has presented one perspective of bullying. More recent studies have looked at bullying as a social phenomenon rather than an individual one. In this analysis bullying is seen as taking place within a culture that allows for this behaviour. Ambert (Ambert, 1995) described bullying as being psychologized but not yet sociologized. This article presents theoretical arguments for analysing peer abuse (of which bullying forms a substantial part) as a sociocultural phenomenon rather than a purely psychological phenomenon. She argues that “a sociocultural perspective… would posit that, currently, there are children and youth subcultures that foster violence and abuse. These children and youths obtain a sense of power out of abuse because it rewards them. Society under various guises, offers them violence as a means of self-empowerment, and as a means of acquiring peer status” (Ambert, 1995, P. 195). She argues that “high risk” is a culture-bound phenomenon and that “high risk” or “at risk” can only exist where there is abuse. “It is not a child’s characteristics that place him or her at risk, but the social environment” (Ambert, 1995, P. 196).
Studies that have addressed the social context of bullying include Hepburn’s (Hepburn, 1997) analysis of accounts from semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers on the topic of bullying. She argues that the psychological approach to bullying which focuses on individual pupils’ temperaments results in a circular logic – she is bullied because she is a ‘provocative victim type’ is simply saying she is a victim because she is a victim. This individualistic focus on bullying she finds is mirrored by the teachers’ constructions. The teachers drew upon discourses of individual responsibility and fixed personality traits which could then be used to reinforce blaming, justifications and so on. Hepburn argues for an alternative discourse that does not focus on the individual in this counter-productive way.

Don Merton’s (Merton, 1997) study of a group of Junior High School girls looked at the sociocultural construction of meanness among a clique of popular girls. A cohort study of Grades 7 and 8 students found a clique of 8-10 girls who were “cool”, “popular” and “mean”. They intimidated peers with threats of physical attack but their reputations as mean and powerful meant they could get their way without resorting to violence. The clique was highly regarded and popular. Merton found that popularity, although highly prized, cannot be openly expressed and that meanness was a way of making sense of the tension between hierarchy and equality. The girls preferred to be considered mean rather than stuck-up because the latter led to loss of popularity, the former did not.

Ann Oakley (Oakley, 1994) has compared studies of women and children, and looked at children as a social minority group. The consequences of minority group status include deprivation of rights and moral construction as less than adult. Oakley describes one outcome of the psychological effect of discrimination and of marginality as the need to respect power relations and seek alliances with the dominant group. This may be one reason for competitiveness of children with one another and an explanation of the phenomenon of bullying.
Keith Sullivan’s study (Sullivan, 1998) of an isolated and bullied child illustrates two very different approaches taken by teachers who have such children in their classrooms. In the first approach the teacher “blamed” the child for her difficulties and saw the solution as assisting the child to make changes such as smiling more and improving her work to make herself more acceptable to her peers. Sullivan concludes that in this case the school and the teacher were unsuccessful in creating a safe environment for her, and then blamed her for this outcome. In the second approach, one outlined by an “expert” teacher, the expert teacher saw the problem of the isolated, bullied child as lying in the dynamics of the class: “You’ve got to think about what’s happening to the whole group that’s making that group react like that. That they feel that insecure that they’ve got to keep pushing people out to make themselves feel safe” (Sullivan, 1998, P. 156). Beyond the peer group, this teacher saw some of the problem lying within the attitude of the schools’ teachers. “…He was very much not accepted by the other teachers…the attitude within the culture of the teachers was such that they would actually not acknowledge the child…The children were modelling what the teachers were doing” (Sullivan, 1998, P. 158).

CHILDREN’S SOCIAL AND CULTURAL WORLDS

If we are to analyse bullying in its social context, then we need to have some understanding of that context, that is, of the social and cultural worlds of children. Until recently, children have been viewed either in terms of their socialisation into an adult world, or in terms of their development, both physical and psychological, into adults. Socialisation was seen as something that happened to the child, generally an adult-directed process whereby the child is shaped and guided to become a well-adjusted member of (adult) society. In the developmental view of the child, the “growing child” is understood in terms of her/his progress in the acquisition of emotional and cognitive skills and knowledge. More recently a new paradigm has emerged that views childhood as a social
construction and children as active in the construction and reconstruction of both childhood and society generally.

Corsaro (Corsaro, 1997) suggests the idea of interpretive reproduction, rather than socialisation, to describe children’s social development. He suggests that socialisation has individual and forward-looking connotations that are inescapable. The term interpretive captures the innovative and creative aspects of children’s participation in society. The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalising society and culture, but are actively contributing to cultural production and change. “Childhood is recognised as a structural form and children are social agents who contribute to the reproduction of childhood and society through their negotiations with adults and through their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children” (Corsaro, 1997, P.43).

Waksler (1991) claims socialisation can be seen as a political activity engaged in by adults and if so then socialisation as an idea is problematic. She suggests that the phrase “children need to be reared, raised etc.” is but part of a conditional statement of the form that “children need to be reared, raised etc. if they are to become adults just like us, if they are to support the world we've made, if they are to “outgrow” or “get over” their childish behaviour etc.” (Waksler, 1991, P.64). Waksler finds one of the fundamental adult biases that distorts children’s worlds is the idea that children are “not something” (i.e. not adult) rather than “something”. Children are lacking (language ability, maturity etc.), have less experience, and are less serious, less important etc. than adults. The bias defines children in terms of what they cannot do rather than what they do do.

James and Prout (1997) have examined what they call “a new paradigm” for the study of childhood, which recognises childhood as a social construction and children’s agency in the construction of both their own peer cultures and society generally. They point out the double
hermeneutic of the social sciences, that is, that to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood is also to engage in the process of reconstructing childhood in society. Research on children is a factor in the construction and reconstruction of childhood, which has implications in relation to the fact of children’s lives being constrained and determined by adults.

James, Jenks and Prout have attempted an analytic framework for childhood studies (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). They describe four new discourses of childhood - the social structural child, the minority group child, the socially constructed child, the tribal child - that provide different views of childhood which are fundamentally sociological rather than developmental. By demonstrating the overlaps between these views, they aim for syntheses between approaches not, as they point out, in order to close off debate, but to open it up for wider discussion, especially in terms of social theory.

If we accept the concept of childhood as a structural form in society, that children are active in the construction of childhood cultures and that children’s cultures are worthy of study in their own right, we then need to determine how childhood can be studied. Adults do not generally “take children seriously”. Adults take the roles of interpreters of children’s behaviour, and dismiss children’s contributions and explanations. Waksler goes so far as to claim that if the researcher takes children’s beliefs, activities, ideas and experiences seriously s/he risks being “taken for a fool” (Waksler, 1991, P.40). Waksler also points to the taken-for-granted assumption that children are wrong and adults right is further reinforced by the power inequality between adults and children. For this reason, adults cannot study children “as adults”. However, if adult and child are seen not as given in the nature of things but as social roles then sociologists can suspend their adult role and can study children.

Berry Mayall’s (Mayall, 1994) collection of articles explores a range of theoretical concerns in the study of children. The methods reported include interviews, group discussions, narratives and drawings,
observation, and participant observation. Mayall notes that “discussions about data collections with, from and for children tend to focus on the following perceived problems: children can’t tell truth form fiction; children make things up to please the interviewer; children do not have enough experience or knowledge to comment on their experience, or indeed to report it usefully; children’s accounts are themselves socially constructed and what they say in conversation or tell you if you ask them is what they have been told by adults. The short answer to all these proposed drawbacks is that they apply to adults too.” (Mayall, 1994, P11).

Similarly, Andrew Pollard (1987) in his study on children argues the validity of children’s accounts has the same problems as subjective data collected from adults, and that there is no reason to doubt the inherent validity of such data any more than that collected from adults. Pollard enlisted the support of a group of children to help him collect data about the perspectives of their peers; the children interviewed each other and other children, and commented on his analysis as it unfolded. This particular methodology seems to me to be a good way of getting children’s perspectives with as little adult interpretation as possible. I am attracted by the way it empowers the children, and I believe that by doing this, children’s own views are more likely to emerge. As will become clear in the Methodology section below, this study has informed my own methodology.

One of the main differences in research with children compared with research with adults is the power imbalance. Adults everywhere are in a position of superiority vis-à-vis children. There is nowhere that adults and children meet where they are ‘naturally’ on an equal basis. Schools are places where much research on children is conducted for the reason that there are gathered there groups of children of a variety of ages and probably as varied in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and so on as groups of children to be found gathered anywhere. However, schools are arranged hierarchically in terms of age, are an
adult-constructed environment, are sites of strong adult control. These are issues that need to be taken into account if we wish to access children’s worldviews in the school environment.

Simpson (Prout, 2000) describes the variety of ways in which schools are sites of discipline and power. Although the most overt display of power is between teaching staff and pupils, there are other power relationships such as pupil resistance of teachers, pupils’ power over other pupils, external power such as that of government agencies or parents. Simpson argues that the body and body discourses are central to the power relations carried out in schools. “The underlying intent of the school curriculum, which orders the spatial and temporal lives of children, is to ensure that schools are inhabited by ‘docile bodies’. “ (Prout, 2000. P. 63). She describes how pupils are introduced to a strict regime of constraint about where and when they should be during the day and how they should comport themselves. The need for this was often explained through the medium of a concern for pupil safety. Consequently it was by utilising their bodies the pupils rebelled, the boys exploiting parts of their bodies and/or bodily functions to disrupt lessons (belching, breaking wind, exaggerated coughing, rocking chairs etc), and the girls pushing at the boundaries of the school dress code.

Bowes (1996) reminds us to pay attention to the power throughout a structure and to avoid narrowly focusing on “the researched”. This entails study of the interactive, negotiated use and distribution of power, which is then placed in a wider social context. She also recommends careful attention to the use of “empowerment”, to be aware of the connotation it contains of the powerful somehow injecting power into the powerless. This view negates the power from below and the agency of the “powerless” in negotiating power.

Corsaro (1997) discusses a number of studies that illustrate ways in which children "challenge" adult authority and norms. One study by Don Ratcliff on the hallway behaviour of elementary school children describes how children most frequently moved about the hallways in
phalanxes (two or more people side by side, moving in the same
direction and usually engaged in conversation). The general rule was
that children should move as quietly as possible in the hall in files.
Moving in phalanxes gave children control of their interactive space,
enabled them to talk and be with friends, and allowed them to challenge
the authority of teachers all at the same time. Moreover, Ratcliff found
that some teachers saw phalanxes as disruptive but seldom enforced
the rule against them.

MY APPROACH

In this study I accept the existence of children’s cultures and the active
involvement of children in the construction and reconstruction of both
childhood and society generally. I consider that bullying is a
phenomenon that takes place within a social context, and has meanings
for children within their social world. To understand the meanings that
bullying has for children therefore, I needed to access children’s
worldviews. The problem then arises as to how best to access their
worldviews. Although it is a territory that adults once inhabited, adults
are outsiders to childhood. Moreover, because of the power imbalance
between adults and children there are additional problems of access –
how far will children allow access to that group which is in a position of
dominance by the very fact of being adult? One of the objectives of my
research was to try to find a way to access children’s worldviews. The
methodology was constructed around this objective and, as I was to
discover, how far would adults allow me near students?
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I view children as an “oppressed” group whose voices have not been heard, whose lives are constrained and determined by adults and whose contribution to the construction of their own social worlds and to the development of adult society is ignored. The term “oppressed” here is a technical one, describing the position of minority groups within a capitalist and patriarchal structure (Oakley, 1994, P. 19). (Such ‘minority’ groups can be social minority groups whose members possess the physical or cultural characteristics that cause them to be singled out and justify their receiving different and unequal treatment). (Oakley, 1994,P.14) This view is based partly on my personal experience, on raising five children of my own, and partly on my readings and appreciation of literature on children and childhood. The readings outlined in the previous chapter describe children’s agency in the construction of both their peer cultures and society generally, and also their powerlessness relative to adults. The two perspectives that have primarily influenced my research design are that children are an “oppressed” group whose voices have not been heard within a hierarchical social system, and secondly, that children are actively involved in the construction of “childhood” so that children’s culture can be studied in its own right.

This means that the study is interpretive in the sense that its methods are based on the understanding that children construct their own social world. However, children are also an “oppressed” group within a social system whose lives are determined and constrained by adults. Their “oppression” means that they are deprived of rights and they are held to be “less than adult”. In this sense then, the approach is Critical: it accepts that children are active in the construction of their own social world but that there are structures in society, such as patriarchy and capitalism, that constrain and determine their lives.
As mentioned above, Critical social science regards people as actively involved in the construction of society but at the same time oppressed by powerful, hegemonic groups. It is distinguished by its interest in the emancipation of people from the false beliefs and ideas about society. In the case of children, this emancipation is problematic, since the researchers will be adult, and therefore of the hegemonic group. There are ways of obviating this, one of which is to enroll the children fully in the research process, and the other is for the researcher to be true to the children’s voices as far as possible in presenting the research findings. Ann Oakley (1994), in her comparison of women’s and children’s studies makes the point that it is to be hoped that adults become the facilitators of children’s own perspectives and voices, rather than representors and protectors of their interests. This study is such an attempt to allow children’s voices to be heard.

For these reasons I have used a qualitative research approach.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Quantitative and qualitative research may be contrasted on several different layers, (see for example Lincoln and Guba, 1985), that is at the ontological, epistemological and axiological levels, whether inductive or deductive reasoning is used and finally whether it is primarily concerned with measuring or with meaning. “Ontology” is defined in The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology (1994. P.292) as “the branch of philosophy or metaphysics (is) concerned with the nature of existence. Ontological assumptions are those assumptions that underpin theories about what kind of entities can exist”. “Epistemology” is defined here as “the theory of knowledge, or the theory of how it is that men come to have knowledge of the external world” (P.147), and “axiology” is defined in the Chambers Twentieth
Century Dictionary (1977) as “the science of the ultimate nature, reality, and significance of values”. (P. 91)

At the ontological level, quantitative research assumes that there is an objective reality “out there” that is independent of the researcher and can be studied using measuring instruments such as questionnaires or surveys. The assumption behind qualitative research however, is that reality is constructed by the participants. There are thus multiple versions of reality and the task of the qualitative researcher is to faithfully report and analyze the voices and interpretations of the participants. (See for example Lincoln and Guba, 1985, P.37 and Creswell, 1994, P.4).

At the epistemological level, because for quantitative research reality is “out there”, the researcher’s aim is to be objective and independent from what is being measured. The methods, procedures, instruments and conclusions of quantitative research should be free from bias and allow for replication and retesting. For qualitative research, however, the researcher tries to minimize the distance between him/herself and the participants as the aim is to study reality from the inside not the outside. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, P. 37. Creswell, 1994, P 6.)

Moreover, at the axiological level, it does not attempt to be value-free; the values of both the researcher and the study should be acknowledged and described at the outset. These values are present in the selection of the research problem, the paradigm that guides the study, the substantive theory that influences the collection and analysis of data and the interpretation of findings, and in the context of the inquiry. Quantitative inquiry is value-free and uses objective methodology to ensure researcher’s values are kept out of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985. P. 38, Creswell, 1994, P. 6)
In quantitative research the approach tends to be deductive, that is it begins with a theory or hypothesis which it then sets out to prove or disprove by empirical testing. It uses deductive reasoning where valid premises lead logically to valid conclusions. Nomothetic statements, that is, time- and context-free generalizations are possible. Qualitative research is exploratory and hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing and the process of building hypotheses and concepts is inductive; categories emerge from the data rather than being identified beforehand by the researcher. Hypotheses are then built up from the details to explain a phenomenon. Such hypotheses are “working hypotheses” based on idiographic studies, that is, they are time- and context-bound and based on particular individuals or events (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, P 37. Creswell, 1994, P. 7).

Finally, quantitative research is primarily concerned with measuring—people, outcomes or products, with finding facts and causes, while qualitative research is interested in describing meaning, with verstehen or understanding human behaviour from the actor’s point of view, with how people make sense of their lives. It is also more concerned with describing processes than in measuring outcomes (Patton, 1980, P.44).

Davidson and Tolich describe two competing paradigms, positivism and interpretive social science. Positivism combines precise empirical observations of individual behaviour with deductive logic to arrive at probabilistic, causal laws that can be used to predict patterns of human activity. The interpretative approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct, detailed observation of people in natural settings to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (Davidson and Tolich, 1999, P.26) They describe the five key areas of difference between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms as:
1. the nature of social reality
   The positivist approach is ‘reductionist’, assuming that parts behave the same in isolation as they do in the whole. The interpretive approach argues for the primacy of relationships over particles.

2. the place for values
   Positivism regards science as being value-free and the emphasis is on procedures to keep the researcher from ‘contaminating’ the data through personal involvement with the research subjects. The interpretive approach argues that observation can never be free from theory, that the world is so complex and random that every observation made of nature is impregnated with theory.

3. when is an explanation true?
   Positivist research stresses reliability – the extent to which the same results will be produced if the study is repeated in different times, places and/or by different researchers. Interpretive researchers stress validity – the extent to which the results accurately reflect the opinions or actions of the people in the study.

4. the nature of human beings and society
   For positivists, human beings are self-interested, rational and shaped by external forces, while interpretivists argue that humans are social beings who create meaning and who constantly make sense of their world.

5. good evidence
   For positivist research evidence is based on precise observations that others can repeat. For interpretive research evidence is embedded in the context of fluid social interactions. (Davidson and Tolich, 1999, Pp.27-35)
WHY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As described above, this research project is an attempt to find the meanings that bullying has for children. Its focus therefore is on the social world of children, a world constructed by them. It starts with the children and enrols them in the research process. It proceeds from the standpoint that children are active in the construction of their social world, but that they are also oppressed and dominated by power systems and inequality structures. The study uses qualitative methods of research. The reasons for using a qualitative approach are outlined below following a brief discussion of the differences between the quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

As described in the Background Chapter, this study posits that children actively engage in the construction of their own social world but that there are social structures that are not only produced by the meanings and actions of individuals, but also produce particular meanings which can limit the actions that individuals can perform. If children are active in the construction of their social world, then at the ontological level reality for them is what they construct, not something “out there” which can be objectively measured.

In order to understand the meanings of bullying, for children, it is necessary to try to understand how bullying fits into children’s social world. The researcher needs to try to come to an understanding of children’s social world, to see it from the inside not just the outside. It is necessary to try to understand and interpret reality as the children see it. At both the ontological and epistemological levels then, quantitative methods are not appropriate.

Questionnaires and surveys, which assume definitions and meanings of bullying already available to the researcher, do not have the flexibility to allow the meanings of bullying for children to
emerge. While quantitative studies that measure how, when and where bullying occurs, can be and have been done, this study is interested in the meanings of bullying in children’s peer cultures. It is concerned not with measuring but with understanding bullying. It seeks to understand how bullying is seen by children, how it fits into their world and what its purpose is. Such an understanding can only be obtained using qualitative methods which accept multiple realities, which seek to reconstruct the constructions of the participants and which make explicit the interaction of the researcher and the researched.

CREDIBILITY

Credibility is concerned with questions of reliability, validity, generalisability, detachment and ethics. The credibility of a study can be increased through the use of various tactics such as triangulation - of methods, theory and also with other researchers; seeking rival explanations and negative evidence; getting feedback from the participants; acting ethically. Keeping the study “open” can also increase credibility. This means making explicit the values of the researcher, describing the methods used to collect and analyze the data, and presenting the findings in such a way that the reader can make his/her own judgement about the credibility of the study.

In this study I have used a triangulation of methods and have sought to keep the study open. By taking the initial findings back to the participants and seeking their comments on the authenticity of these preliminary findings I have undertaken a ‘validity check’. This enabled me to expand and clarify and test some of the themes.

The generalisability of a qualitative study is another issue that is of relevance in the discussion of credibility. Where there is an acceptance of multiple realities, so that the realities of the
participants in a particular study may not be the realities for any others, and where the influence of the researcher on the findings is an accepted aspect of the study, the case for any generalisability of the findings to other groups is problematic. One position is that a particular case is so idiosyncratic that no generalization can be made, and at the other extreme it could be claimed that generalisability is impossible for any qualitative study because it can never be context free. However, it is possible to take a middle view and look at the question not so much of generalisability as of “extrapolation” or of a “working hypothesis” that can be used and tested again and again (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Pp. 122-124 Patton, 1980, P.488).

This study is based on the participation of students of one class of one intermediate school in one city. Different outcomes may arise from studies in different school - schools that are smaller or larger, that are single-sex, of different decile rating, from different districts, of different ethnic/religious composition and so on. However, the findings from this study could form a “working hypothesis” that could be used as a way to look at the meanings of bullying for children in other contexts.

There is also the possibility that an approach that includes such a small cross-section of children treats children as a largely homogenous group, cutting across differences of class, gender, age and ethnicity as well as sexual orientation and disability. Children are not one group but many, and for bullying in particular there are likely to be different views depending on their gender, sexual orientation, disability etc. However, it is possible to justify treating them as a largely homogeneous group on one level simply to make their views perceptible at all.
ETHICS

It is incumbent upon social science researchers to ensure the participants in their research are not harmed in any way by the research process. Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, bullying, and because the research involved children, extra care needed to be taken to ensure that the participants in this project were not adversely affected.

There were two issues that were of particular concern to me. One was that students who had experienced bullying, either as victims or as perpetrators, might have unresolved issues around the subject that would make it difficult for them to participate in the project. I was also concerned that any students might find that at the end of the project, having dealt with sensitive and potentially painful issues, they had nowhere to take these issues and no one with whom to discuss them.

I based my ethical approach on the Association of Social Science Researchers Code of Ethics and the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee granted ethical consent. I discussed with my supervisor ways to deal with these issues of concern referred to above. These included making it possible for students to exclude themselves, and approaching the school about the possibility of providing some back-up counselling.

Information and Consent forms were sent out to all the parents. (Appendices 1 and 2). Although parents had the opportunity to deny consent for their child, the students themselves did not have any other way of avoiding participation in the project. This is a problem in doing research with children, since school is one of the few places where children gather, so is the most likely place where such research will take place. However, unless the research is carried out at lunch break, the students are obliged to participate. I did consider using lunch break and taking volunteers, but this created other
problems in terms of facilities and privacy that made it untenable. It was also possible that I might not get any volunteers!

The teacher assured me that he thought it unlikely that there were students in his class who would have problems participating. As he described it to me, of all the classes he had had, this one would be one of “the best” in terms of any bullying behaviour. He described them as a particularly good group, who generally got on very well together. He was quite relaxed about doing the project and felt confident that it would not cause problems to the students in this class.

I suggested to the teacher that some pupils might like to talk to someone after the project was finished, for reasons referred to above. He assured me that there was a school counsellor the children could see, and he also felt that the children would approach him or their parents if they needed to. I felt that as the teacher knew his students, and as there were likely to be other topics introduced into the classroom that were of a sensitive nature, I could rely on his judgement that some kind of follow-up programme would not be necessary.

In addition to these steps, I also took some care to explain to the students that the material they provided would be anonymous and confidential. I told them that neither the school nor the class nor any individual student would be identified. In the first session when they were asked to give examples of bullying, it was specified that they were not to use names.

Finally, because of the way the research was conducted, that is, that it was presented to the students as a project for them to undertake, I believe that they were able to see it as another school task. It was clear for example, that I did not want them to talk about bullying they
themselves had experienced although inevitably their own personal experiences did occasionally arise.

In practice, it seemed that the students were not at any stage upset by the discussions. When students talked about their personal experiences of bullying, other students were open and even supportive. Even when students were ‘accused’ by others in their group of being bullies, although they attempted to justify their behaviour, they did not appear to be overly concerned. The ‘accusations’ were made in a factual way and the group did not appear to reject the accused students.

WHAT I DID TO GATHER DATA

The data was gathered using question sheets, focus groups, the students’ own documentaries, and taking the initial findings back to the students, so that there was triangulation of methods. A summary of the theory behind the methods used – Case Studies, Triangulation, and Focus Groups and a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of these methods follows. There is then a description of how the methods were applied in this research, that is, what actually took place at the school. This is followed by a description of how the data was analysed.

Case Study

I chose to use a case study to investigate bullying. The term “case study” covers a variety of different methods of research. Stake (1995) has described three types of case study – intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Another is the instructional case study, for example, as commonly used in law or medicine to describe a case adopted for instructional purposes. The intrinsic case study
describes a case in detail because the case is interesting in itself, or because for some reason more detailed knowledge of that case is needed. Instrumental case study is the study of a particular case not because of the interest in that case, but in order to learn about some particular problem or question. That is, the case is instrumental to the study of a particular question. A collective case study is several coordinated studies of a research question. Yin (1994, P.4) identified three specific types of case study, exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. He distinguishes the case study from other research strategies by the following definition:

“A case study is an empirical inquiry that;
- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- multiple sources of evidence are used.” (Yin, 1989, P.23)

In particular, he describes the three conditions which distinguish case study research from experimental, survey, archival and history researches. These are (1) the type of research question posed (typically “how” and “why” for case studies). (2) The extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events (little for case studies). (3) The degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events (case study focuses on contemporary events). Merriam (1988, P. 21) describes the main concern of case studies versus surveys or experimental research as being “interpretation in context” and defines the qualitative case study as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit”.

This research project was defined as a case study because it is a qualitative study, it is interpretive and descriptive and it is “bounded” in that it investigates the students of one classroom. Under Stake’s classification, it is an instrumental case study, its purpose being to
study a particular case, not for its intrinsic interest, but in order to learn something about bullying there. The use of a case study as the preferred method of research was because the nature of the research question, to explore the meanings for children of bullying, required the interpretive and intensive approach that is typical of case study research.

The aim of this study, to explore the meanings for children of bullying, required coming to some understanding of children’s worldview. To achieve this understanding, given the time and resource limits of research for a thesis, an in-depth study of a small group of children was preferable to a more superficial study of a larger and more diverse group. Given sufficient time and resources it would clearly be better to use multiple case studies so a more diverse range of children could participate. Children are not one group but many, and choosing one group to study means losing that diversity, whether of class, race, religion, ethnicity, age or whatever.

However, the group chosen for study was not intended to be a “typical” group of children nor are the conclusions drawn from this study intended to be representative of children in general. The aim of the study is to come to some understanding of how bullying fits into children’s social world. It is to be hoped that this understanding will form a hypothesis that may be useful to the way in which we think about bullying, and that can also be tested and re-tested.

The group chosen for this study was one class from an Intermediate School in a suburb of a large city. The school has a higher-end decile rating. The reason I chose this school was primarily because I had access to a teacher at the school who had taught some of my own children at another school. From my previous dealings with him I had found him to be friendly, open, and relaxed in his dealings with children. I believed it was important to approach the “right” sort of teacher because of the nature of my research. It was clear that the
study would take up several days of class time, so it was necessary that the teacher was amenable to having his/her timetable interrupted, or to having the research activity somehow included in the curriculum being studied. Because I wanted the children to video their own focus groups, which would clearly be quite invasive of the classroom, I also needed a teacher who would be prepared to “step back” and let the children take over the classroom activity. I wanted the children to feel as empowered as possible in undertaking this activity, because I wanted it to be their research as much as possible, with minimal adult involvement.

This was difficult, because school, and the classroom in particular, is an adult-dominated environment in the sense that both the school rules and the classroom program, which are constructed by adults, direct children’s actions and behaviour over the school day. Clearly some “negotiation” of these takes place, but power finally resides with the adults. To counteract this as far as possible, it was my hope to enrol a teacher who would be sympathetic to my approach, and who would be happy to take a passive role and allow the students to run this research activity.

Finally, obtaining access to a class for research is a privilege not a right and I believed my previous acquaintance with this teacher would improve my prospects of gaining entrée to the classroom.

**Triangulation**

Stake (1995) has described four types of triangulation: data source, theory, methodological and investigator triangulation. This study used methodological triangulation, that is, employing several methods within a study. The reasons for using triangulation are:

- To obtain a variety of information on the same issue
To use the strengths of each method to overcome the deficiencies of the other
To achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability and
To overcome the deficiencies of single-method studies.
(Sarantakos, 1993, P. 155)

Stake (1995, P. 114-115) describes the reasons for using triangulation as twofold, that is, to search for other interpretations and/or to confirm findings. Stake makes the point that if one holds a strong belief in constructed reality then triangulation will be used to seek other interpretations rather than confirm findings. Triangulation is often used for the purpose of producing more valid and reliable results, but as Sarantakos (1993, P. 156) points out, each method still needs to be tested for validity and reliability, the findings supported by each method can still be invalid, and there is clearly a problem if the methods used produce different findings. The primary reasons for using different methods in this study were based around the fact that this study is exploratory in that it is seeking for ways to investigate children’s' world. The use of focus groups for example, was to get the children thinking on the topic of bullying, to get some group “synergy” and so on. Individual answer sheets were used to get some individual interpretation from children who were not fully comfortable expressing their views in the group. The documentaries were used with the intention of allowing the children to create some data with minimal adult involvement and to encourage them to think creatively about the topic. By using several different methods, findings that did not emerge from one method of data collection might be found in another. In addition, if similar findings arose in two or more of the methods, there would be good grounds for accepting their validity. Conversely, if findings from one method were not found elsewhere, or were contradictory to findings from another method, there would be stronger grounds for questioning their validity.
Focus Groups

The methods used included a mix of group discussions, group work and individual work by the students. Because this research takes the view that children are an “oppressed” group whose voices have not been heard, one of the difficulties in obtaining data from was getting access to their world without the adult/researcher voice dominating. For this reason, I decided to get them to conduct their own focus groups, which would be videotaped, so no adult need be present.

The use of focus groups as a data-gathering technique has been established since the beginning of World War II when it was used primarily as a means of determining the effectiveness of radio programs to boost morale. Since that time it has been used extensively in marketing research, but since the 1980’s it has emerged in social science research. An advantage of focus groups is that like the unstructured or non-directed individual interview, they allow individuals to respond without confining them to the interviewer’s interpretation or pre-conceived idea of a topic.

Indeed, one of the reasons why the use of the focus group lay dormant for so many years was because of the popularity of quantitative methods of research and the doubts about the soundness of qualitative research methods generally. However, a concern for the limiting nature of research techniques where the researcher/interviewer directs the interview led social scientists to look for ways in which the realities of participants could be seen. Structured interviews with set questions that do not allow the subject to deviate to their own areas of interest or importance can limit the findings to the preconceived ideas of the researcher/interviewer and miss the reality of the participant. Focus groups, like interviews, can be unstructured allowing participants to range quite freely in their
responses to questions and prompts, or if more guided responses are wanted can be made more fixed and structured.

Moreover, in focus groups the attention is focused on the interaction between the group members rather than between the interviewer and subject. Participants interact with one another, react to one another's comments, and are influenced by one another's opinions. As happens in real-life, meanings arising from focus group data are thereby socially constructed. The "synergy" of the focus group that arises from this interaction between participants allows for the emergence and development of ideas and issues in a dynamic way that does not occur in one-to-one interviews or questionnaires.

However, this gain in breadth can be at the cost of a loss in depth of detail. The researcher has less control over the course of the discussion in a focus group and consequently may lose data that could be obtained in an interview because of its potential for more effective probing and participant reflection and less competition for 'air time'.

Another disadvantage of the focus group is that participants may spur one another on to more extreme views, (Berg, 1998, P.112) with the subsequent loss of some precision. However, it is also possible that particularly when discussing controversial topics, group participants may try to gauge the group consensus and then agree with it. There may then be a tendency in the group to move towards some kind of mean or average view.

There is also the question of the suitability of focus groups as a research method when children are the participants. Charlesworth and Rodwell (1997) find from their study that “the focus group should be embraced as an effective means of entering and understanding the child’s perspective” (P. 1214). In my own
experience of conducting focus groups with children on the subject of bullying, I found them to be enthusiastic participants who seemed to be at ease discussing a potentially sensitive topic. Although there is a communication and power gap between children and adults which needs to be bridged for data to be collected, my own experience suggests that the possible novelty of an adult sitting and listening at length to their views and taking them seriously, overcomes much of the reticence which might be expected in view of the adult/child disparities.

Finally, two practical points that are relevant for this study are that using focus groups to obtain data is generally less time intensive than using interviews or other methods such as participant observation that may be applicable.

In this study, the students conducted their own focus groups. The discussions were videotaped, with the students’ knowledge. There was no external moderator. Instead, the students were given sheets to work from, with questions of the sort that a moderator might ask to start discussion. From then on, it was entirely up to the students how the discussion was conducted.

Without a researcher/moderator present to direct the discussion and to keep participants focussed on the topic, there is a greater likelihood that the discussion will detour. “Interesting” comments may not be probed or followed up, dominant talkers may take control of the discussion and shy or reserved participants may not be drawn out. However, some of these disadvantages are obviated because the students are used to working in groups and are used to completing a task to a timetable. Moreover, because the groups were held in the classroom during class time, and the assignment was introduced by the class teacher, the task became more like a familiar class activity. The students were aware that they needed to complete the activity as described by the teacher in the time
available. In addition, as is described below, the teacher selected each group, and the basis for selection was that the students would work well together to complete the task.

It could be claimed that the absence of the researcher-as-moderator might be more likely to exaggerate the disadvantages of the focus group method described above, viz., agreeing with the group consensus or alternatively being spurred on to more extreme views. Moreover, when discussing topics as sensitive as bullying, participants are even more likely to appraise the opinions of other group members and stay within an “acceptable” range. I would add to this possible weakness the fact that the participants in this study are of an age (11 to 13 years) where sensitivity to being viewed as “normal” is particularly high. An adult moderator may very well be able to draw out views that are outside the “normal” range by conveying to the participants the acceptability of all views. It may be possible that the moderator could create a “safe-place” for all opinions within the focus group environment.

However, it is also possible that the moderator would not achieve this, that the participants would be too sensitive to the opinions of their peers in the group to be persuaded by an adult that all views were acceptable. Moreover, it is also possible that the adult moderator may in fact have a restraining effect on the opinions expressed as students might be unwilling to state thoughts that could be accepted by their peers but that they believe would be viewed as objectionable by adults.

Finally, this study is concerned with describing the meanings of bullying for children, that is, it looks at bullying within a social context. The focus group is a social context, and how children express their views on bullying within the focus group can provide information on how bullying is viewed within that particular social context. Although an in-depth interview has the possible advantage
of digging deeper, the “synergy” of the group is lost. In this study, this synergy is more important as it is bullying as it is situated in the group that is of interest. Because the groups are being videotaped, both the verbal responses and the body language responses to other students’ comments are available for analysis. This provides data on how children in a group, in a social context, both view and manage the meaning of bullying.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were a group of intermediate-age children from a co-ed school in a suburb in a large city. I chose this age group because I considered younger children may have difficulty articulating their views, and older children may have taken on adult views of bullying. This partly draws on my experience as a mother, raising five children (age range 7 to 18 years) and partly from my readings (e.g. Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, Pp.49-59) and course experience. It is possible of course, that this group may have already absorbed adult views of bullying, but in order to minimize this possibility I chose a school that had not undergone a “bullying programme” recently.

In addition, the research was introduced to the children in ways that encouraged the children to realize that they held the knowledge. For instance, the teacher and I introduced the idea of aliens visiting the school who had observed this behaviour and wanted to find out about it. The children were undertaking this research in order to inform these aliens. Although I did not expect children of this age to really believe that aliens were around asking about bullying, I wanted to convey to them the idea of a children’s culture that adults did not understand. By thinking about aliens as the recipients of their “research” they might be better able to see their knowledge of their
world as being interesting, worthwhile and unknown to those outside children’s worlds.

MAKING CONTACT

I first approached the teacher and obtained an understanding from him that he was happy for his class to take part in the research. I sent him my Research Proposal and we had some brief conversations by telephone, then arranged to meet to discuss the research.

The first discussion was held after school, and lasted for about two hours. During this time I outlined what I wanted to do and some of the rationale behind my methods. The teacher asked about aspects of my research that he wanted explained further, and we discussed various general matters such as my view of children as an “oppressed” group. This particular discussion was quite elongated, as the teacher did not accept that children were an “oppressed” group, a view that may be at least partly a consequence of the nature of the teacher’s role within our schools.

After this discussion I made up a detailed program of how the research project would be conducted and sent this to the teacher. We met again to discuss the details of this, and drew up another plan for the program.

Originally I had intended that the students would actually conduct and video their own focus groups, but this had become impracticable. One reason was because the owners of the video cameras were not happy for students to operate the cameras (I tried two camera hire places and also personal contacts and found the same reluctance to allow the students to operate the cameras). The other reason was because I was unable to convince the teacher of
the need for this, either because I failed to explain clearly the rationale behind it, or because he believed that such a method would not result in the students providing much information about bullying, possibly a combination of both. The use of the video cameras was not for a “visual sociology” to record everyday life or particular events. It was intended as a “tool” only, to try to give the children control over the project. This was not possible, as mentioned above, but by using video cameras and leaving the students to their discussions the focus groups were more their own. They were still performing for an audience however, either me or the aliens, or even just the camera.

The children worked in groups to do the research. I had discussed the selection of the groups with the class teacher beforehand, being sensitive to gender differences in communication that may have become a factor in the fieldwork. I also discussed the possibility of some children who for a number of reasons, such as being the victim of bullying or intimidating behaviour, may not be able to work in their usual groups for this project. However, it was decided after this discussion that for this particular class there was no reason why the children would not work as well in their usual groups as in any other combination. Nonetheless, the teacher must have decided on reflection that he could make a better choice of groups as he did not use their usual groups but selected the group members for the five groups.

When I asked him how he made the choice he said that it was a mix of boys and girls, a variety of backgrounds (“there are a mix of kids here”) and a mix of leaders and non-leaders. He explained to the class that he wanted a “range of experiences” and that if they went with their friends we wouldn’t necessarily get the range. On the second day of working in these groups, the teacher said the groups seemed to be going well, there was plenty of coherence, energy etc. He confided that at the previous session he was worried that he
might have blundered in the selection of groups as he thought they were a “bit flat”. He went on to say that he didn’t want to put them in their usual groups or allow them to self-select because it could end up like a sleep-over, or just having a chat. He felt that he was “taking a risk” in his selection because it might not have worked. It was clear to me that the teacher took responsibility for the success of the groups in terms of their commitment to the task, and was concerned that the students might not come up with useful data.

IN CLASS WITH THE STUDENTS

The first session consisted initially of an introduction of myself to the class and then the students were told about the research. The students were told it was research on bullying, and that I wanted to know what they thought about bullying. It was explained that I was interested in what happens when adults are not around. In the teacher’s words “what’s going on with you and your friends when there’s no adult eye to influence how you might choose to be.” The students were then directed to their groups and were handed out Sheet 1 (Appendix 3) to work on in these groups. No definition of bullying had been given to the students, and the purpose of this activity was to get the children thinking about bullying, to introduce the topic without giving them any ideas about it, particularly an adult perspective on the subject of bullying. I also wanted them to work on this in groups, so that the idea they gave of what bullying was would be informed by a group of children, that is, that it was more a social definition than an individual one.

After this activity was completed, the students returned to their own desks and were given Sheet 2 (Appendix 4) to work on. This was an individual activity, although the children were not stopped from talking to one another. These “Criteria” sheets had been worked out with the class teacher as checklists for the children to work from.
The individual work was included to get some comparison with the group work and also to allow those children who may be overwhelmed by the group atmosphere, or whose views may be lost in the group work, to express their views. I considered that this might have been particularly relevant for girls and children of ethnic minorities.

Both these activities were undertaken by the students working independently of the teacher, so during this time I chatted with the teacher or wandered about the classroom. The noise level was high as the students were discussing the work, and presumably other things, so by moving about the room I was not likely to be perceived as being able to overhear discussion. I thought that the students could ask me questions if they wanted to, or just talk to me. However, they did not seem to have any wish or need to ask questions of myself or the teacher, and were clearly used to being given activities to work on independently.

Before the morning tea break, the teacher introduced the idea of Aliens. He told them that aliens had observed this behaviour called bullying amongst humans, had now landed at the school, and wanted the children here to explain it to them. They had learned to speak English, but could not read, so everything about bullying had to be included on the videos. I had suggested to the teacher in our preliminary discussions the idea of describing the research as being done for Aliens. The purpose of this was give the children the idea that not only did they hold the knowledge, but that it was special knowledge and they had the important task of explaining it to an alien group. Adults (and aliens), do not have this knowledge of bullying which takes place within children’s social world, only children do. We, (the Aliens), needed these students to explain it to them. Although these students were of an age where they would not believe the “truth” of this story, they were of an age where the idea of Aliens is exciting, and the idea of adults introducing the concept
into the classroom rather fun. Although the students seemed rather
taken with the fun aspect of this idea, they did not seem to take up
the idea when doing the project. No one referred to the Aliens as an
audience for their videos for example. However, a student did call
me over at one point and ask me if it really was true about the
Aliens!

During the morning tea break, the video cameras were set up, ready
for the next session, which would be videotaped. The cameras were
set up so that one camera was focused on each desk group, and a
separate microphone was placed on the desks in the middle of the
group. I explained to the students issues of confidentiality, that only
researchers like me would see the tapes, that they would not be
identified by name or by school, and that no one would be telling
teachers or parents or anyone else what they had said. I also asked
them to respect what others in the group said in the same way, and
to remember that everything that was said in the room should be
kept there.

During this session the students worked in the same groups they
had been allocated to during the first session and discussed the
questions covered in Sheet 3 (Appendix 5). This session was
videotaped. The purpose of this session was so that the students
would discuss bullying, both for the record, and also for them to start
thinking about what they wanted to include in their documentaries.

During the next session, the students stayed in these groups and
brainstormed “documentary”. The teacher told them to consider
what they wanted to go in their documentaries. The teacher elicited
some preliminary ideas like giving some background, including both
sides of an argument and proposing solutions, from the students
before they started on the task. This session was also videotaped.
The fourth session took place two days later. During this session the students planned their documentaries. This session was not videotaped, and was simply a working session for the students to finalize the details of their documentaries. As the documentaries would be filmed in sequence the next day, there would be time constraints placed on them and so they needed to have their filming planned in detail in advance. The teacher reminded them to focus on their audience, that is, the Aliens, to think about what are the most important things, and what is the best way of presenting the information.

In the fourth session, the students went in their groups to make the videos. The filming took place in a spare classroom, and the only people present were the actual group making its documentary, and myself, who operated the video camera. I tried to present myself as simply an operator as I wanted the documentaries to be completely their own work. The only suggestions I made were ones to do with where they might stand for the best light and so on, and I made encouraging noises when they had finished a scene – “That was great” etc. The students were told to aim for a documentary length of about 10 minutes, and the filming of the five groups took the whole school day.

Three months later and just before the end of the school year, I took my initial findings from these sessions back to the students, both for their feedback on the accuracy of my interpretation and to ask them to expand on some issues that they had raised. I presented my findings on the whiteboard, and addressed each one, asking about its validity, and also asking them to expand on the meaning of some of the issues that had come out of the data. I emphasized that I had summarized their work and that I could be wrong, so they should feel free to make any changes, offer any suggestions, tell me it was wrong and so on. This session was taped, and I also asked some students to take notes of the discussion, telling them once again that
it was their ideas I wanted, so they could decide what was important. Because the whole class was involved in the discussion, the teacher got them to discuss the topics in their desk groups and then report back to the whole class.

A major limitation with these techniques is that while the intention of the research was to come to an understanding of the meanings of bullying for children, to see how it fits into their social world, the research is being undertaken in an adult-dominated environment, the school classroom. As mentioned above, the school is an adult-dominated environment. Adults construct the classroom program and school rules, and although some “negotiation” of these takes place, the power resides with adults. However, accepting that children are an “oppressed” group in society, it is difficult to imagine a place where children legally gather, or could gather, that is not dominated by adults and where adult rules do not pervade. Although the research is designed to minimize adult dominance by the children working in groups and using video, it is nevertheless a limitation in this research.

The reason for getting the children to work in groups, and to do the project with minimal adult input, was to give them as much control as possible over the project. It was hoped that by giving them as much control as possible they would be more likely to develop the confidence to interpret the issue in their own way and less likely to feel the need to interpret it in ways to please adults. It was hoped that by working together in groups they would focus on their own world and build up a child’s interpretation of that world.

The reason for getting the children to video their findings was firstly so that I could have a record of these that I could view and analyze, but which could be done with the adult taking a background role. Secondly, the children enjoyed making these videos and it gave them a greater sense of control over the project by doing this.
Although the methods were chosen in order to give the children the optimal opportunity to interpret their world, I finally interpret it when I make my analysis of their interpretations of their world. Once again it is an adult speaking about them to other adults. This is unavoidable, given that this is an MA for marking, but I have moderated this effect by taking a report back to the children for them to comment on and taking their comments on board.

The techniques chosen clearly also have limitations imposed by the fact that the research covers only one school, and one class within that school. Findings from that class may not be typical; similar studies carried out in other schools with a different socio-economic mix, single-sex schools, private schools and so on, may not come up with the same findings. However, no claim is made for generalisation. The findings here are limited to this case, but it is hoped that they may enrich our understanding of the phenomenon of bullying.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data available for analysis consisted of the students’ responses on the Handout Sheets 1 and 2; the videotapes of the two focus group sessions; the students’ videotaped documentaries and the feedback session. There were also the ‘casual’ comments made to me by the students and the teacher, and my own observations in the classroom.

The data was analysed using content and discourse analysis to seek themes or patterns within the data that were then interpreted for meaning and theory.

For the first level of analysis, the Handout Sheets (Appendices 3 and 4) were split up into groups under the topics covered, that is,
the responses to How, When, Where and so on; the 10-20 Examples of Bullying, and the responses to Why is the Bullying Happening in These Examples?

Because the videocameras were introduced into the research as a “tool” to minimise adult involvement the videotapes were not intended to provide data for a “visual sociology”, and were not analysed in this way. Although the visual data was not ignored – expressions, body language and so on – were noted, the videotapes were analysed in much the same way that audiotapes are used in analysis. The videotapes of the focus group sessions and of the students’ documentaries were watched with sound on and sound off. Full transcripts were not made, but extensive notes were taken. Verbal data was supplemented with notes about any relevant visual data – body language, movement of students, facial expressions and so on. My analysis of the focus group data took account not only of the opinions expressed by individual students, but also the interaction between the students, following Catterall and Maclaren’s argument that “the interaction between participants is a key data resource for analysis and interpretation” (Catterall and Maclaren, 1997, Sec. 5.2).

My initial analysis of this data was combined into notes that I then took back to the students for clarification and verification. The audiotape of this session was fully transcribed.

The next level of analysis consisted of looking for themes or patterns from these groups of data. I initially used the groupings of questions in the Handout Sheets – How, When, Where and so on, to look at what the students were telling us about how they defined bullying. This was an “emic” approach – “According to this view, cultural behaviour should always be studied and categorised in terms of the inside view – the actors’ definition – of human events” (Patton, 1980, P. 306). I then looked at the focus groups and the
documentaries for their views of bullying, both at this emic level of
definition and then for patterns within the data that would explain the
meanings of bullying within their world – the “etic” level of analysis.

The students’ responses to the questions in the Handout Sheets lent
themselves to a counting of frequencies of certain responses, and
this count is included in the Findings Chapter below. These
frequencies are not intended to have any statistical validity and are
not generalisable. The frequencies were counted simply to get a
sense of what was in the data. They were used as described by
Morgan – “The counts represent a first step: the location of patterns
in the data. This is followed by a further examination of the data to
produce a theory that explains why these patterns occur in the way
that they do” (Morgan, 1993, P. 96).

The second level of analysis used discourse analysis, in the sense
of focussing on texts and talk as social practices, to search for
patterns or themes across data. Themes identified in the data were
compared across the different groups of data. So, for example,
themes identified in the students’ responses to the question Who
(bullies)? in the Handout Sheet could be compared with how the
“bullies” were portrayed in their documentaries. Meanings were then
extracted either through finding connections between, and a
synthesis of, the themes identified, or through the identification and
explanation of apparent contradictions in the themes.

The interweaving is presented in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4: DISCOVERIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

One of the objectives of this research was to explore the use of children’s own videos as means to access children’s worldviews. The first section of this chapter will look at the findings in relation to this objective. The second section will consider the findings from this research concerning the second objective, that is, the meanings that bullying has for children, at how bullying fits into their worldviews. Objective 3, What might work in combating bullying was not an area the students provided material on (see page 84 for coverage).

OBJECTIVE 1: TO EXPLORE THE USE OF CHILDREN’S OWN VIDEOS AS A MEANS TO ACCESS CHILDREN’S WORLDVIEWS

My findings for the question of access to the children were based on my observations of, and reflections on, the process of gaining access to the classroom and the students for this study. For the question of the use of video cameras, I based my findings on observations of the students in the classroom, on informal discussions held with the teacher and with the students, and on my viewings of the videotapes both on their own and also in relation to the data available from the other sources.

Access to Children

As discussed in previous chapters, the perspective for this study takes the view that children are active in the construction of their own peer cultures. This implies that the world-views of children within these cultures differ from those of the adult cultures in which they are embedded. One of the difficulties in studying children then is in finding a way to access these world-views. It had been my
intention to get the children to video their own focus groups and interview one another using video cameras. The purpose of this was to give the children as much control as possible over the process in the hope that this would admit access to their views with as little adult input as possible. However, as described in the Methodology chapter, it was not possible to obtain cameras for the students to use. This is itself a reflection of the way adult power over children permeates into everything children do, or are prevented from doing. We might ask how far was this a reasonable prohibition based on past experience, or was it a prejudice about children’s levels of competence or responsibility? How often is criticism of children’s competence or responsibility a convenient excuse adults use to block children’s access to either limited goods, or to goods which might enable them to access power or by-pass adult authority?

The second problem I encountered in my intention to get the children to video their own groups was in actually getting access to the children. I have already described in the Methodology Chapter how I failed to convince the teacher of the need for the use of video cameras. In my initial discussions with the teacher, I had set out a detailed plan for the research process. I had explained to him that one of the reasons for using these methods was because I regarded children as an oppressed group who views have not been heard. This precipitated a very long discussion on whether children were oppressed or not, ending without my convincing him that they could be regarded as oppressed. I can see that a teacher is unlikely to view children as oppressed, in fact may well see themselves as oppressed by the children! Children do attempt to subvert adult authority and a lot of classroom behaviour is an attempt by children to ‘negotiate’ some space where they have power and control.

In addition, the classroom is the teacher’s domain and teachers are reluctant to hand over this domain. This was his classroom and these were his students. Moreover, the teacher has a responsibility
to protect his/her students from what may be unscrupulous outsiders. As a mother of school children I hand my children over to the care and protection of what I hope to be professional and ethical teachers and expect them to be taken care of. However, there is a fine line between protection and control, and as adults we need to keep questioning how far our protection of children is for their safety and how far for our control and our comfort. My detailed plan was let go, a new plan was drawn up with altered methods and the need for the video cameras was questioned. Why was this? Part of the reason was that the teacher did take responsibility for the “success” of the project, and wanted to be sure that the students would work well, that the groups were a good mix of “movers and shakers and leaders and non-leaders”, that useable data would be gathered. However, I believe part of the reason for such a hands-on involvement was reluctance by the teacher to hand over his classroom and his class to anyone, even (or especially) a researcher.

For researchers into children’s worldviews the difficulty is that we need to get past adult gatekeepers in order to access children. Wherever we choose to study children, they can be accessed only through adults. Moreover, the children’s choice about whether they want to take part in the research is to a large extent dictated by the adult gatekeepers. In this study consent forms were sent home to parents, and the only way the students could avoid taking part would be through their parents or by telling the teacher they did not want to take part. One can well imagine a reluctance to tell parents since it might lead to unwanted disclosures by the student, particularly as students often do not tell parents about bullying they are involved in. Students who wanted to be excluded from the study would have to be given other tasks, probably sent to another classroom, or absent themselves during the study, all of which would draw their non-participation in the study to the attention of other students.
Both these aspects of research with children, their protection/control by gatekeepers and the fact that children can only usually be accessed through an adult, illustrate children’s powerlessness vis-à-vis adults. Adults might act “in their best interests” and “for their own good” but it is adults who decide what those interests are, and what is good for children. I had attempted to find a method of research that would allow me to access children’s worldviews, but I had not expected that I would first need to find a way to access the children. As mentioned above, children will almost always be accessed through adults, and groups of children are most likely to be accessed through schools since that is a place where nearly all children gather. Because of children’s powerlessness relative to adults, the role of the gatekeeper needs to be seriously considered in undertaking research with children. In particular we need to consider the school as a site of adult power, as an institution charged with the responsibility of not only imparting the skills and learning contained within the curriculum, but also with enculturing the students, with helping them to fit in to adult society. At any time of the school day there is a place where each pupil should be; there are rules that govern the movement of pupils around the school, where they can and cannot go, how they must conduct themselves. There are rules governing what they wear, what they must and cannot bring to school, how they should interact with teachers and with each other.

Prout (Prout, 2000) described a view of the school curriculum as intended to order the spatial and temporal lives of children to ensure that schools are inhabited by docile bodies. The same study also described the ways in which children act to subvert school rules and challenge the teachers. I do not believe that the teacher I encountered intended to be difficult or domineering in the way he took such a hands-on approach to my research; on the contrary I believe his motivation was one of helpfulness, to ensure that I got the best out of the class. However, the role of the teacher in schools
is one of control, of the classroom and of the students. In his role this teacher took control of what was happening in his classroom.

Another aspect of studying children in schools that needs to be considered is the effect that the school as an institution might have on the research. I have already described the impact that I believed the school as a site of adult power had on my access to the children. However, there is also the possible impact that it might have had on the research findings. Schools are age-based hierarchies, with the oldest people – adults – at the top of the pyramid, and the students then placed in classes with their peer-groups. As described above, the school orders the temporal and spatial lives of the pupils, and the pupils act to challenge and subvert adult authority. Both these aspects were apparent in this research; students were clearly very aware of the authority of teachers, both in the way they presented “teachers” in their documentaries and also in their constant referral to “teachers” as being the people who should stop bullying. In addition, they challenged and subverted adult authority through the way they joked, played around, talked off the topic and so on, instead of working on the topics for the focus groups. They also walked about the room, ‘fooled about’ in front of the cameras, talked about turning off the cameras, and used various other techniques to avoid the actual task on hand. It is not possible to know how far doing the research in a school influenced the findings, but it is possible that the students naming adults, for example, as the people who should stop bullying might be a consequence of their being in an adult dominated environment when the question was asked.
Use of Video Cameras

As mentioned previously, I had intended the students to use the video cameras to film their own focus groups and to interview one another. What I actually did in this study was to set up the cameras so that the focus groups were videotaped without an adult actually present (except for the teacher and I wandering about the classroom) and then I videotaped the students’ own documentaries. The students were initially very conscious of the cameras, and made frequent reference to them. They seemed to regard the camera as an audience in itself, playing up to it and addressing it, but not addressing me through the camera although I had told them I would be viewing the videos. During the sessions when I held the camera and videotaped their documentaries, they addressed me as someone to advise them and were conscious of the camera rather than of me as an audience. When I returned to the school three months later and showed them their documentaries, their reaction was a mixture of embarrassment and humour.

It was clear that the students were conscious of the cameras and performed for them. However, this does not diminish the validity of what they said, since it can be argued that we all put on performances in our various roles. The students’ roles as ‘students at school’ are performances just as much as their ‘roles’ in front of the cameras. Goldman-Segall (1998) makes the point that our understanding of what is happening, or that what children tell us is what they are really thinking, is not sullied by their performances in front of the camera. She says, “How can we think that schools are natural settings in which to observe young people? Not only are they social constructions whose purpose is to manage and enculturate the next generation, they are places where performances of gender, class, race, and economic status are played out at every turn of the head.“ (P. 109).
In the videotapes of the focus group sessions, the students performed for the camera, and were not entirely able to forget the later adult viewer – the occasional ‘swear word’ was quickly withdrawn or commented on in a cautionary way by another student. During these focus group sessions the students were to a certain extent ‘performing’ for an adult. This was partly because of their consciousness of the cameras, but also because the sessions took place in the classroom at their desks. Classroom activities are undertaken for adults, to be ‘assessed’ by adults. However, there is still a great deal of student-to-student interaction in the classroom that is concealed from, or undetected by adults. During the focus groups, as the students became immersed in the activity, both the camera and its adult observer became less important. Moreover, although the students were given discussion guide sheets, they had the freedom to let the discussion range as they liked; there was no adult facilitator to direct their discussion. Although it is not possible to know to what extent the students spoke ‘freely’, there were times when it seems unlikely that comments made would have been made if an adult, especially one ‘responsible’ for the students, had been present. For example, in two of the groups the students ‘accused’ one of their members of being a bully. The ‘accused’ bullies both responded with attempts at denial and then rationalisation. These accusations and the reactions of both the ‘bullies’ and the others in the groups, were conducted in a way that indicated to me the students were ‘performing’ only for themselves.

In the documentaries the students were knowingly performing roles that they had created. They enjoyed making these documentaries and displayed creativity, great acting ability and clever mimicking of the documentary style as seen on television. My intention in getting the students to make documentaries was to get them to present their views on bullying in much the same way that “adult” documentaries might on television. I had hoped that they would
interview one another “in depth”, show what they thought bullying was really like and so on. In other words, that the documentaries would provide students with the opportunities to make factual statements about how they saw bullying. However, what I found was that while the students did indeed do “in depth” interviewing and did give their views on bullying, the videos also provided material that could be analysed in the way we might analyse a novel or a play. The closest comparison to this is perhaps the “impressionistic documentary” which can be analysed as both fact and fiction. (Barbash and Taylor, 1997). In a sense the students created narratives that could be analysed, and I found I was asking questions like why certain characters or roles were presented in the way they were.

These documentaries then, I regarded as ‘set pieces’ and have analysed them as performances. There is a great deal of information about how bullying is viewed for example, in terms of how they acted out particular roles in an illustration of a bullying episode. Viewed as stylised accounts, they provided material that could be analysed for their views on bullying. For example, they often presented stereotypes of bullies, victims and teachers - small, nerdy, bookish victims, or a “school-ma’am-ish” teacher with spectacles on her nose. Part of the reason for this is because documentaries created to convey information often present stereotypes of individuals that are recognisable to the audience. This provides a familiar context and new information can be added to that context. In this sense, the students were only following a well-known format.

However, these stereotypes could also be analysed at another level, and I looked at the function of the stereotypes chosen. Why did some groups present the ‘victims’ as extreme nerds when the students said elsewhere that anyone can be bullied? The use of the stereotype here could be interpreted as showing how victims are
‘different’ in some way, and are weak and powerless. The students have described elsewhere how anyone can be bullied, that people are bullied for being ‘different’, and that teachers or other adults should stop the bullying. On only two occasions did any students suggest the victims should “stand up for themselves” and in one of these they went on to say that it usually didn’t work. Presenting the victims as stereotyped nerds and brainiacs enabled the students to demonstrate all these aspects of the victims of bullying –that is that they are ‘different’ in some way, that they are powerless to stop the bullying and that someone more powerful needs to assist them.

One of the talents displayed in these documentaries was the ability of some students to probe the respondents in their interviews. In one documentary, two girls who had dressed up in matching skirts and tops (one pink, one blue), and brought along deodorant spray cans to use as microphones, sat behind desks and interviewed the ‘bully’ and the ‘victim’. In their interview with the ‘bully’ the bully responded to their questions about why he bullied with answers that justified his actions. They then decided to do another ‘take’ of the interview with the ‘bully’, asking the same questions, but this time the ‘bully’ changed his answers completely and now presented a view that was critical of his own bullying. This was not in response to any suggestion on the ‘interviewers’ behalf, but appeared to be because he had got himself into such difficulties with his answers to their probing questions in trying to justify his bullying. There were other instances of ‘serious probing’ in the documentary interviews, and watching the student interviewers confirmed for me that students of this age group would be capable of taking video cameras and interviewing their peers independently of an adult in a way that would provide good data for analysis.

Would the data have produced different themes if the students had held the cameras? Although they would still have been in the school setting and would have been aware that they were handing over the
tapes, it is possible that controlling the cameras and microphones would have allowed the students to range more freely and they may have come up with other themes.

I analysed the videotapes and feedback tapes into themes. This informed my analysis of the Handout Sheets and both are interwoven into the consideration of Objective 2 below. The tapes were not analysed by counting utterances on a topic as was done for the Handout Sheets. I had already developed some of the themes from the handout sheets, and looked for confirmation of these themes in the tapes. At the same time, I searched for new themes in the videotapes and these are described below, P.64 and in detail from P. 66.

OBJECTIVE 2: WHAT DOES BULLYING MEAN TO CHILDREN?

The first part of this section on the meanings of bullying for children will investigate the data at the ‘emic’ level, that is, listening to children’s voices on the topic and hearing what they are saying at an everyday level. Children are not generally “taken seriously” and when research is undertaken on topics such as bullying, adult researchers usually provide the definition and scope of the topic. In this study, I tried to minimise adult interpretation of the topic, bullying, and tried to listen to the voices of the children.

However, research must be more than just a faithful recording of the children’s voices, it must also interpret. The second part of this section will comprise my interpretation of what they have said, in their answers to the questions on the handout sheet, in their focus groups, and in their documentaries.

For the first level of analysis I read the responses in the Handout Sheets looking for commonalties across all the students, and also at
how individuals perceived bullying. Some of these sheets were clearly worked on by groups together, and I regarded them as providing a group-consensus view of bullying. The questions asked in these sheets – the Where, What, How, Who, When questions – had been worked out beforehand as providing a good range of questions to give the students to encompass the idea of bullying. They therefore formed an obvious starting point for the analysis, and I began summarising the students’ responses into these groups. I then grouped the responses to all the questions (including the 10-20 examples of bullying and responses to ‘why is the bullying happening in these examples’) on the Handout Sheets into these initial categories. I also intended to take my initial analysis back to the students for their comments, and I thought presenting my findings in the familiar way in which I had originally asked the questions would make it easier for the students to confirm or refute my analysis.

As well as reading the Handout Sheet responses, this level of analysis included multiple viewings of the videotapes of the focus groups and the students’ video documentaries. I looked for the same themes in the tapes – that is for answers to Where, What, How, Who and When – in relation to bullying, and also for any other categories that might emerge. I took extensive notes of the videotapes, both of the dialogue, the body language and of how the students interacted with one another and how their ideas shifted over time. One of the difficulties with collecting data from watching videotapes is that much of our understanding of what is happening when people are talking and interacting is not explicit, that is, we know what is happening even though we may not be able to explain why we know. There are some tools available to us to help with these explanations, such as Content Analysis and Linguistics. However, I did not want to use the detailed level of analysis that these disciplines bring to verbal data. I was interested in children’s
understandings at the social level, the sort of information that is indicated by a shoulder shrug or a darted look for instance. The videotapes and the “feel” for the data that I got by watching them, therefore informed much of my understanding.

These initial categories then were as follows:

- Where?
The answers to this question covered everywhere – school, home, mall, playground, walking home, buses, trains, new towns, holidays, music practice, playing sport, TV. Of the fifteen sheets, five just said “anywhere” and one said “school or outside of school”. Ten specified “school” and eight specified “home”, five of these putting “home” first on the list. So, of the sheets where places were specified at all, all ten mentioned “school” and eight mentioned “home”. These students indicated that bullying can take place just about everywhere, with school and home featuring prominently.

- What?
In answer to this question, the students either listed behaviours such as insults, teasing, lying, leaving people out, or gave general definitions such as “when a person is mean to someone hurting them mentally or physically” or “physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse”. The behaviours defined as bullying included a range from “teasing”, “laughing at you”, through to “stalking” and “blackmail”. In their answers to What?, the students ideas about what bullying is, seem to coincide pretty much with adult definitions of bullying in terms of it being hurtful behaviour. The main difference here is that students mention behaviours like “stalking” and “blackmail” and refer to “abuse”, harsh terms that adults would not normally associate with children’s bullying. They did distinguish between “play fighting”, “brother and sister fighting”, “sarcasm” and “bullying” on the tapes of the focus groups. They also referred to
“bullying” in relation to sport – being hassled for missing goals in soccer and crying after a really tough rugby tackle leading to being called “cry-baby’ for the rest of your life.

• When?
The most common response here (10 of the 15 sheets returned) was “anytime”. If times were listed, “lunchtime” and “school” were included. Three answers described the power of bullies: “when they feel like it”, “whenever the bully wants to and “whenever the bully thinks they have an easy target”. There were no references to adults, and no one made any comments like “when there are no adults around”. Three students mentioned “lunchtime”, a time when adults are not so frequently at hand, but these three all cited “school” as well.

• Who?
“Anyone” was most commonly mentioned (8 of the 15), and “people at school”, “people in your class”, “school mates” and “friends” were all included. “Family”, “sisters, brothers” and “teachers” were also included. It is interesting that “anyone” was so commonly listed, and that specific characteristics were not given, such as “big people” or “mean people”. One student did say “anyone that is mean enough to” and one said “because they are so unhappy they try to make other people unhappy too”. Other than that however, it would appear that the students considered that anyone is capable of bullying. On the videotapes there was some indication that “bullying “ between brothers and sisters was all right – “Yes, if it’s a sibling” or “a little bit between friends is OK”.

• How?
This question was intended to elicit answers to “How does bullying happen?” in terms of the context in which bullying might occur. However, it seemed to be confusing for the students and they
answered either by describing what bullying is – hitting, teasing, name calling, and so on, or with comments like ‘make the person feel unhappy’, ‘envy, hate, discrimination’. On the videotapes it was demonstrated as being an angry parent, fights, catfights, teasing or hassling because someone was different or they were nerds and the bullies were responding to being annoyed or just because they found it fun.

In Sheet 1 the students were asked to give 10 to 20 examples of bullying that they know about. The examples given by the students amplify the answers to the questions What? and How? in Sheet 2. There were over forty different examples of bullying behaviour listed in these sheets. They ranged from what might be called ‘mild’ bullying to very serious abuse. Some of the ‘milder’ behaviours included “Parents making you eat vegetables”, ”X chased by Y”, “being followed” and “making embarrassed”. The more ‘serious’ forms included “making someone do something”, “beating up”, “teasing”, “physical abuse”, “A shot B with a bb gun”, “blackmail”, and “stalking” (also “war”). Teasing or hassling was frequently for “clothes, looks, possession, abilities, car, house, family” and so on.

The behaviours listed could be grouped into categories - Teasing, Physical bullying and Meanness. “Teasing” includes such thing as insults, name-calling, making fun of and making embarrassed, hassling about looks, possessions and traditions. “Physical bullying” includes beating up, physical abuse/harassment, tripping up, being shot with bb gun, pushing someone in front of on-coming car and taking others stuff/food. “Meanness” includes not letting someone participate, sending nasty notes, talking behind someone’s back, sharing secrets, and discrimination. Of all the behaviours the students listed as examples of bullying, the two categories Teasing and Physical bullying were equally common. Meanness followed, and then there were a variety of examples that go beyond teasing or
meanness - blackmail, framing someone, being followed/stalking (mentioned four times), and war.

In addition to the first groupings the videotape analysis offered three more themes — ‘Is bullying good/bad’, ‘Who should stop it’ and ‘Why does bullying happen’.

I summarised these findings (see below - “Findings for Student Feedback”) and took them back to the students for their comments. I wrote them up on a white-board and addressed each one, asking for their comments, and also asking for clarification or extension of some points. This session was audiotaped, and one student from each group also took notes. For most of this session, the students discussed the questions I raised in their groups, then reported back to the class, but the class as a group discussed some points.

**Findings for Student Feedback**

**Where?**
Everywhere – but you seemed to think mainly at school

**What?**
You said everything from name calling, sending nasty notes, teasing, hassling, fighting, hitting, blackmail, discrimination, yelling, rejecting, excluding through to war.

**Who?**
Basically everyone – friends, enemies, your family and other relations, people in your class, team members, teachers, shop assistants, gangs. You said the bully was “bigger”, “stronger”, “taller” and so on. You also said that bullying comes from home.
When?
Anytime – at school, at lunchtime on the field, holidays, at sport practice.

Why does bullying happen?
1. Because people get bullied themselves (at home or somewhere else), because they come from a stuffed up family, have no values, have no friends, personal insecurity.
2. For fun, because it’s cool, makes them feel good, to show off, bored, think it’s funny, don’t know how to control the situation, they don’t get their own way.
3. To teach them a lesson, because they got smart to the bully, they annoyed the bully, the bully is jealous.

You said that bullies think they’re “cool” and “up themselves”.

Who should stop it?
You mainly said teachers, then other adults.

Combining the findings from the Handout Sheets, the videotaped focus groups and students’ documentaries and the responses from the feedback session, I summarised the students’ view of bullying as described below.

The Students’ Definition of What Bullying Is

The findings here can be summarized into the categories Where, What, When, Who, as follows:

Where?

*Everywhere, but mainly at school, and then home.*
What?

Everything from name calling, teasing, hassling, hitting, blackmail, yelling, rejecting, excluding, through to war. Any behaviour that hurt or embarrassed.

When?

Anytime – at school, lunchtime at school, at sport practice, on holiday.

Who?

Basically everyone – friends, enemies, your family, people in your class, people in your team, teachers, and gangs.

In addition to these initial categories that I used in the Handout Sheets, there were three other themes that emerged from the videotape data. These were ‘Is bullying good/bad’, ‘Who should stop it’ and ‘Why does bullying happen’. The first of these categories, ‘Is bullying good/bad’ arose primarily from the focus group questions ‘Is bullying good? Should bullying be encouraged?’ The questions considered were worded in a way that would allow students to consider the possibility of ‘uncommon’ notions, such as that bullying could be good. The students were willing to contemplate these notions, and did suggest that bullying “could be good if its your brother or sister”, or “yes, it teaches you to stand up for yourself”, “he learns how to be independent” and “can be good for teaching some people a lesson who you really don’t like”. However, overwhelmingly the students did agree that bullying was bad because people got “hurt”, “sad”, “embarrassed”, “because its bad for everyone” and even in groups that did consider there may be times when bullying could be good, they would later make comments like “bullies are emotionally retarded” and “you could
press charges, you could have people up for assault”. The students also overwhelmingly rejected bullies with comments like “they think they're real cool and up themselves”; “most of the time bullies don’t have much friends, well they do but then, like, they’re real mean to them”; “people who bully should go to this place where they have “time out”; “what’s good about being nasty to people?” In addition, the two students who had been ‘accused’ of being bullies in their groups, at first tried to deny that they were bullies, then attempted to justify their bullying – “I bully the bullies” and “I copy ‘X’ (the other ‘accused’ bully), he’s my idol” in an attempt to make a joke about it. The groups clearly did not admire the bullying behaviour and the ‘accused’ did not appear to be pleased that they had been accused. One can imagine that if a behaviour was overtly disapproved of, but secretly admired by the students, then anyone ‘accused’ of such behaviour may have to deny or justify their behaviour, but at the same time might look pleased to have been identified in this way. However, there was no evidence in the way of comments nor any body language (such as smirks or head being held high) that these students were pleased to be identified.

The category ‘Who should stop it’ arose from the students’ responses to the focus group question and also from their documentary videos, and noting who stopped or was seen as responsible for stopping the bullying that was shown there. Invariably the students regarded teachers, then “adults” as responsible for stopping bullying. The question for the focus groups ‘If yes, by whom’ was invariably answered “By teachers” – “Teachers and adults. It should be stopped by a teacher”, “It should be stopped by adults, parents, teachers”. Only two students suggested “you should stick up for yourself”. This occurred in response to the question ‘By whom? (should it be stopped). The initial response in that group was “teachers, parents”. Then one student said, “No, by yourself.” Another responded “Stand up for
yourself”, and the first student replied “I can. No one bullies me.” (This was a student who had earlier been ’accused’ of being a bully.) There were also no suggestions that onlookers should stick up for victims. In one group it was suggested that people “could go to the police – have them up for harassment”.

The category ‘Why does bullying happen’ was one that emerged from the students’ responses on the Handout Sheets, the focus group discussions and the students’ documentaries. The students offered the suggestion that “bullying comes from home” in answers to the Handout Sheet question ‘Why is the bullying happening in the situations you outlined in your 10-20 examples?’ and also offered it in the focus group discussions and in their documentaries. There was no prompting for this suggestion in terms of any question about where does bullying come from, or any suggestion about the families of bullies, but the students frequently made the unprompted suggestion that “bullying comes from home” in a variety of different contexts. For example, in their focus group discussions some students said, “Most bullies are on the receiving end of bullying themselves. Like at home”, “They bully because their parents do it to them heaps”, “This kid he dropped a baby and the dad like so wasted him”, “How bullies get to be bullies – they might get beaten up at home or hassled at home”. In their discussion about what should go into the documentaries the following comments arose – “Could interview families, show how it goes back in the generations”, “I can say it comes from the homes, unstable family”, “Oh yeah, give him a few beats, my parents gave it to me all the time”, “I think people bully because I think it comes from homes where there is an unstable environment” and “I was brought up like that. My dad used to smack me. Extension cord, whoooo!”

One of the documentaries showed a very dramatic display of a violent and aggressive “father” bullying his “son”. The “presenter”
The category “Why does bullying happen” also included a number of reasons such as “to get stuff” – lunch, money and so on, “because they’re bullied themselves”, “because they got smart/annoyed the bully”. However, comments about bullies that kept occurring, both on their Handout Sheets and also in the focus groups and documentaries were descriptions of bullying - “to be cool”, or bullies - “because they think they’re really cool and just like up themselves”. “It’s cool to do it”, “Bullying’s for jealousy. You’re jealous. I’m the man”, “They think they’re real big”, “Yeah, and they’re actually not. Like those people who think they’re big and mean they’re like….”, “People think they’re so cool”, “Yeah, people think they’re so fashionable”.

When I took my findings back to the students for their comments, I told them that they had frequently given the reason for bullying as “they do it to be cool”, and asked them what did they mean by “cool” in this context. They told me that it meant “to be popular”. This is further discussed below.

**Interpretations**

The data – Handout Sheets, videotaped focus groups, videotaped documentaries and feedback - was now re-viewed for analysis at a deeper level. The findings up to this point described what these students thought that bullying was, how they saw it. However, there was still an analysis to be made of how bullying fits into their social
world. For this level of analysis, I reviewed the data, looking now for the meanings of bullying. At this level of analysis I looked for apparent contradictions in the data, for descriptions that seemed initially strange or unlikely, for explanations of why bullying was presented in the way it was in the documentaries.

Control

I referred earlier to the examples of bullying given by the students ranging from “parents making you eat vegetables” right up to “stalking” and “war”. Another example given at the ‘lower end of the scale’ was “news taking the place of the Simpsons”. The two ‘lower-end’ examples – “parents making you eat vegetables” and “news taking the place of the Simpsons” – could easily be dismissed as exaggeration or just jokes. However, if we take them seriously, then why did the students include them and what is the factor they have in common with the other (more commonly accepted) forms of bullying which the students described?

In the demonstrations of bullying given in the students’ documentaries the bullies and victims were usually stereotyped as ‘nerdy, brainiac’ victims and large, aggressive bullies. However, in some cases the students were of equal size/status and in one documentary the students described the two ‘bullying’ episodes shown as ‘a fight’ and ‘a catfight’. In these demonstrations there was no apparent difference in physical/verbal abilities of the ‘bully’ or the ‘victim’, they were apparently ‘equal’. These two demonstrations of ‘bullying’ would not commonly be classified as bullying at all. The accepted definitions specifically exclude ‘fights between equals’ and one-off events. To be labeled “bullying” there must be a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. Here, however, the students did not differentiate between bullying and fighting and there was no power imbalance. In the example described of the “fight” and
the “catfight”, when the ‘presenter’ asked the students why they were fighting, in the case of the fight one of the boys said, “He was trying to steal my woman”. For the catfight one of the girls gave the reason “her hair is so five minutes ago” and the other made a derogatory reference to the opponent’s clothes. The hair/clothes reasons seem to be typical reasons given for bullying, that is, for being different from some norm. The reason “he was trying to steal my woman” is an obvious illustration of a power struggle – a fight for control of a ‘limited good’. Although there was no power imbalance between the protagonists in these examples, the reasons for their bullying/fighting were about control – over the ‘woman’ and over who defines ‘style’ (of hair, clothes etc).

I referred above to the students generally showing stereotypes of small, nerdy victims and large, aggressive bullies. I described how these stereotypes enabled the students to display both the powerlessness of the victim and the powerfulness of the bully.

The two representations of bullying in these videotapes, one showing bullying as equivalent to a fight between equals and the other showing how the victim of bullying is less powerful that the bully, initially appear to be contradictory. One shows the bullies and victims as physically and verbally equal, while the other shows the victim as being powerless relative to the bully. However, the “fight between equals” can be seen to be a fight about control – attacking someone for stepping outside the norm, or fighting for control over a ‘limited good’. The representation of the nerdy victims and aggressive bullies can also be interpreted as a way of displaying the fact that bullying is about control.

One common factor then, that appears to emerge from the students’ descriptions of what bullying is, is this factor of control. If we see bullying in this way, that is, as an expression of control or power, then the students’ inclusion of such a wide range of behaviour as
bullying starts to make sense. It is not just that they include a whole lot more behaviours in their definition of bullying compared with that used by researchers, but that they see bullying as being about control. So controlling behaviour is bullying for them; “making you eat vegetables” becomes aligned with “being excluded from the group”, “being beaten up because you were doing something annoying” or just being beaten up “because the bully enjoys making people unhappy”.

**Social Integration**

We can consider the idea that bullying has an unintended consequence of ‘socializing’ children, of encouraging them to fit in with the group. When students talked about who gets bullied they invariably said people who are ‘different’. Any feature can be picked on – tall, short, fat, thin, glasses, hair, clothes, race and so on, or being a ‘brainiac’, too smart or too dumb, useless at sport. ‘Bullying’ that is about appearance - clothes, hair, being fat, and so on, or about behaviour – reading books, computer nerds and so on, is a way of controlling other children. If you are mocked or ‘punished’ in some way for being ‘different’ then you are likely to try hard to become the same or to fit in.

Sullivan (Sullivan, 1998, P.146) refers to his observation of a teacher who either chose to ignore or was genuinely unaware of students quite blatant bullying of a child in the classroom. Atlas and Pepler (1998) also found that teachers intervened in only 18% of bullying episodes in the classroom and that although when judged to be aware of bullying they were more likely to intervene, teachers did not consistently intervene in bullying episodes during the classroom observations. Although obvious explanations are that bullying is covert and/or that teachers do not know how to handle it, it may also
be that adults consciously or unconsciously ignore bullying between children because they are aware of the socializing consequences of this behaviour.

Duncan (1999) describes teachers’ power to control large numbers of pupils as often resting on appeals to normality. Schools constantly measure pupils against a set of norms, constructing hierarchies in which pupils constantly weigh up themselves against one another. The resulting competitive ethos and drive to succeed are “necessary means of covert social control by the school authorities…obtaining the compliance of pupils in the effort to achieve a corporate aim” (Duncan, 1999, P. 134). If teachers appeal to discourses of ‘normality’ to control pupils, it is not surprising to find that pupils also use discourses of normality to acquire social control.

I described above how the students overwhelmingly condemned bullying. If children so commonly disapprove of bullying we need to ask why it flourishes so well. One reason is clearly because they don’t know how to stop it, they are afraid they will be 'next' if they intervene and so on. However, another reason may be that aside from the social control it grants the bullies, children are also well aware of its integrating effect. Those who violate group mores, who ‘dare’ to be different in some way, are severely punished by being mocked, excluded, teased, or dealt with physically. If bullying has such an unintended consequence, that is social integration which aids the stability and cohesiveness of the group, then this would explain its persistence within the very groups that display and condone this behaviour while at the same time condemn it.

This may also be one of the reasons why discourses around bullying regularly look at the behaviour and background of the bully/victim dyad and seek to blame either the bully or the victim. This enables
people to express their disapproval of bullying without actually challenging bullying as such. Very few people condone the act of bullying when confronted with evidence of the physical or psychic trauma of the bullied child, but there may be a sense in which it is seen as having a function. The following argument appeared in The New Republic - "By defining bullying so broadly, the anti-bullying movement risks pathologizing behaviours that, however unpleasant, are in some sense normal parts of growing up and learning how to interact in the world." (Soskis, 2001). The U.S. News and World Report used a similar argument - “Serious bullying can be ugly. Parents and schools should stop it and punish offenders…But rumors and dirty looks and putting up with horrible classmates are all part of growing up. So are the teenage tendencies to form cliques and snub people now and then” (Leo, 2001). These adults clearly see bullying as having a function in socializing children and in giving them the skills to cope in an adult world.

Popularity

The students frequently gave the reason “to be cool”, to “get a good reputation”, “because they think they’re up themselves” as an explanation for why people bully. When I took my initial findings back to the students I asked them specifically what did they mean by “cool” as they had given this explanation of bullying so frequently. They said it was to be “popular”. The teacher immediately picked up on this and asked “You’re saying bullies bully for popularity?” in a disbelieving voice. However, I believe we need to reassess what “popular” means to young people compared with the commonly accepted meaning it has for adults (someone a lot of people like). Merton (1997) refers to “popular” girls who are “mean”. These girls are not “nice” girls and are not necessarily “liked” by other girls, but they are “popular”. Similarly, LaFontana and Cillessen (1999) found that peer-perceived popularity, where children are asked to
nominate peers whom they believe to be popular, is a construct that is distinct from *sociometric popularity*, a measure that asks children to name the children they like the most and the least. In the same way, bullies are “popular” but not “nice” and not necessarily liked by their peers. To be “cool” or “popular” is to demand respect but not necessarily to be a nice or likeable person. Such students are powerful figures within the peer group and attain or maintain their “cool/popular” status through bullying.

**Powerful Adults**

The students repeatedly described bullying as “coming from home”. They were several times more explicit and said “because he gets the beats at home”, “this is where bullying is learnt”, or “they get treated low at home and so they try to be high at school”. Other times it was not clear that they meant bullying was imitative, because they also made references to “having no values”, “stuffed-up family” and so on. These comments seemed to indicate that bullying comes from home although it is not necessarily imitative or modeled on parent/sibling behaviour. They also said repeatedly that teachers and other adults should stop it. There were only a couple of references to the victim helping her/himself – “you should stick up for yourself”. The responsibility for bullying – its origin and its potential demise - seemed to be laid pretty firmly with adults. This is not unexpected since children are likely to perceive adults as having power over their lives. No doubt they have also absorbed the analysis and description of ‘dysfunctional families’ as being responsible for a number of social ills. Such information could be gleaned from a variety of impacts with adults, such as formal and informal discussions and overheard conversations. It is an analysis that is also widely heard through the media, both in documentary and in entertainment programs.
In their documentaries the students presented the “teachers” and “parents” as very powerful people. Whenever a “teacher” entered a scene, s/he was immediately able to break up fights, hand out detentions, and was treated by the “bullies” and “victims” with complete respect and obedience. Similarly, the “parent” in one documentary was presented as a very powerful person who ignored or ridiculed the “interviewer”, upset tables and picked up his “child” and removed him from the scene.

Although the students referred to bullying coming from home, they did not necessarily mean that adults bully, although many do. Students also referred to “teachers’ bullying” and one student told me that he had “been bullied by a teacher at this school”. I think we need to be cognizant of adults’ bullying behaviour towards children, and not dismiss it too easily as aberrant behaviour. The readiness with which the students referred to home as the origin of bullying, the way adults were presented as such powerful people and the way they looked to adults to stop bullying, seems to indicate a powerful adult presence in the students’ discourses on bullying.

In summary, four themes emerged from all my data sources: Control, Social Integration, Popularity and Powerful Adults. These themes are also threaded through the literature.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of this research were:

1. to explore the use of children’s own videos as a means to access children’s world views,
2. to find out whether bullying has different meanings for children from those described by adults and
3. to find out what children think might work in combating bullying.

OBJECTIVE 1: USE OF CHILDREN’S OWN VIDEOS TO ACCESS CHILDREN’S WORLDVIEWS

My original intention with this research was that the students would conduct and video their own focus groups. I had hoped that this would give the students more control over the project and minimise adult involvement. I thought they would enjoy making the videos, would get involved and would feel empowered by being the ones who operated the cameras.

Although my original intentions were not fulfilled, I did find the videotaping of the focus groups and the students’ documentaries an interesting and fruitful technique for collecting data. Without an adult actually present during the focus group discussions I believe the students interacted in a more “peer oriented” way than if an adult had been there as facilitator. However, their interaction was still possibly shaped by the fact that the focus groups were held at school in the classroom, an adult-dominated environment.

I found that my access to the children was limited by the role of the teacher as both guardian and gatekeeper. This alerted me to the power structures within schools and the impact that these might have on both access to children and also to the actual research. For some research on children, this may not be so important, but if we
want to access children’s worldviews we need to consider how the power structure of the school might influence our research. Duncan (Duncan, 1999, P.7) found that gatekeepers were more convinced of the credibility, respectability and usefulness of psychologists researching bullying than of sociologists studying gender, so he presented his own project (to examine gender relations amongst pupils with a sub-text of sexual harassment and assault) as an extension of his earlier survey on bullying. Simpson (Prout, 2000. P.60) in her study on the experiences of children with Special Educational Needs found as the fieldwork progressed that it became obvious that all children were subject to needs especially with reference to the body. This led her to explore the importance of the body to all children in the power relations that are played out within schools.

Corsaro notes that the focus for schooling is on “preparing children for their future as adults, rather than appreciating their present contributions.” (Corsaro, 1997, P. 36). A study that wants to look at children’s peer cultures and children’s contribution to the peer cultures within the school is clearly at variance with this aspect of school culture.

The question of how the school as a particular site of adult control affects the results of the research also needs to be considered. Although it might seem reasonable to conduct research into bullying at school sites, since that is where children tell us it mainly occurs, we do not know what impact this has on the outcomes.

Although the students were not able to take more control over the project by using the videocameras themselves, I was able to videotape their focus groups which meant that an adult did not have to be present during these sessions. This gave the students some freedom of discussion without an adult presence, and I believe that such a technique would be a useful process for any research where
that freedom is more important than being able to facilitate the focus group discussion.

The students’ videotaped documentaries viewed as stylised accounts could be analysed for their views on bullying. I had not anticipated that the students’ documentaries would take shape in the way they did. Expecting factual statements about bullying, I found I was also looking at fictional accounts or narratives about bullying and I analysed them by looking at what these stories were portraying. Importantly, I also found that the students displayed great ability in interviewing and probing and I believe that given the opportunity these students could undertake interviews and focus groups that would provide good data for analysis, some of which they might provide themselves. This was certainly the experience of Pollard (Pollard, 1985) who conducted his research by getting pupils to interview one another during lunchtimes.

OBJECTIVE 2. THE MEANINGS OF BULLYING FOR CHILDREN

The students indicated that bullying could take place anytime, everywhere – but mainly at school and home. The finding that it occurs mainly at school is not unsurprising in that school is a place where groups of children gather. However, it may also be that there are some features of schools, such as that school is a site of adult control, which facilitate bullying.

Another finding was that anyone could bully. The students indication that anyone could bully contrasts with much of the research into bullying which finds that there are “typical” characteristics of bullies, e.g. aggressive, popular, show little empathy, are powerful, strong and so on (for example, Besag, 1989, P18). This finding dovetails with the finding discussed next that students include a much wider range of behaviours in their definition of bullying. If bullying includes such a range of behaviours then we might expect that more people
will be ‘guilty’ of using them. However, the fact that the students did
include a range of people in their lists of bullies – friends, teachers,
siblings, parents and so on, does indicate that they see bullying as
something available to anyone and not just confined to a few
‘dysfunctional’ children.

The students also gave a wide definition of what bullying is. They
included everything from name calling, teasing and fighting to
stalking and war, a range of behaviours some of which many adults
might consider a “normal part of growing up”. This finding has also
been noted in other research, where many children extended their
definition of bullying to include fighting between equals and
aggressive behaviour which is not necessarily repeated, or qualified
in other ways (Smith and Levan, 1995). I believe we need to take
this seriously and be aware of the fact that what students
understand to be bullying is different from the narrower definition
commonly used by researchers – in particular that the researchers’
definition does not generally include a single incident, nor does it
include a fight between equals. In relation to this finding, it appears
that looking at the range of behaviours that students considered to
be bullying and at the way they presented bullying in their
documentaries, bullying seems to be seen by the students as any
“controlling behaviour”. The students saw bullying primarily in terms of control. It was either depicted as a more powerful person being
able to control a weaker person, or it was described in terms of
controlling behaviour – being made to conform to social norms,
whether defined by adults (being made to eat vegetables) in adult
bullying, or powerful peers (having the ‘right’ hairstyle or clothes) in
peer bullying.

The second feature that emerged from this study was the social
integrating consequence of bullying. Students described how people
are bullied for anything that was “different” – hair, clothes, being fat,
too brainy, too dumb and so on. The ‘powerful’ students –
popular/cool, high status – are able to define what is ‘cool’ and bully other students who do not conform to their definition of ‘cool’. They can also maintain their own status by adhering to this definition of ‘cool’ themselves.

If bullies bully to be ‘popular’, then they are both attaining and maintaining high social status by bullying other students. Having once achieved high status they are then in a position to define social norms and they can maintain their status by their own adherence to the norms that they have defined. No doubt this all requires careful management, and one is always at risk of moving down the social scale. Other students risk a conflict with the bullies if they dare to challenge those norms, and/or challenge the bullies. The students made it clear that they did not generally believe they could challenge the bullies by their regular naming of ‘teachers’ as being the people who should stop the bullying. In this way, by defining social norms and ensuring students adhere to them, bullying performs a social integrating function. It establishes norms and through bullying of those who ‘challenge’ the norms, it creates a cohesive and stable social group.

Although the students were presented with the opportunity to consider the idea of any good aspects of bullying they overwhelmingly came to the conclusion that bullying is bad and rejected the bullies. This finding might be considered hardly surprising, but if bullying is so widely condemned then we need to ask why if flourishes so well. My explanation for this apparent contradiction is that bullying enables children to define social norms and to make one another conform to these norms. A similar analysis is used in Maynard’s study of social conflict among children.

Maynard (1985) finds that through conflict children build discrete, local forms of social organisation – “the occurrence of an episode of dispute may represent the precise moment during which a small group’s social organisation is fundamentally negotiated” (Maynard,
1985, P. 218). Adler and Adler (1995) in an analysis of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in preadolescent cliques describe how individuals in cliques – circles of power wherein leaders attain and wield influence over their followers – used tactics of inclusion to reinforce their popularity and prestige and tactics of exclusion to foster clique solidarity through members fear of their own exclusion from the clique. Although Adler and Adlers’ focus is on the cliques and the movement in and out of favour of clique individuals, the impact of the clique’s manoeuvrings on the wider peer group is unmistakable – “being picked on instilled outsiders with fear, grinding them down to accept their inferior status and discouraging them from rallying together to challenge the power hierarchy” (Adler and Adler, 1995, P. 154).

The third feature that emerged was the explanation given for why people bully, which was to be ‘cool’ or ‘popular’. I described here how we need to define “popular” in new terms, that is, not as someone whom a lot of people like, but as someone who demands respect, that is, someone who has high status in the peer group.

Popularity is a concept that is troubling, leading to sometimes confusing findings in the literature (See for example Feldman and Elliott, 1990, P. 293). The reason for this confusion may be in our understanding of “popular” people as those liked by a lot of people. However, this may not be how children see “popularity”. Students in my study said that bullies bully “to be popular”. I believe we need to redefine our understanding of popularity and to regard “popular” pupils not as those who are the most liked or the nicest, but as those who are most “respected”. Popular students have high social status, not because they are admired, but because they have earned their high status through their manoeuvrings and manipulation of their peers, using bullying tactics to create around them an “in-group” of supporters and to instil sufficient fear in the outsiders to prevent them from mounting a challenge.
The students frequently described bullying as “coming from home”. Maybe these students were able to see and articulate what various studies have found, viz. that family and family processes influence children’s peer relationships. The focus in much research into bullying has been on the individual characteristics of bullies and victims, an approach that has led naturally to a focus on the contribution of family background to bullying. (See for example, Curtner-Smith, 2000, for a discussion of her findings in relation to the mechanisms by which family processes contribute to boys’ bullying, and also for a summary of a range of studies that look at the families of aggressive and bullying children).

Adults also play a role in children’s bullying. I have described how the students frequently described bullying as coming from home, and how they saw teachers and other adults as the people who should stop bullying. The importance given to adults in the students’ discourses indicates that we need to be aware of both adult bullying behaviour towards children and other adults, and also that adults may overtly support children’s peer bullying because of their awareness of its social integrating function.

While I have discussed some of the meanings of children’s bullying within children’s peer cultures and have sought right from the start to situate my research into bullying within children’s worlds, it is also the case that children’s cultures are embedded in the wider adult culture. Adult contributions to bullying can come from a number of sources – parent/family background, teachers, the power structures and organisation of schools, television and other media. However, rather than focus on the psychosocial practices that create bullying, such as poor parenting practices, I believe we need to consider our attitude towards bullying and to what extent we genuinely condemn bullying or whether we “covertly” uphold it by belittling it, ignoring it or blaming individuals, because we consciously or unconsciously understand the role of bullying in aiding social cohesiveness within
children’s groups and maybe its contribution to their development and adjustment to adult society.

OBJECTIVE 3. WHAT MIGHT WORK IN COMBATING BULLYING

This was one of the original objectives in this research but, as often happens, in the process of the research objectives undergo refinement and may even change completely. The students in my study did not initiate any solutions to bullying and if they addressed it at all, seemed pessimistic about its demise – “you’ll never stop bullying”; “its like smoking dope, its illegal but people still do it”. They named teachers and then other adults as the people who should stop bullying and rarely suggested children could stop it themselves. The absence of suggestions by them on what might work in combating bullying possibly indicates that the prerogative lies with adults to initiate this progress. It could be that children are so conditioned to adults exerting ‘control’, adults are seen as the locus for initiatives.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The findings concerning the problems of gaining access to the children indicate that the school as a site of adult control needs to be considered in conducting research with children at school. It has implications for researchers not only in terms of access to children, particularly if they want to understand children’s worldviews, but also for the impact that the power structures within schools may have on the research findings.

The wide definition of bullying described by the students has implications for research into bullying. Children and researchers might well be talking about different things and even if researchers define the term it is likely to be problematic if it does not conform to the students conception of what bullying is. It may be better for researchers to use another term, such as “peer abuse” to describe what they have commonly defined as bullying. It is to be hoped that further ‘student’ focused work on the subject will occur.

A question that might also be asked in regard to students’ inclusion of such a wide range of behaviours in their definition of bullying, is whether this range of bullying is indeed just as painful and damaging as the sort of bullying described by adults. There may or may not be similarities with adult family violence victim research which could be usefully explored.

The role of bullying in the creation of “popular” cliques and its contribution to social cohesiveness and integration need to be taken into account in programs designed to stop bullying. Children reject bullying, but if it has a role in the production of children’s social groups, then this needs to be seriously considered in attempts to combat bullying. Research into this aspect of bullying’s role could be undertaken, particularly looking at social cohesion within children’s
groups where bullying either does not occur or where it is much diminished. Certainly, while there is research on group dynamics among adults and societies, there is a dearth of research about such aspects with children as yet. I believe groups of children with low or non-existent bullying behaviour could be found; Bettelheim (1969) for example claimed bullying did not exist amongst the children on the kibbutz. Let us hope we can find such groups closer to home and that researchers begin to look at this area of research from the children’s perspective. It is about time, after all, that children were constructively heard, as well as being seen. Their voices deserve an audience.
Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Parents

Information Sheet for Parents

Dear Parent,

I am a student at Victoria University studying for a Masters degree in Social Science Research. As part of my course, I am undertaking a research project on Bullying, and will be working with xxxxxx and his students in Room 10 at xxxxxxx School during this project.

My approach in this research is to try to find out what Bullying means to students of this age. The students will undertake some research themselves by interviewing one another in groups, which they will film on video. They will take turns filming and interviewing, and my hope is that they will learn about interviewing and filming as well as enjoy doing the project.

I am attempting to obtain young people’s views on bullying, so if you are happy for your young person to take part, I ask you as far as is possible, to avoid giving them your views on bullying while the project is on going.

Responses collected will be put into a written report. None of the students will be identified in this report. A summary of the report will be made available to you if you wish, and to the school when it is completed. The tapes will be destroyed at the end of the project.

It is planned to begin the project during the third week of Term 3, and it will consist of four sessions running over a couple of weeks.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the project, please contact me at Phone 476-3032.

You have the opportunity on the reverse of this letter to allow or not allow your young person to take part in this research project.

Sue Buckley
Appendix 2: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM: Research Project

Please read the following statement and then sign and date this consent form and return to school by Friday, 28 July.

I have been given a general description of this project, and I understand what is involved. I know that if I would like more information I can contact Sue Buckley at Phone 476-3032.

I understand that my young person does not have to take part in the research project, and I understand that the students taking part in the videotaped discussions will not be identified, and that the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Although some of the comments made by students on the tapes may be used in the thesis on the research, I understand that names or other details will not appear and individual students will not be able to be identified.

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RESEARCH PROJECT
ROOM 10,
xxxxxx INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

I (please circle)
Agree  Do not agree

to allow ...................... to take part in the research project.

SIGNED: ________________________________ DATE:

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY FRIDAY, 28 JULY. IF THE FORM IS NOT RETURNED BY THIS DATE, WE WILL ASSUME THAT YOU HAVE NO OBJECTION TO YOUR YOUNG PERSON PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT.
Appendix 3: Sheet 1

Sheet 1: 10-20 examples of bullying that you know about.

I want you to think about what it is that you experience with your peers (that is, anyone around 5 years older or younger than you) when adults are not around. I want to find out what is going on with you and your friends when there's no adult's eye to influence how you might choose to be.

In your 10-20 examples of bullying, I don't want you to use names. If you need to give someone a name, make it up e.g. “X said to Y…” or “A and B were out on the field…” or whatever.
Appendix 4: Sheet 2

Bullying.

Sheet 2.

Think of everything that bullying is. Answer the questions:

Where?

What?

How?

Who?

When?
Why is the bullying happening in the situations you outlined in your 10-20 examples?
Appendix 5: Sheet 3

Bullying.

Sheet 3: Questions for your groups.

Can bullying be good?
Why/why not?

Can bullying be bad?
Why/why not?

Should bullying be encouraged?
Why/why not?
If yes, by whom?
How could it be encouraged?

Should bullying be stopped?
Why/why not?
If yes, by whom?
How could it be stopped?
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