

**Applying the Method of Shared
Concern in Australian schools:
an evaluative study**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this inquiry is to provide a description and evaluation of the Method of Shared Concern, a non-punitive method of addressing cases on bullying in schools. It inquires into how the Method is being applied in a sample of Australian schools in 2008 and examines its general effectiveness.

Specifically, the inquiry examines how in practice the Method is being employed by practitioners in Australian schools. As such, the aim is to obtain detailed accounts of a number of cases, focusing on:

- what the practitioner did in applying the method, the decisions they made and the outcomes achieved at each stage of the process
- how the students involved in the intervention actually reacted
- what problems were encountered
- reflections of the practitioner and researcher on the applications.

The effectiveness of the Method was to be judged according to two criteria:

1. whether the application of the Method brought about a cessation or reduction in the bullying experienced by the person or persons being targeted
2. the effects on other persons taking part in the interventions process, including those who had participated and the person acting as the practitioner.

Background

Bullying has for some years been identified as a major problem affecting school communities throughout the world (Smith et al. 1999). It is generally agreed that bullying can be defined as the systematic abuse of power in interpersonal relations. It involves a more powerful person or group deliberately seeking to hurt or threaten an individual or group that is unable to defend themselves adequately. Typically, bullying involves a series of negative acts. Bullying may take a variety of forms, both direct, as in physically attacking someone or verbally abusing them, and indirect, as in unfairly excluding people, spreading rumours, or sending hurtful anonymous emails. It has been estimated that about half the students attending school have experienced some kind and degree of bullying. In Australia, one child in six has reported being bullied on a weekly basis (Rigby 1998).

The harm done to vulnerable children who have been bullied has been extensively researched. Both physical and psychological consequences have been identified (Hawker & Boulton 2000; Bond et al. 2001; Rigby 2005a). Long-term negative effects on the mental health of victims have been reported (Olweus 1993). In addition, it is known that students who continually engage in bullying at school tend to be more clinically depressed and suicidal than others (Rigby & Slee 1999) and are more inclined to act aggressively towards others in the wider society, both contemporaneously (Rigby & Cox 1993; Andershed, Kerr & Stattin 2001; Van der Wal, de Wit & Hirasing 2003), and after leaving school (Farrington 1993; Olweus 1993).

Bullying in schools has been identified as a major concern for Australian educational jurisdictions in the *National Safe Schools Framework* (Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2003). Anti-bullying policies are now mandated throughout Australian schools and it is evident that a variety of anti-bullying programs are being implemented (see Rigby & Thomas 2003 and also McGrath 2006). As yet, however, there is limited information about what measures (if any) are being taken that are effective in reducing school bullying.

Studies of the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives

A number of published inquiries have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of work undertaken by schools to reduce the prevalence of bullying. Inquiries meeting stringent validity criteria are described and discussed in a recent book containing accounts of major interventions around the world (Smith, Pepler & Rigby 2004). More recent surveys of program effectiveness have been undertaken by Vreeman and Carroll (2007), Baldry and Farrington (2007), and Rigby and Slee (2008). The reported outcomes have, on the whole, been disappointing, with an average reduction of cases of bullying of around 15%. However, interventions in some schools have been much more successful with obtained reductions in excess of 60% (see, for example, Salmivalli et al. 2004). The obvious question is: What are such schools doing to achieve outstanding results?

To date, there is no satisfactory answer to this question. In part, this is because the programs have typically contained multiple elements, for instance, risk management procedures, working with children in classrooms, peer support, punitive methods of dealing with cases, restorative practices and problem-solving approaches to behaviour management. Hence, changes in the rate of bullying cannot be logically attributed to one particular measure. What is needed are inquiries which enable one to identify the impact of particular elements. In this study we examine interventions carried out by schools when they address cases of bullying that come to their attention and, in particular, the Method of Shared Concern (Pikas 1989, 2002).

Interventions in cases of bullying

It is generally agreed that preventative methods are needed to address bullying, for example, through systematic surveillance of student behaviour, the use of curriculum content to encourage prosocial behaviour, and the training of students as peer supporters or mediators. A great deal of work has been done in recent years to promote such activities. However, despite these endeavours, schools are continually required to intervene when cases of bullying occur. In fact, research assessing the effectiveness of such interventions has revealed that in many cases the interventions undertaken by teachers are ineffective.

The question of how schools can best intervene in cases of bullying is one of major concern among teachers, as is evident in the diversity of judgements among teachers in Australia and overseas on how to respond to cases of bullying in schools (Rigby & Bauman 2007; Bauman, Rigby & Hoppa 2008).

The most relevant source of information on how effective interventions can be is students, especially those who have been bullied and gone to a teacher or counsellor

for help. In Australia, approximately 30% of children report having been bullied at school (Rigby & Barnes 2002). Many victims go to teachers as a last resort. The stigma against 'telling a teacher' is such that many children are dissuaded from doing so. They greatly prefer to tell their friends or parents (Rigby 2008). So we may conclude that cases that come before teachers as a result of victims informing teachers are, on the whole, relatively serious ones.

Several studies tell us what happened after the teachers had been told. A large-scale study in England by Smith and Shu (2000) involving over 2000 students aged 10-14 years revealed that, according to students, in 9% of cases teachers did nothing. When teachers did act, 16% of students reported that the bullying got worse and 29% reported that the situation did not change. In a US study (Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick 2005), among the 58% of children who had been bullied several times a week and actually told a teacher about it, only 28% reported that the teacher was successful in stopping the bullying. Twenty percent said the teacher tried to stop it to no effect, 10% said the teacher tried to stop the bullying but it became worse, and 8% did not try to stop the bullying. These are all grim statistics which suggest that telling a teacher is not a particularly effective strategy.

Similar results have been reported in Australia. As in England, telling a teacher is less common than telling a friend or a parent. What is revealing about an Australian study conducted by Rigby and Barnes (2002) with an even larger sample of students (over 38,000 aged 8-16 years) is that outcomes from telling depended greatly on the age of the informant. Among young students (around 8 years of age) some 65% of the respondents indicated that telling had made things better in some way. Among older students, around 16 years of age, about half of them said it made no difference. Regardless of age, however, approximately 10% reported that after telling, the situation got worse.

It must be concluded therefore that, in general, interventions with cases of bullying in schools have not on the whole been successful; especially they have achieved quite limited success when applied to cases involving secondary school students.

Alternative forms of intervention

A number of alternative methods have been proposed for addressing cases of bullying in schools. These include:

- (i) the traditional disciplinary approach relying largely on the deterrent effect of punishment
- (ii) restorative practices whereby students are induced to reflect upon their 'wrongdoing' and act so as to restore a damaged relationship
- (iii) strengthening the potential target, especially through the use of assertiveness training
- (iv) mediation conducted by a counsellor, teacher or trained student to resolve the conflict between the aggressor and the target
- (v) the Support Group Method, sometimes called the No Blame Approach, as proposed by Robinson and Maines (1997)

(vi) the Method of Shared Concern, as proposed originally by Anatol Pikas (1989, 2002).

To date, no systematic attempt has been made to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of these six approaches. By far the most commonly used approach is (i) the traditional disciplinary approach. According to a survey conducted in Australia, approximately 75% of teachers believe they would use such a method in a case of low to moderate severity (Rigby & Bauman 2007). Given that the outcome from teacher interventions tends to achieve quite limited success – and the disciplinary approach is overwhelmingly the main method employed – empirical support for the effectiveness of this approach is unlikely to prove highly significant.

As a result of the perceived inadequacy of the disciplinary approach in reducing bullying, many schools have been abandoning or strictly limiting its use. It is sometimes claimed that being punished for a bullying offence increases the motivation to seek revenge on the target who is presumed to be the informer. Equally damaging and less overt ways of continuing the bullying without getting caught are often devised – and the target is no better off. Providing adequate protection for the target is often difficult as it requires a great deal of surveillance. Disciplinary approaches commonly assume that an individual perpetrator is entirely responsible for the offence. This is quite often not the case. As Salmivalli (1999) has shown, a number of students may play decisive roles such as reinforcing or assisting one or more ringleaders in carrying out acts of bullying. The causes of bullying may be traceable less to the deviant personalities or motivation of individual students than to the way a group of students operate. Hence schools are increasingly looking for new and more comprehensive ways of dealing with cases.

Probably the most widely used alternative, non-punitive approach to dealing with cases of bullying in Australia is through the use of restorative practices (Thorsborne & Vinegrad 2006). Such practices may be applied at different levels or contexts: with individuals implicated in bully/victim problems; in classrooms, and sometimes through wider community involvement. Restorative practices are being promoted and encouraged by some Australian educational authorities; for instance, their use is being mandated by some educational jurisdictions and teachers often express their satisfaction with the use of this approach. However, its success in actually reducing bullying has not been established. According to an inquiry conducted by the Youth Justice Board in the United Kingdom (2004) drawing upon results from 26 schools, restorative justice conferences were not found to reduce levels of victimisation in schools.

Recognising that the imbalance of power between the bully or bullies and the target may at times be small and not necessarily fixed, some educators have emphasised the importance of the targeted person developing skills that enable them to become less vulnerable. Such skills include acting more assertively and making friends who would provide necessary support. In Australia, Evelyn Field (1999) has been prominent in suggesting techniques that targets can employ and ways in which vulnerable children can be coached to become successfully assertive. To date, no evaluations have been reported of the effectiveness of this approach. Generally it is agreed that where the imbalance of power is relatively small and the victimised student is willing and able to acquire the necessary skills, some cases of bullying may be successfully addressed

in this way. However, there are clearly many cases in which the imbalance of power cannot readily (if at all) be overcome, as when an individual is being continually harassed by a group of students or is being attacked by a much stronger person.

Mediation has been put forward as a means of dealing with cases of bullying and employed in some schools. This may be carried out by a trained adult mediator or (in some cases) by a student trained as a peer mediator. Where students in conflict are amenable to being 'mediated' this approach can be successful, as long as the mediator is able to maintain strict neutrality. Remaining neutral is considered difficult or impossible in cases where the perpetrator is perceived to be behaving unjustly and steadfastly demanding an unfair outcome, as is generally the case in bullying. Where both parties want the conflict to be resolved, or can be induced to see that it is in their interest that the problem be resolved, mediation can be effective. However, in a large number of cases such a situation is difficult to achieve unless skilled preliminary work has been undertaken, as may sometimes occur when the Method of Shared Concern is employed.

Another approach is the Support Group Method (Robinson & Maines 1997), formerly called the No Blame Approach. This is a non-punitive approach which has been used widely in England and in some schools in Australia. It can begin when a student is identified by the school as being bullied. He or she is interviewed to discover what has been happening and especially how the student has been affected by the bullying. The student is invited to describe graphically the distress that has been, or is being, experienced and to identify the perpetrators. It is made clear that the perpetrators will not be punished. A meeting is then convened with the perpetrators, together with a number of other students who are thought to be helpful in resolving the problem. The practitioner explains how the target has been feeling and asks each member of the group to indicate how they can help to improve the situation. Subsequently the outcome is carefully monitored through interviews with the perpetrators and the target. Among users the approach is popular, as indicated in recent research reported by Smith, Howard and Thompson (2008, in press).

The Method of Shared Concern is also a non-punitive approach, originating through the work of Anatol Pikas (1989, 2002). It has been employed in schools in a range of countries, including Sweden, Finland, England, Scotland, Spain, Canada and Australia. Broadly, it seeks to resolve bully/victim problems by empowering participating students in the course of a series of meetings to find an acceptable and durable solution that will prevent the bullying from continuing. Specifically, how this is done is covered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: THE METHOD OF SHARED CONCERN

The Method of Shared Concern originated through the work of Anatol Pikas, a Swedish psychologist, in Sweden in the 1980s (published 1989). Further developments were published in 2002. The name he gave to the method was ‘Shared Concern Method’, abbreviated as SCm. Some have continued to use this title; however, most writers, including Smith and Sharp (1994), Sullivan (2000), Murphy and Lewers (2000), Rigby (2005b), and McGrath and Noble (2006), use a more anglicised nomenclature and called it ‘The Method of Shared Concern’.

Pikas has provided no manual or writings in English describing in detail how the Method should be applied. His influence in Australia has been largely through workshops he gave in Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne in 1994 and 2006. The authors of this report attended these workshops and are broadly agreed on the main features of the approach. There have been variations in interpretation and application of the Method. For instance, one description provided by the Australian ‘Friendly Schools’ initiative includes only the first two stages of the procedure (Erceg & Cross 2008). In 2007, Readymade Productions produced a DVD to provide training for teachers in the use of the Method.

It should be noted that the term ‘shared concern’ is often used loosely to refer to any approach in which a teacher or counsellor conveys to others a feeling of concern for the victim of school bullying. For example, it is sometimes said that practitioners of restorative practices may express their sympathy or concern for such a victim as a means of bringing home to the perpetrator the harm they have done. In this study we are not concerned with the somewhat casual or incidental usage of the term, but rather with the method of intervention based upon the work of Anatol Pikas.

The following is an account of the Method as it is broadly understood.

An outline of the Method

The Method of Shared Concern is a non-punitive method of dealing with bully/victim incidents aimed at empowering students who have contributed to the bullying or become aware of the bullying to act so as to resolve the problem. It involves a multi-stage process, beginning with individual interviews leading on to group meetings. It is assumed that the bullying is strongly influenced by the relationships the students have with each other. According to Pikas, the originator of the Method, this intervention process can cause a shift in the group dynamics, and provide an environment in which the parties may engage in a negotiation process to bring about a peaceful and sustainable outcome.

It can be applied in a school under these conditions:

1. The principles and procedures of the Method (as explained below) are understood by staff members and its use has general support in the school community.
2. There is a staff member or members trained in the procedure to work through the Method in detail and follow the recommended procedure.

3. Cases chosen for its application are those which do **not** involve very severe incidents, such as serious assaults, or ones of low severity that can be dealt with less formally.
4. There is active participation by a group of students who have become involved in the problem.

In the following description of the procedure and rationale for the Method, those suspected of undertaking the bullying are referred to, for convenience, as ‘the suspected bullies’. It is not intended to imply that the children so described possess some fixed quality that determines that they will invariably act in a bullying manner. On other occasions they may act differently and actually help those being victimised. The Method in fact aims at empowering them to become part of the solution to a problematic situation. The person(s) who are being bullied are referred to as the ‘Target(s)’. Similarly, it is not intended that children identified as being targeted by the bullies possess a fixed quality that determines that they will be victimised. At other times and in other contexts, they may be treated differently and may eventually become free of bullying or harassment from others. The person implementing the intervention is described as the ‘practitioner.’

How the Method is applied

The Method of Shared Concern involves the following stages.

A. Individuals involved in a bully/victim problem are identified.

Reliable information is needed in relation to:

- a) the person or persons being bullied by another individual or group
- b) the person or persons continually engaged in carrying out the bullying.

Information about what has been happening is **ideally** obtained through observations and/or receiving reports rather than through someone talking directly with the Target. Sometimes, however, the child or parent may report the incident to a staff member. In such cases, the child may be at risk from the bullies and care needs to be taken to ensure their protection. The risk is reduced when it is made clear to all concerned that no punishment is intended.

B. A number of students are identified as likely to have taken part in the bullying, or to have supported it in some way.

Each student is seen in turn, starting (if known) with the likely ringleader. (Under some circumstances, if desired, other students aware of the problem – for example, bystanders – may be included, as they may sometimes play an important role in influencing the bullying.) It has become customary to differentiate between the different roles bystanders may play, as suggested by Salmivalli (1999). (See Appendix 1.)

The interview must take place in private and without interruptions. The meeting begins with the interviewer inviting the student to sit in a chair opposite (without an intervening desk) and waiting for eye contact before the interaction begins. At these meetings with individual students, it is important **not** to make any accusations.

The practitioner first explains their role – to help children feel safe at school, then points out that it has been noticed that a particular student has been having a hard time at school with other students. The practitioner describes what has been discovered about the plight of this student, for example, being upset, isolated or staying away from school. Once the concerns of the practitioner have been clearly – and sincerely – conveyed, the student is asked to say what he or she has noticed or knows about the situation.

As soon as the student has acknowledged some awareness (not guilt) relating to what has been happening, they are asked directly **what can be done to help improve matters**. Note that the interviewer is not trying to ‘get to the bottom of the matter’ and apportion blame, but to produce a constructive response that will help to change the situation.

Commonly, suggestions **are** made about what can be done by the student. But if they are not, the practitioner may make suggestions, ones that are not difficult to carry out. Strong approval is expressed for any constructive proposals; then another meeting (at an agreed time) is arranged to see how things have gone. Importantly, at this meeting no threats are made nor any warnings given. The remaining students in the group are seen, again individually, and the procedure repeated.

Example of a possible interaction between the practitioner and a suspected bully

PHASE ONE

Practitioner (P): I hear that Tom [the Target] has been having a hard time at school. I am feeling concerned about him. [P mentions a few things that suggest he has been having a hard time, then continues.] I gather that you know Tom. [P waits for acknowledgement.] I’d like you to help me to understand what has been happening to him. What have you noticed about him lately?

Suspected bully (SB): [long pause; P waits] Well, he does sometimes seem a bit down. Some kids have been teasing him. Just having fun. Nothing big.

P: Oh, so it does seem that things aren’t so good for him right now.

SB: I suppose so.

PHASE TWO

This can begin as soon as there is any acknowledgment that the situation for Tom is not good.

P: I am wondering if you can think of anything that could make things a bit better for Tom.

SB: [long pause] Well, I suppose I could stop making fun of him – like calling him names.

P: [enthusiastically – not grudgingly] That would be excellent. So you are going to stop teasing him. That’s a good start. Now let’s meet again in a couple of days’ time and see how things are going. Thank you for coming and talking to me to help the

situation for Tom. I will see you again soon. [P makes sure to negotiate with the student precisely when and where they will meet.]

Some variations

1. The SB may deny knowledge of what has gone on. This may be due to genuine ignorance, or more likely (if sound preliminary work has been done) to an unreadiness to cooperate. One can briefly change the subject. If Tom is, or has been, part of the friendship group with SB or takes part in any activities with the SB, P may ask about what things they do together; then return to Tom's current condition – and how he seems to be these days. (This sometimes enables the student to recognise a change that has occurred and to acknowledge some concern.) If no progress is made, it may be necessary to say: 'Well, it seems like you haven't noticed anything or you don't want to talk about it today. Please keep your eye out for anything – and we can talk again later.' (A common mistake is to **assume** the SB has engaged in the bullying behaviour and must be pressured to acknowledge a real concern for the Target. With this Method it is quite wrong to ask SBs how they would feel if they had been treated in such a way. In no way does the Method seek to induce a sense of shame or guilt).
2. The bully may deny any **personal** involvement and say that somebody else has been upsetting Tom. One might say: 'Well, you have some influence with X. I wonder if you could have a word with her. She would listen to what you might say.'
3. The student may pressure the **practitioner** to say why they have come to suspect him or her of doing such a thing. Here P needs to carefully make it clear that the suspicion is **not** based on what the victim has said, but rather on reports from (unspecified) others, and, ideally, through personal observation. P should never get into an argument over this. Return to one's main theme: that is, the admittedly hard time being experienced by T and what can be done about it.

C. The Target is interviewed.

The targeted person (T) is seen **after** all the SBs have been interviewed.

P begins by explaining their role and ask how things are going, expressing concern, sympathy and support over what has been happening. It is important that a trusting relationship is developed. However, questions need to be asked to find out whether T has been doing something to bring on the bullying – that is, by acting as a provocative victim. Importantly, no blame should be directed at the student. This line of questioning must be done sensitively. Often the victim is wholly innocent.

P discloses that they have actually talked with the SBs individually and there has been an undertaking to do some things to improve the situation. T is asked to look out for signs of change. P arranges to meet again with T to see how things develop.

D. Several days later, follow-up meetings are held with individual bullies (as previously arranged).

The aim here is to ascertain whether the SBs have carried out actions, as promised, to improve the situation. Only when P is satisfied that progress is being made can a meeting be convened with the whole group of SBs.

E. At the group meeting of Suspected Bullies, each member is asked to say what they have done to try to improve the situation.

This commonly has the effect of promoting further positive social interactions with T. It is usually possible to:

- (i) compliment members on the progress that has been made
- (ii) 'fall in with' (or elicit) a suggestion from members of the group that T be invited to join them for a last meeting to finally resolve the problem.

P should bear in mind that sometimes the group members may believe that T has been, in some ways, provocative or unreasonable, and concessions or adjustments may be required of T. It is therefore sensible to discuss any reservations that the SBs may have about how to relate to T, and to help them formulate a plan or proposal to put to T. P may then ask each member of the group what they are prepared to say at the final meeting. Such preparation of the group for this meeting is essential.

F. At a brief meeting with the Target, he or she can normally be induced to join the group for a final meeting, with assurances that progress can be made at the meeting.

However, if T is not willing to come along, his or her feelings and decision must be respected.

G. At the meeting with the Suspected Bullies and the Target present, sometimes called the Summit Meeting, the students are enabled by the Practitioner to express their thoughts about how they wish to proceed to resolve the issue.

Typically, if the SBs have, in fact, experienced a sense of genuine concern about the target and have taken steps to improve relations, the meeting serves the purpose of confirming that the problem has been successfully addressed. P may nevertheless discuss with the students what they might do if there is a relapse – and emphasise the need to keep channels of communication open.

There are occasions when each side harbours some resentment. This can occur when T has behaved provocatively and the 'bullies' want to see a change in T's behaviour. **The SBs are given the opportunity to put forward their agreed proposal, as formulated with P's assistance at the previous meeting.** (Some preparation for this meeting may also be carried out previously with T.) At this stage P plays the role of the mediator. Typically, adjustments take place on each side. The aim here is to help the students reach an acceptable agreement about how each will behave towards the other in future. This may (if deemed necessary) take the form of a written contract which everyone signs.

Salient points regarding the Method of Shared Concern

1. The Method of Shared Concern is an approach to dealing with cases of bullying in schools which benefits both the target of the bullying and the person or persons undertaking the bullying.
2. The approach is 'solution focused', that is, the emphasis is upon bringing about desirable changes in the participants rather than discovering who is to blame and applying sanctions.
3. It is assumed that those engaging in the bullying are typically (not always) insensitive to the harm or the extent of the harm they are doing to their targets. This insensitivity is commonly due in part to their involvement in a group which seems to give legitimacy to their bullying activities and prevents them from feeling personally responsible for the outcomes.
4. What they gain mostly through the bullying is a sense of being part of a group which is 'having fun', thereby strengthening their connectedness with each other and boosting their collective self-esteem.
5. There may also be some apprehension on the part of some of the bullying students that they might be targeted by the leader or others if they do not take part in the bullying. The practitioner should be aware this possibility. However, it is generally **not** useful to raise the matter with the student.
6. **As individuals**, the bullies commonly feel uncomfortable about what is being done. At some level they may at times feel that they would like the bullying to stop.
7. A hostile blaming attitude on the part of an authority figure such as the practitioner is likely to **increase** the desire to continue bullying and unite the bullies more strongly. Hence any accusations could be counterproductive.
8. Working with individuals initially is likely to elicit a more positive response than working with them in a group. Often students in a group close ranks and some 'hide' behind others; moreover, the situation is harder to control.
9. Although the method involves a non-blaming approach, it does **not** in any way seek to excuse or condone bullying. It is in fact quite direct and confrontational. It strongly invites and expects a responsible response.
10. Having individually-made promises to the practitioner generally means that members of the bullying group will not talk to each other about what has transpired. Group influence is thereby weakened.
11. Careful monitoring of what ensues after promises or commitments have been made is absolutely essential.
12. Interviewing the Target first should be avoided, if this is at all possible, because if the bullies suspect that the Target has informed on them, he or she will be further endangered. In some cases the Target has already informed and will therefore need to be protected. The Target is safer if the bullies understand that no punishment is going to be applied.
13. Students who are targeted are not always 'innocent', and it is important to understand what they may be doing to provoke the bullying. In some cases, one may need to work directly on changing a Target's provocative way of behaving.
14. It is important to see the whole group of suspected bullies together, but **only** after progress has clearly been made towards improving the situation. The aim at this meeting is to make public what they have done to help the situation, to congratulate them, and (if necessary) work through any residual problems with the group.

15. Good planning and preparation for the final meeting is essential. Where there are some unresolved issues, for example, when the target is seen as provoking some of the bullying, the bullies may be encouraged to formulate a reasonable proposal to put to the target. In the final stage the practitioner will need to act the part of mediator.
16. Essentially, the Method aims at producing desirable change in the attitudes and behaviour of students who have bullied through a modification of the dynamics of the group with which they identify.
17. Although the aim is to re-individualise bullies, the idea is **not** to 'break up' groups (students have a right to enjoy being in a group) but eventually to change their attitudes and behaviour towards the Target and towards other potential targets.
18. The time taken to reach a solution to the problem may vary, sometimes lasting no more than several days. Sometimes it takes repeated meetings and may extend over weeks. The Method aims at producing a lasting solution to the problem and this can be achieved best by implementing each stage of the procedure. In the long run this saves time that may otherwise need to be spent attending to recurring, unresolved conflicts that involve the students.
19. It is considered desirable that those taking part in the process be interviewed again some weeks later to discover how they felt about their participation and whether the bullying really had stopped.

Relationship between the Method of Shared Concern and other intervention methods

The Method of Shared Concern differs radically from the most widely used approach to addressing cases of bullying, that is, the traditional disciplinary approach. Most strikingly, it seeks to resolve cases of bullying without the use of punishment. In this regard it is similar to restorative practices and the Support Group Method (Robinson & Maines, 1997). But it differs crucially from restorative practices in not seeking to induce or take advantage of a sense of remorse in the assumed bully as a step towards getting the 'wrongdoer' to act in a restorative manner and bring about a satisfactory relationship with the person who has been targeted. In place of 'remorse' it seeks to cultivate a sense of 'empathy' with the Target. It differs also in emphasising that enduring solutions to the problem of bullying can best be accomplished through the use of group meetings involving those students who have participated in bully/victim incidents.

It differs also from the Support Group Method in that Shared Concern begins by arranging a series of meeting with **individuals** suspected of bullying someone, rather than engaging in discussions immediately with a group of students among whom are suspected bullies. It assumes that working first with individuals and then with groups of those involved is the most practical and effective way of proceeding.

Mediation may form part of the Method, but only after adequate preparations have been made with the participating students. As previously discussed, mediation tends to be ineffective when there is a substantial imbalance of power between perpetrators and the target, but can be effective when the attitudes of students have been modified through the experience of first taking part in individual meetings with a skilled practitioner, and subsequently participating in group discussions.

In the course of working with the target of the bullying, the approach of 'strengthening the victim' may in some circumstance be employed as part of the Method of Shared Concern. The Target may be helped to become more assertive and to avoid needlessly antagonising others. The Target may also be able to play a more positive and effective role in the mediation process. However, it is recognised that 'strengthening the victim' is only part of the process, relevant in some circumstances but not in others.

Especially in one respect, the Method of Shared Concern is unique in that it encounters the students implicated in the bullying both individually and in a group setting. It recognises that changes need to occur at both the individual and group level. Subtly, it enables the group dynamics to change so that those who have bullied are no longer motivated to continue or (in the case of the Target) provoke the bullying

Areas of application of the Method of Shared Concern

It is generally agreed that not all cases of bullying can be appropriately treated using the Method of Shared Concern. It should not be used in cases of very severe and criminal bullying; nor in cases in which the bullying is relatively mild, for which some individual counselling may be sufficient. Where the bullying is very severe, pressures on the school are commonly such that disciplinary measures need to be taken; in some cases police action. The Method is considered most appropriate in cases of moderate-level severity where it is possible to identify a number of students who have become involved in the bullying as perpetrators, victim or bystanders.

It is not always evident whether an act of bullying involves group participation. Establishing the extent to which 'group' is involved as opposed to an 'individual' may not be easy. Sometimes even the target may be unaware of the people who are encouraging and supporting the bullying and may think that one individual perpetrator is entirely responsible. Similarly, a person carrying out the bullying may think of themselves as acting independently, even when the action is being supported, sometimes passively, by others. Self-report measures probably underestimate group involvement and may sometimes result in individuals being viewed mistakenly as the sole perpetrators. Even so, according to an Australian survey involving over 30,000 respondents aged 8-18 years to an anonymous questionnaire, students who report having engaged in bullying at school are more likely to report that they have bullied as part of a group than as an individual (Rigby 2002, Appendix 3, p. 283). This suggests that when bullying takes place in a school there is usually some degree of group involvement.

The age range over which the Method of Shared Concern can appropriately be used is, as yet, undetermined. Pikas, the originator of the Method, has argued that it is best suited to problems involving older, secondary students, on the grounds that a greater level of cognitive maturity is sometimes required of the participants. He argued that controlling student behaviour through the assertion of teacher authority, termed 'authoritative suggestion', can be much more effective with younger students, and that the application of the Method of Shared Concern was more appropriate for working with older students. This view is consistent with reports from Stevens, de Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost (2000) who reported that, in their large-scale intervention in Flanders using the traditional disciplinary Olweus intervention program, much poorer outcomes were obtained with samples of older students. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the Method of Shared Concern can be used

effectively with younger students. Duncan (1996) reported that successful interventions were obtained using the Method with children in the second and third years of primary school in Scotland.

One important area of application of the Method of Shared Concern is in cases where the Target is behaving in a provocative manner. Unlike most other methods, including the traditional disciplinary approach, restorative practices and the Support Group Method, it is **not** assumed that the target is wholly 'innocent'. It recognises that some students seem to elicit aggressive responses from others, consciously or unconsciously. According to Solberg, Olweus and Endressen (2007) approximately 15% of victims of school bullying can be classified as provocative victims, with boys being more likely than girls to fit this category. In cases where there is some degree of provocation, the reactions of the students who engage in bullying may seem to them to be justified. However, when the reactions involve sustained and disproportionate aggression, the behaviour of the more powerful party can certainly be called 'bullying' and must be addressed. Some form of mediation then appears necessary. Both sides need to change their behaviour if harmony is to be established or restored. Unfortunately, this is difficult to achieve when there is an imbalance of power. The Method of Shared Concern is considered unique in seeking to address this problem through group meetings in which mediation becomes possible.

Evaluation of the Method of Shared Concern

The Method of Shared Concern has been used in anti-bullying programs in a number of countries. These include England (Smith & Sharp 1994), Spain (Ortega, Del Rey & Mora-Merchan 2004), Finland (Salmivalli et al. 2004) and Australia (Peterson & Rigby 1999; Griffiths 2001). Clearly the Method of Shared Concern has been seen as an important component in the development of anti-bullying programs around the world. In each case, the programs noted above have been reported as producing significant reductions in bullying behaviour. However, the fact that the programs contained other elements, for example peer support activities, prevents one from attributing the reduction in bullying solely to the use of the Method.

Some published reports have focused specifically on the effectiveness of the Method. Studies conducted in secondary schools in Sheffield, England, revealed that reductions in bullying were reported by three out of four students with whom the Method had been applied, and that five of the six teachers responsible for employing the Method claimed that it had reduced the frequency and severity of the bullying (Smith & Sharp 1994). A further study in Scotland reported that the Method was applied successfully or very successfully in 34 out of 38 cases among children aged 7-16 years (Duncan 1996). More recently Smith (2001) reported on a survey of 155 schools across England to discover how teachers rate the Method of Shared Concern. On a five-point scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) to five (extremely satisfied), the average rating of 3.9 was well above the midpoint on the scale. Thus, some overseas reports provide indications of considerable success when the Method is applied. These include rated outcomes following specific applications as well as practitioner satisfaction with its use.

In Australia, comparatively little evaluation of the Method has taken place. The use of the Method in a secondary school in New South Wales appears to have contributed to a significant reduction in self-reported victimisation in Year 7 and was rated

positively by students (Petersen & Rigby 1999). Reports obtained by Griffiths (2001) in Western Australia from trained school personnel/school psychologists using the Method indicated between 85-100% success rates in upper primary and secondary schools. This suggested that the Method could have a high rate of success in Australia, but a more focused study was clearly required before such a claim could be firmly advanced.

Finally, evaluations of the Method have hitherto simply reported on the perceived 'success' of the process. No studies have examined in detail actual applications of the Method to discover how, in practice, the Method is being applied and in practical terms what issues arise when practitioners in Australia use it.

CHAPTER 3: THE METHODOLOGY OF THE INQUIRY

This inquiry employed a mainly qualitative methodology. It involved a detailed study of applications of the Method of Shared Concern undertaken by schools with actual cases of bullying. Use was made of written reports on cases addressed by the school, and interview data were obtained from those taking part, namely, the practitioner of the Method, the students identified as having some involvement or knowledge of the bullying, and the school principal.

Broadly, the aims were to establish:

- (i) the circumstances in which the method was applied
- (ii) how in detail the method was applied
- (iii) what transpired in the course of the application
- (iv) outcomes from the application.

Steps in the inquiry

Step one: Identifying schools

Step one involved identifying schools willing to take part in the inquiry which met the following criteria.

- A practitioner familiar with the Method of Shared Concern and prepared to apply it in a suitable case was available.
- The case was deemed suitable if it involved bullying of moderate severity, neither very low in severity, as in occasional teasing, or very severe, as in violent assault.
- The use of the Method was supported by the school principal who agreed to be interviewed on how the school was addressing bullying. (This provided a useful context in which to appraise the Method.)
- Commitment was made to ethical conditions related to the conducting of the research. These included:
 - (i) obtaining ethical approval from relevant bodies such as the University of South Australia and the educational jurisdictions in which the schools were situated, including both government and non-government bodies
 - (ii) informed consent from all those participating in the inquiry, including the parents of the students who were interviewed.
- The researchers undertook not to provide any information in their report that could identify those who had taken part or the institutions which had facilitated the research.
- The practitioner undertook to provide a detailed report on what had transpired in the course of applying the Method along lines indicated in a proforma that was provided; and to be interviewed, for which purpose an interview schedule was used (see Appendix 2)
- The practitioner also undertook to identify a colleague at the school prepared to interview the students who had taken part in the process, several weeks after the final meeting with the practitioner (see Appendix 2). This was to ensure

that data collected regarding the effectiveness of the application was obtained by the person who had not applied the Method.

Step 2: Interviewing practitioners

Before undertaking any intervention using the Method, practitioners of the Method were interviewed to ascertain their background and experience relevant to its application. What was required of them was discussed in detail. They were informed that they should first contact the researcher before undertaking the intervention and discuss the suitability of any proposed case.

Step 3: Receiving reports from practitioners

Reports with detailed responses to the questions provided about the case were received from the practitioners. The researcher then visited the school and interviewed the practitioner. Typically this involved 1-1.5 hours.

Step 4: Receiving reports from the staff colleague and interviewing the school principal

Reports from the staff member who interviewed students who had participated in the inquiry were received, and the school principal was interviewed by the researcher.

Practical issues arising in undertaking the project

Considerable interest in the project was evident from the inquiries that were received following dissemination of information to schools briefly describing the project. Dissemination was done through the assistance of the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, Catholic Education (Diocese of Ballarat), and informal contacts made with schools for whom the researchers had worked as consultants or provided workshops on the Method of Shared Concern.

Expressions of interest were obtained from a much larger number of schools than the project required. For example, in South Australia where Professor Rigby carried out the work, some 35 schools indicated their interest in participating. Each was contacted and the nature of the required commitment explained. A similar response was obtained in Western Australia where Ms Coosje Griffiths conducted the study. However, it became evident that although there was considerable interest in the project many of the interested schools were not able to allocate the necessary time or resources. In South Australia, only 6 of the 35 schools were ultimately able to undertake the tasks required of them. To achieve an adequate sample of schools it was necessary to go outside South Australia and Western Australia. Effective collaboration proved possible with schools prepared to undertake the project in Victoria and Tasmania. In the end 17 schools participated in the study.

The reasons given for the non-participation of interested schools were essentially practical. On reflection, many of the schools reported that the demands that would be placed upon the staff and especially on the practitioners were very high, requiring considerable time and effort in providing the detailed reports required of them on the individual meetings with Suspected Bullies and Targets, as well as participating in extensive interviews with the researcher. In addition the project required informed consent from parents or guardians. This requirement generally does not apply to

schools which are using the Method. Some schools claimed that there were other competing projects being undertaken at the time and their involvement in the proposed project was currently impracticable. Finally, there were schools claiming that it had proved impossible to find cases of bullying among their students that were appropriate for the use of the Method. This latter claim was probably a rationalisation on the part of schools that were unprepared to use scarce resources in undertaking and reporting upon the intervention.

A second issue related to the degree of detail provided by the schools. In relation to all of the cases, the practitioners applied the Method conscientiously and detailed as far as possible how the process was applied and with what outcomes. There were nevertheless some minor differences in what was provided, for example, due to absences and non-attendance of some children from meetings with the practitioner and some variations in the way the method was applied. These variations are described in Chapter 5.

Analysis and reporting

For the most part, analyses were qualitative and involved a detailed examination of the content of responses in the course of semi-structured interviews conducted with:

- (i) practitioners of the Method
- (ii) school principals
- (iii) students who had been involved in the process, as Suspected Bullies, Targets or bystanders.

Given the sensitive nature of this inquiry, respondents were assured of confidentiality.

Where appropriate, rating scales were used to assess some aspects of evaluations of the intervention, namely:

- the degree of concern for the Target expressed by the Suspected Bullies in the individual interviews
- the confidence expressed by the practitioner in achieving a cessation of the bullying
- the readiness or otherwise of the practitioner to continue with the method in future
- the degree of satisfaction expressed by the students who had taken part in the process.

Problems and difficulties encountered by the practitioners were identified.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

The following account of cases of bullying and how they were dealt with is based upon several sources:

- (i) the written report supplied by the practitioner
- (ii) the content of the interview conducted with the practitioner after receiving the report
- (iii) the written reports supplied by a colleague of the practitioner who interviewed the Suspected Bullies or bystanders and the Target of the bullying.

Further background information was obtained from the school principal regarding the context in which the intervention took place. Appendix 2 contains the interview schedules employed in this study.

Cases for this study were obtained and described by Professor Ken Rigby of the University of South Australia (Case Studies 1-12) and Ms Coosje Griffiths of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (Case Studies 13-17). To maintain the anonymity of the schools at which the studies were conducted, the identity of the schools and the persons assisting in this inquiry are not provided. However, it is acknowledged that permission to approach the schools was provided by the following state educational jurisdictions: the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, and the Tasmanian Department of Education. Catholic Education South Australia and West Victoria (Diocese of Ballarat) also supported and facilitated the research. Cases were obtained from a wide range of schools, including primary, secondary and special.

Table 1 provides a summary of the cases with respect to demographic factors and the nature of the bullying that occurred.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND FACTORS FOR THE CASES

Case	School	Suspected Bullies/bystanders			Target/s			Nature of the bullying
		Gender and number	Age	Year	Gender	Age	Year	
1	Lower secondary	F (x5)	12	7	M	12	7	Repeated offensive comments made about a boy regarding his parentage
		M (x2)	12	7				
2	Lower secondary	M (x3)	14	9	F	14	9	Sexual harassment aimed at severely embarrassing a girl
3	Upper primary	F (x5)	10-11	5	F	10	5	Verbal ridicule, to some extent provoked by the Target
		M (x1)	11	5				
4	Special/ alternative school	M (x4)	14-18	8-10	M	53	Staff	Rude comments and ridicule of a staff member during a school excursion
		F (x1)	14	10				
5	Lower secondary	F (x5)	13	8	F	13	8	Ridicule directed at a girl who was overweight
6	Lower secondary	M (x3)	13	8	F	13	8	Some physical and verbal harassment, to some extent provoked by the Target's racial comments
7	Lower secondary	F (x4)	14	9	F (x2)	14	9	Name-calling, put-downs and threats directed at two other female students in particular
8	Lower secondary	M (x4)	14	8	M	15	9	Verbal ridicule and some low level physical harassment

Case	School	Suspected Bullies/bystanders			Target/s			Nature of the bullying
		Gender and number	Age	Year	Gender	Age	Year	
9	Upper primary	M (x3)	10-12	6/7	M	12	7	Continual teasing to bring about an emotional response
10	Lower secondary	M (x2)	15	9	F	15	9	Constant unpleasant teasing and damage to the Target's property
11	Upper secondary	F (x2)	15 & 16	9&10	F	15	10	Production of content material for a website to abuse the Target
12	Lower primary	M (x2)	8	3	M	8	3	Constant ridicule relating to the Target's height
13	Lower secondary	F (x4)	15	19	F (x2)	15	9	Verbal bullying and threats of violence
14	Upper secondary	M (one only)	14	9	F	18	12	Ridicule and racist comments, and attacks on the Target's property
15	Upper secondary	F (x2) By (x2)	15	10	F	15	10	Frequent verbal teasing and mean tricks
16	Special/ alternative	M (x4)	13	8	M	13	8	Name-calling, put-downs and physical threats
17	Upper primary	F (x6)	12-13	7	F	12	7	Serious bullying, punching, threatening, name-calling, things thrown and exclusion

The practitioners

The practitioners consisted of teachers, counsellors or psychologists who had agreed to participate in the project by applying the Method of Shared Concern in an appropriate case of bullying, and report on its application. As explained in the Methodology (Chapter 3), they also undertook to be interviewed by the researcher at the conclusion of the intervention, and to arrange for a colleague at the school to conduct a post-intervention interview with each of the students who had taken part in the process.

In total, 18 practitioners were involved in the cases. (In one case two practitioners worked together.) All the practitioners had become familiar with the Method of Shared Concern and were experienced in working with student behaviour problems. However, there were considerable differences in training and experience in using the Method. These differences ranged from having attended training workshops with Professor Pikas (the originator of the Method) or with trainers trained by him and subsequently practising the Method for several years as a school counsellor, to having viewed a training video and read accounts of the Method prior to implementing the procedure for the first time. Of the 18 practitioners, seven were experienced users of the Method. The other 11 had used approaches that contained some elements of the Method of Shared Concern, for example, in being non-punitive and solution-focused in their approach, but had not used a full application of the Method previously.

Abbreviations used in the reports

Those taking part in the interviews conducted by the practitioner and staff member are described herein as SB1, SB2 etc to denote respectively the first Suspected Bully interviewed, the second and so on. The practitioner is referred to as P. The target of the bullying is referred to as T. Bystanders are abbreviated to By1, By2 and so on.

Case reports

Details of the cases as obtained from practitioners are given below. These are based in part on written reports provided by the practitioners, and from interviews conducted with each of them on conclusion of the intervention (see Appendix 2a for the schedule used as a guide in conducting the interview.) Additional information was obtained from the practitioner's colleague who conducted the post-intervention interviews with the SBs and the Target (see Appendix 2b.) Finally, the school principal or delegated person was interviewed (see Appendix 2c.)

As agreed, information regarding the identity of the school and its location is not provided so that confidentiality is preserved. In some cases it was possible to obtain more detail about the interventions than others. Where possible, estimates of the degree of concern showed by the SBs or bystanders for the Target were obtained. These were scored on a five-point scale, with 1 indicating 'no concern' and 5 'great concern'. At the end of each case, a commentary provided by the researcher draws attention to key features and issues raised by the intervention. The cases, obtained during 2008, are arranged in chronological order.

Case Study 1: Girls harassing an orphaned boy in a secondary school

It was reported to the practitioner by another teacher that a boy had been repeatedly harassed by a group of girls at a school camp. The boy (aged 14 years) had been adopted by an Australian family from an orphanage in Romania. Offensive comments were repeatedly made by the girls relating to the boy's biological parenting. Given that there was clearly a group

involvement and the bullying was of moderate severity, Shared Concern was the selected intervention method.

The practitioner was an experienced male teacher, head of Middle School and in his fourth year at the school. He was completing a Masters in Educational Leadership. P had attended a workshop on the Method of Shared Concern, and had viewed a training video on the Method. Previously he had used elements of the Method in counselling students but not the entire process.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

On the basis of reports from a teacher, five girls and two boys were identified as Suspected Bullies or bystanders. All the students were in Year 7, aged 12 years and had an Anglo-Australian background. The one believed to have the most power in the group was interviewed first. Each of the interviews took place in the practitioner's office where no interruptions could occur.

SB1 (female) at first seemed intimidated by the process and suspicious of the interview. However, she was entirely willing to cooperate and assist with providing information and offer to contribute to a solution. She willingly acknowledged that the subject of the taunts was having a slightly difficult time and had lost some of his 'spark'. SB1 showed some concern for the situation but appeared to be more interested in a resolution for her own welfare than the subject's. She readily volunteered the names of other students who may have been implicated in making upsetting statements. SB1 suggested that she could make some positive comments towards this student to help him feel more comfortable in the class. P agreed with SB1 that he would meet with her in the week following the coming Easter break. She was happy to meet with P but this may have been partly because she was too intimidated to object. The interview progressed well. P thought that that the short duration was a positive aspect. SB1 became less alarmed as the interview progressed and as P continually reiterated that she was not in trouble. P also stated explicitly that he was not intending to allocate any punishment for this, but was simply trying to work towards a resolution with her and others' help. SB1 agreed that she would say some positive things to T to help him feel that he was included in the group. It was agreed that they would meet to see how things were going after Easter.

SB2 (female) seemed less intimidated by the process than SB1 and was willing to engage in the discussion. She appeared a little anxious, but more guarded, and suspicious of the process. P constantly reiterated that this was not about blame or punishment but just about trying to make everyone feel safe and included. SB2 was very reluctant to acknowledge any concern with the victim or that there was any problem at all. She was also very keen to blame a group of boys for their part in the situation and would not acknowledge any responsibility for it herself. P found it very challenging because other students had spoken very openly about the situation and clearly implicated her and others and she was unwilling to accept any responsibility. It took a significant effort of restraint on the part of P not to move into the area of accusation. SB2 showed very little concern for the situation and was therefore a little tentative in suggesting ways that she could improve it. One suggestion she did make was that she could try to divert any negative conversations or comments that were directed towards T. SB1 seemed quite confident and comfortable manipulating situations in this way.

P thought the interview went well but was disappointed with the extent to which it was possible to pinpoint SB2's role in it. Her overall reluctance to admit any responsibility or any concern suggested to P that she was the ringleader.

SB3 (female) was very open in her willingness to identify situations that may have caused T to be upset. She readily acknowledged that he was not as happy as he had been at the start of the year. She identified two males who had been involved in making additional comments to T on the bus. SB3 willingly showed concern for the situation and understood that T was less happy. She readily suggested she could check in daily with T and just ask how he was going. P explained that this need only be a very brief conversation but that this would make a significant difference to how he was going. P arranged for a future meeting in the week after Easter. P's impression was that this was a very open and honest interview and that SB3 not only identified the situation but was willing to help resolve it.

SB4 (female) was open, friendly and willing to engage in the process. It took a little discussion for SB4 to acknowledge that T was having a hard time. However, she then readily identified things that could be contributing to him encountering some difficulties. Initially, SB4 suggested that she could intervene and stop the other students making negative comments to T. P indicated that he felt this might be the role of the teacher and that she shouldn't put herself out to this extent. She then suggested that she would try to include T more in group activities. P said again that she shouldn't put herself out to any extent but agreed that this would be an excellent way of helping him to feel better about his role in the group. They agreed that they would meet again following Easter to see how things were progressing. P thought that SB4 may be verging on a bystander rather than being a Suspected Bully, resulting in her conduct in the interview being very open and helpful.

SB5 (female) appeared to be completely open and friendly in engaging in the process. She was aware, to some limited extent, that T may have been a little unhappy. She was also aware of him becoming frustrated more frequently. In discussion, she was able to show absolute concern for the situation as she had an autistic brother and was aware of him being teased at times. She suggested that she was happy to intervene and that if she saw students teasing T she would ask them not to. P suggested that it was a significant imposition for her to do this but she said that she was happy to do it because of the situation with her brother. P indicated that he would meet with her briefly after the Easter break to ask how that was going. The interview with SB5 was very clear and open and easy for P to conduct.

SB6 (male) was a little apprehensive; mostly the interview found him in a guarded state and unwilling to share information. He acknowledged that T had become frustrated and lost his temper but was unwilling or unable to identify anything that could have contributed to this. He laid the blame fairly and squarely with T for being so frustrated. He had no recollection of any events that he or others had been involved in that could have contributed to this. It made the interview somewhat difficult because he refused or could not identify a situation of concern. P's approach was slightly different with him. P asked him if he could watch out for any situations that may be causing T to become frustrated. He agreed that this was a reasonable thing to request and that he would watch out for this. P explained that he would meet with him after the Easter break to check with him to see how he was progressing with this and to see if he had identified any situations.

SB7 (male) openly conceded that T didn't seem quite as happy as he had been. He readily identified that this was caused by a number of girls asking inappropriate questions of T, including questions about which girls he liked. The conversation was conducted openly and without suspicion. SB7 did appear to show some concern for T. He did not, however, concede that he was in anyway involved in causing the problem. SB7 agreed that he would help by telling a teacher if he saw any instances of this occurring. Initially he said he would intervene but when P suggested that this might cause him a bit of embarrassment he agreed

and said that he would just prefer to tell a teacher. He agreed that he would report to a teacher if any teasing occurred that he observed. P indicated that he would follow-up with him after the Easter break and thanked him for his willingness to help.

In summary, on the whole the interviews had gone well, with most of the interviewees showing some concern, although the level varied between individuals from 1 to 5. Suggestions from the interviewees on how T could be helped included: I will say positive things about T to help him feel part of the group; I will check with T and ask how he is going; I will include T more in group activities; I will intervene if aware of T being teased; and I will tell a teacher if I see instances of T being asked inappropriate questions. It was felt that most of them had taken personal responsibility for helping to improve the situation.

The Target

This interview took place, as with others, in P's office several days later and lasted about 12 minutes. The Target was a boy aged 14 in Year 7, from Romania. He had been diagnosed as having a learning difficulty in the area of literacy. He was nevertheless a keen student who very much wanted to be involved in lessons.

He was open and presented as not greatly concerned about the harassment he had received, and said that he had been receiving good help from the staff at the camp where the problem was identified. He acknowledged the difficulties he had had at the camp from girls asking inappropriate questions about his family. (He denied that any boys had been involved.) He felt that the class should understand the importance of accepting people for who they are and could be spoken to about this. (P pointed out that this might result in some students feeling that they were being implicated wrongly and that those responsible for the harassment were perhaps the ones who needed to be spoken with.) T was not aware of any way he could have provoked the harassment. On the basis of what other students had told him, P thought that T's behaviour in class – seeking to answer the majority of questions and an unwillingness to listen to others and acknowledge their input – could have been frustrating for some students. T was very receptive to being involved in the Shared Concern process when it was explained to him.

Further individual meetings: Meetings were held with individuals after the Easter break. Three of them had forgotten their commitment to help, but renewed their promises. However, according to each of the SBs the situation had improved. T confirmed that the bullying had stopped.

Group meetings

Meetings with the Suspected Bullies

Given the relatively large number of group members it was decided to hold separate meetings – first with the five girls, then with the two boys. The meeting with the girls was brief (5 minutes). The girls were thanked for their cooperation and a further meeting was suggested (by P) to include T. A further brief meeting (5 minutes) was then held with the two boys. They were also thanked for what each had done to help. In both groups an agreement was reached to invite T to join them in a further meeting. In this application of the Method no preparations were made about what would be said at this next meeting.

Summit meeting (SBs plus the Target)

Prior to holding this meeting P had met with T who was agreeable to taking part. The meetings were conducted separately with the male and female SBs. In each case there was a

recognition that thanks to their cooperation the bullying had stopped. P felt confident that the problem had been resolved.

Post-intervention interviews

These were conducted 3 weeks later, as arranged, by a colleague of the practitioner.

Interviews with the Suspected Bullies

Interviews were conducted individually with SB1, SB3, SB4, SB5, SB6 and SB7 (SB2 was absent and unavailable for an interview). All of the respondents indicated that the meetings had helped to improve the situation for T and that it was a good idea to use this process with other young people to solve similar problems. All of them reported feeling positive about the meetings, except one (SB7) who said 'I didn't mind that much'. Others were more enthusiastic, for example: 'I felt that we dealt with the situation well' (SB4) and 'Looking back, I have learnt that we have to try to solve our problems' (SB3). They all indicated that there had been positive changes: 'Well, it has made us talk about the situation and made us realise what we had done (SB3), 'No-one has teased T which has made it better for him' (SB7) and 'I think because of these meetings it has improved the friendships T has made' (SB4).

Interview with the Target

When asked to say how he felt about having taken part T said: 'It made it better to cope with this type of thing.' The situation had improved: 'I was not bothered and their teasing stopped. Students are more accepting of me. I now enjoy school more.' T thought it was a good idea to use the process with young people with similar problems. He added: 'I think it is a great idea. We were able to think about what had been said to us.'

Interview with the school principal

The principal recognised the issue of bullying as an important one to which more attention must be drawn and more effective ways of dealing with the matter developed and utilised. Work to counter bullying had already been given a high priority through the development of a Peer Relations Policy which has been explained through meetings with students and parents. Considerable emphasis had been placed on surveillance at the school, for instance, by making use of cameras stationed strategically at locker areas, outside toilets and in the underpass linking parts of the campus. Surveys of bullying behaviour have been employed in Years 7 and 8, supplemented by small group interviews. Staff have taken part in workshops focusing on problems of peer relations. Lunchtime clubs have been formed to assist in this regard.

A range of methods have been used in dealing with cases of bullying. These include the use of disciplinary action, helping some children to be more assertive, and mediation in suitable cases. Restorative practices have been used and some outside training made available to assist. Some students are trained to provide peer support. The Method of Shared Concern was seen as a useful technique for some cases and its use is strongly supported. It was observed that it depended for success on the capacity of students to experience empathy for others, which may occur at a later stage of development. Two concerns were expressed about the Method: whether sufficient time can be made available for its application; and whether parents can understand and accept the rationale for its use.

Commentary on the case

P believed that the Method of Shared Concern had proved to be a very effective tool for guiding students towards a resolution of issues of bullying. Importantly, he saw it as

providing an approach to achieve long-term restoration of respectful relationships within a group where normal social conduct had broken down. He was keen to use the Method again in similar circumstances. However, he recognised a possibility of conflict with parents who feel that unless punishment is applied to the perpetrator the school is seen as 'doing nothing'. Finally, he observed that although the resolution of the case could be attributed to the rationale underlying the Method, he could not dismiss the possibility that the SBs were reacting, in part, pragmatically to the authoritative direction of the practitioner.

In this application of the Method, emphasis was placed largely on the individual interviews with participants. Group meetings were held primarily to thank participants collectively, rather than to explore actions they were prepared to take to improve relations with T. Given the readiness of the SBs (with one exception) to act helpfully and the virtual absence of provocation by T, it was possible to make good progress in the resolution of the case. Post-intervention interviews indicated that the intervention had been successful. Nevertheless it would have been useful to have prepared the group of SBs for the meeting with T. This could have led to a better understanding of the dynamics and given group an opportunity to share and explore their feelings towards T.

The failure due to absences to speak with SB2 at the post-intervention interview stage was unfortunate as she had been identified as the least cooperative of the SBs. As P has pointed out, her reluctance to express concern for T and her readiness to identify others (apparently misleadingly) as participants in the bullying suggested that she was in fact the ringleader. Although there was no evidence that any of the SBs had continued the bullying, it would have been of much interest to discover how SB2 had reflected on the experience.

Of further interest was the specific role adopted by the practitioner. He was particularly keen to emphasise that no punishment was being considered and this appeared to have led to the SBs being much more ready to cooperate. However, the practitioner recognised that some of the interviewees may have acted constructively in compliance to the authority of the staff member who had a senior position in the school. Especially noteworthy in this application was the practitioner's readiness to recognise the risk or difficulty the SBs might encounter in acting in too supportive a manner and to ask them to think carefully about any commitment. This was helpful in getting the SBs to accept personal responsibility for their actions. All in all, despite some omissions in the application of the Method, the approach was notably successful.

Case Study 2: Boys sexually harassing a girl in a secondary school

This case came to the attention of the Year 9 Coordinator following a phone call from a mother of a Year 9 girl. The harassment by three boys had taken place in a classroom. As a consequence, the girl became distressed and stayed away from school. In accordance with school procedures (not a requirement of the Method of Shared Concern), the Target was asked to write a report of the incident. This is given below with the terms SB1, SB2 and SB3 substituted for actual names.

It all started on Wednesday when SB2 and SB1 were sitting near me (in class). They pulled out some of SB1's hair and blew it onto my desk. I thought they had cut off some of my hair but then they said they didn't so I let it go.

Then SB1 started banging the table with something and I wanted to know what it was. Instead he kind of hid 'it' under the table. I leant back a little to see what it was and it was a piece of metal. And when he was banging the table it sounded heavy. However, after I looked, SB2 said; 'Stop looking at SB1's penis. Now both knew very well I

was not looking there. They now keep making remarks about it and I have told them to stop but they haven't. I have tried ignoring them, but that hasn't worked. I asked the teacher if she could move SB1 away but she said no, but that she will talk to him, but she hasn't. And now SB3 keeps saying rude remarks. Many people have seen what is going on and just laughed. I must admit it was funny at first but now it is just plain annoying. SB1 needs to be moved away from me because I can't concentrate on my work when he is saying stuff like that.

The case was referred to the school counsellor who is an experienced practitioner of the Method. She is a trained teacher who had been employed as a counsellor for the last three years with over 50 cases. P had attended workshops given by the originator of the method, Anatol Pikas, on two occasions. She had also assisted in making the video to illustrate the method, and had provided workshops herself. P chose this approach because the case was not of low severity, involved a group of students and was obviously well within her area of expertise. It is worth noting that a common response to sexual harassment is to treat it as a crime that requires a punitive response. Based on reports from the student, three boys (each 14 years old from Year 9) were identified as Suspected Bullies and interviewed individually in P's office where there were no interruptions. As recommended in using the Method, notes were not taken.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

SB1 was identified as a ringleader. He appeared friendly, open and willing to engage in a 25-minute interview. He had no record of previous misbehaviour. SB1 expressed surprise on learning that the incident had led to T staying away from school. Having heard the account given by P, SB1 showed quite a lot of concern (rated 4 on a 5-point scale). Nothing was said about any possible provocation from T. In the course of discussion, he disclosed that he had an older brother who sometimes teased him and he did not feel that it was at all funny. Over time SB1 became more empathic, offering to stop harassing T and to encourage the others to stop as well. It was agreed to meet again. P felt that SB1 was prepared to take personal responsibility to help improve the situation and was optimistic about the outcome.

SB2, during a 15-minute interview, was by contrast suspicious, guarded and hesitant, and asserted that 'other boys were doing it'. He felt it was a pretty harmless joke. They were just 'mucking around'. His concern over T's plight was low (rated as 2), despite which he disclosed that he liked her and she had helped him with stuff. Despite earlier denials of personal responsibility, he offered to stop making the comment that T was 'looking at SB's willy'. The commitment to help appeared weak, as he did not see much wrong with what had been happening. In the course of the interview he had become somewhat more cooperative. However, P was not convinced that he had accepted any real personal responsibility to improve matters.

SB3, over a 10-minute interview, was friendly, easy to talk to and eager to please. He immediately understood the situation and appreciated that T had been distressed about it. He showed a great deal of concern over the situation (rated 5) and readily offered to stop.

In general, the meetings had been successful in motivating the boys to change their behaviour. They had been assured that no punishment was being considered. Two of the three showed a good deal of concern; the third (SB2) minimal concern, though he had agreed to behave differently. All had agreed to a further meeting. No apology was suggested and none was requested.

The Target

During a 25-minute interview, T was seen by P as 'likeable, friendly'. She was informed that the three boys had already been interviewed and that they had promised to help improve things. She was worried about them getting into trouble and was assured that they would not if they worked with P. (P could not guarantee that if the bullying continued that it would not become a disciplinary matter.)

T explained how upset she had been and had not wanted to come to school. In the past she had got on 'OK' with the boys, but now felt that she did not want to have anything to do with them. She explained that she had laughed (out of embarrassment) at the time and felt that this may have sent the wrong message.

It was put to her that she could meet with the boys at a later stage (when the teasing had stopped). She seemed anxious about doing so – and was told that it was up to her.

Further individual meetings: SB1 and SB3 were chatted with individually and briefly while they were in class and each indicated that things were going well. SB2 was met in transit between classes and he shared a concern that T was not talking to him. P suggested that she may need more space and time to get over the harassment. He understood and agreed to 'back off'. The impression from the meetings was that T was seen as being more at ease.

A further meeting with T confirmed that things were going much better. The annoying behaviours had stopped and she was feeling all right about coming to school. However she was **not** happy about coming to a joint group meeting at this stage. It seemed risky, especially in view of the fact that she would soon be attending a school camp with them. She was concerned that the meeting could potentially lead to a re-igniting of the problem. It had stopped and she didn't want to risk the chance of recurrence. P explained that she could be asked again later, but it was emphasised that she would not be pressured to come to any group meeting. The possibility of her being accompanied by a friend was raised but she did not support the idea.

Group interviews

There were strong indications that progress had been made – through individual interviews with SBs and T, and observations made by the Year 9 Coordinator. No further meeting took place. It appeared to P that the problem had been solved.

Post-intervention interviews

These were conducted by a colleague of P several weeks later.

Interviews with the Suspected Bullies

SB1 reported that he felt fine about having participated, and the situation had improved for T who was not being called names any more. He believed the process would be useful for working with students with similar problems. The situation with T was now normal – nothing bad was happening. SB2 (surprisingly) said the meeting with P had been 'comfortable'. He noted that it was not like anybody was in trouble or picked on. P was described as 'nice and calm in explaining why I was there'. He saw the situation as improved – with no-one 'saying anything bad to her any more' and no harassment. He added that the situation was better now. 'She speaks to us and we speak to her.' SB3 said that looking back he 'felt bad about the bullying'. He added that 'P was nice and helped us out.' Things had improved and they were all friends now and talked together. The method was recommended for solving other similar cases.

Interview with the Target

T said it ‘feels like it helped’. She felt comfortable during the interview and found P ‘understanding’. The situation had improved. ‘They stopped talking nasty and started talking nice – treating me like a friend.’ T felt that it would be a good idea to use the process with other young people to solve similar problems.

Interview with the school principal

The school principal indicated that the main challenge has been to reduce the prevalence of bullying in the school. Concern was focused especially on the impact of bullying on the victim; in particular on feelings of being safe, having good self-esteem and dignity. There was concern also about those who learn to succeed through bullying others. Considerable work was being done at this school in accordance with the school’s anti-bullying policy. Systematic surveillance of student behaviour was maintained through yard duty and ‘havens’, and clubs had been set up to increase a sense of safety and reduce boredom that could result in bullying. Work was being done with groups of students in class and at ‘retreats’ with the counsellor to promote more positive peer relations, for instance, through systematically encouraging positive bystander behaviour. Meetings had been held with parents to address cyber bullying. In some cases of bullying, disciplinary actions were taken, but to a large degree the Method of Shared Concern, as employed by the student counsellor, was seen as the most appropriate response to cases of bullying, especially because it respects and upholds the dignity of all involved and is consistent with the philosophy of the school.

Commentary on the case

This application involved a truncated version of the Method, that is, without the group meetings. The final or summit meeting was prevented from occurring by the understandable reluctance of T to participate in what she thought would be an embarrassing situation that could lead to the problem getting worse. Although it is certainly desirable to hold such a meeting, P rightly felt that T should not be pressured to join. As it turned out, the post-intervention interviews strongly suggested that the problem had been solved with the active cooperation of each of the students. Of particular interest was the role played by SB2, who was the least happy at being involved in the first stage of the procedure – and was later found to be the one most attached to the girl. Most importantly, the targeted person felt safer and the perpetrators of the harassment had become aware of the hurt their behaviour had caused and had desisted.

This case raises the question of whether all stages of the Method should always be implemented. Clearly there are circumstances in which a meeting with the SBs and T might be impracticable, as when T is unwilling to come to such a meeting and cannot (and should not) be persuaded to do so. Given that there was good evidence that the problem had been resolved – from the individual participants in the process and the Year 9 Coordinator – the truncating of the process might be justified, although there is always a risk that some underlying issue fuelling the bullying could be addressed in a group meeting, and a ‘group acknowledgement’ that the problem had been solved would have been reassuring.

Case Study 3: Girls bullying a ‘provocative’ girl in a primary school

This case centred around a 10-year old girl who was being bullied by some students (boys and girls) in the classroom and beyond. It came to the attention of the practitioner after T fled in tears from her classroom, where she was being harassed, to the sick room and refused to return to her class. The practitioner met with her in the sick room and discovered that she was upset by how some other students had been treating her during a class that was being taken

by a relief teacher. It became clear that the bullying – which included verbal abuse and throwing things at T – had been going on for some time. The nature of the bullying could be described as moderately severe with group involvement.

The practitioner was a deputy principal and experienced teacher who had been employed in schools for the past 24 years (eight years at the present school). P is a qualified counsellor with a Graduate Diploma and Masters degree in Counselling. She had attended workshops on the Method of Shared Concern and viewed the training video. P had used the Method or elements of it on numerous occasions, and had instructed other teachers in its use.

Contrary to the requirements of the Method, prior to the individual interviews the Suspected Bullies and bystanders were seen in a group consisting of four ‘bullies’ nominated by T and two bystanders. At first P thought that the matter could be addressed by such a procedure. At this meeting the students behaved in an unruly manner, were argumentative and not ready to take the matter seriously. Having failed to make headway using an initial group interview, P resorted to a true application of Method.

Individual interviews

These took place in P’s office and lasted between 3 and 10 minutes. Contrary to the normal procedure, notes were taken, but with a view to confirming that an accurate record was made of what was said. No blaming occurred in any of the interviews. The interviewees ranged in age from 10-11 years, all were in Year 5, and all were Australian. Five were girls; one a boy. In this report P provided generalisations only regarding the interviews with the students.

The Suspected Bullies and bystanders

The Suspected Bullies and bystanders were interviewed individually in the P’s office, a quiet room without interruptions. Reactions varied from being confident, open and ready to share, to being nervous, apprehensive, suspicious and defensive. In the course of the interviews, interviewees became more relaxed. All but one (a bystander) acknowledged that the T’s situation was of some concern. The perceived degree of concern differed widely. On a 5-point scale one student rated her concern as 4, two as 3, two as 2, and one as 1. (Unfortunately, P did not provide detailed information about individual SBs and bystanders.)

In the course of the interviews it became evident that although some of the interviewees felt some concern for T, all of them believed that she had behaved provocatively towards them by being verbally abusive, angry and aggressively calling people names without reason. They felt too that the T had tried to manipulate the situation when they had a new (relief) teacher by deliberately misleading her.

Despite their misgivings, the students were ready to explain how they would try to improve the situation. These statements were made:

- I will stop calling her names
- I will say sorry
- I will include her in our play
- I will keep away from her
- I will stop teasing.

P felt that these promises were not expressed with much conviction and that at least two of them had not taken personal responsibility for their proposed actions. It seemed possible that some of the responses may not have been sincere – and were influenced by their perception

of being in some sort of investigation. This was despite assurances that no punishment was being considered.

The Target

Lasting 10 minutes, this interview took place in P's office several days later. T identified as Aboriginal. (She did not look Aboriginal and there was no indication that she had been subjected to any racial bullying.). There was evidence that she had in the past attacked others. She defended her behaviour of calling others names during the lesson with the relief teacher, on the grounds that 'they get stupid when there is a relief teacher'. In the interview she appeared angry but glad that P was there to help her. (At a later meeting with T it appeared that the situation was improving. T was observed playing with some younger children and it was learned that she had made a new friend.)

Further meetings with individual SBs to ascertain progress suggested to P that progress had been made towards resolving the problem.

Group meetings

P now felt that the students had really thought about T's plight and were open to thinking about what could be done to help.

Meetings with the Suspected Bullies and bystanders

There were in fact two meetings. The first was held in a rowdy atmosphere in which students expressed their annoyance at T and were not ready to discuss the matter constructively. It was decided that another meeting would be held. The second meeting was more successful. P indicated that they would be meeting with T and ascertained that they were ready to help solve the problem – though there were clearly some reservations. Further preparation for this final meeting with these students was not undertaken.

Summit meeting

Prior to this meeting, preparation was undertaken with T who was 'coached' to refrain from further antagonising the group by blaming them. In addition, T was permitted to bring a friend along. The friend – from the same class – remained silent during the meeting, but nevertheless provided some psychological support. At the meeting there was still some hostility towards T. However, progress was made, partly by T being conciliatory. She produced a 'conditional' apology, along the lines of: 'If you think so, then I'm sorry.' On the whole, the students felt 'ready to move on'. But P was not entirely convinced that all of them had accepted individual responsibility. However, after this meeting P was 'confident' it would not continue. No steps were taken to get the students to sign a contract relating to how they were prepared to treat each other in future.

Post-intervention interviews

The Target and Suspected Bullies and bystanders

At the post-intervention interview, conducted several weeks later, T indicated that she had felt 'nervous' but 'good' in taking part in the interviews. She thought that the meetings were a good idea but they had not really improved her situation. She mentioned others who were 'making faces' at her and 'pretending to shoot me in the head with a fake gun'. She also said she had been teased by several others asking whether she loved a particular boy. Although the teasing appeared mild, she continued to be annoyed by it.

Among the Suspected Bullies, three of the four were positive about having taken part in the process. One bystander was positive, the other uncertain. None thought that the situation had

got worse, but for four of them there was 'no change'. Two indicated that they personally had established better relations with T. However, three thought she was still engaging in teasing others in the class, and some resentment was still evident. According to one of the students: 'It's like she wants to be harassed!' It seems probable that T was in fact a provocative victim and that further work was needed with her.

The school principal

The principal recognised the problem of school bullying as an important one. She noted that parents often get angry about how the problem is handled. A great deal of work has been done in the school to counter bullying, including:

- (i) the development of an anti-bullying policy and associated grievance procedures
- (ii) work in classrooms to promote positive values and improve social skills
- (iii) a 'chill-out' room provided for children at break times
- (iv) the use of restorative justice procedures.

The philosophy underlying Shared Concern was seen in many ways as similar to that underlying restorative justice. One of the difficulties in applying these and other measures was seen as due to the increasing demands being made on teachers, resulting at times in considerable fatigue. The general impression gained was that the school was having difficulty finding adequate resources to deal effectively with the problem.

Commentary on the case

This turned out to be a difficult case and the outcome was not very satisfactory. There were several reasons for the difficulties experienced by P. Firstly, the initial response was to meet the students in a group rather than individually. Subsequently P acknowledged this to be a mistake (she had believed that working with a group might have saved time!) but some of the damage had already been done. The SBs began to close ranks, and were motivated to not express serious concern for T. Subsequently P had to contend with some unruly behaviour that was difficult to control. Secondly, the case in itself was a difficult one, involving a 'provocative victim' whose somewhat offensive behaviour seemed to the SBs to justify their aggressive behaviour. Finally, the group involved in the bullying was relatively large and this exacerbated the problem.

Under the circumstances – and having made the initial mistake of dealing with a group of students together and not individually – P tried hard, and with some success, to improve the situation. Some progress was made with individuals and positive steps were taken by some group members to improve the situation for T. In part, this was made possible by P's patience and recognition of the reality of situations which developed. It was recognised that under some conditions it is unreasonable to persist with a meeting that appears counterproductive and better to try again later. Also it was evident that little progress could be made unless T was prepared to accept some responsibility for the problem, and allow herself to be 'coached' on how to respond so that the situation could be improved for her. P also recognised that T being outnumbered six to one by the others could be daunting for her and that it was useful in this case to have a supporter present, albeit a silent one.

In general, this case illustrates the importance of beginning with individual rather than group meetings, and the P in adjusting to situations as they arise. Further, this case appears to have been one in which greater efforts could have been made to prepare the SBs – not just the T – for the final meeting. The use of a contract could have been helpful in promoting a greater sense of responsibility among the 'bullies'. In conclusion, it is worth noting that the practitioner was relatively new to the Method and reported afterwards that she had learned a

good deal about how it could be applied more successfully. She felt that she would certainly use it again with similar problems.

Case Study 4: Students bullying a staff member in a special school

This case concerns the harassment of a staff member by a group of boys at a special school catering for students whose behaviour makes it difficult for them to be accommodated in mainstream schools. The Target, a 53-year-old male (designated as a Special Services Officer), had been held to ridicule and continually sworn at during a sports excursion for which he had supervisory responsibility. As a result he was feeling upset and in need of help.

The situation came to P's attention through T reporting it to him, and also from reports from staff members who had witnessed it. A group of students was involved and T was clearly distressed by what had happened. This justified the use of the Method of Shared Concern.

The practitioner was male, a qualified teacher who had worked at the centre for 10 years. He had attended courses on counselling and was familiar with the Method of Shared Concern through viewing the training video and reading about it. He had demonstrated a natural aptitude for counselling and was entrusted with such work with students and staff.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

The leader of the group was readily identified by T, and was interviewed first. He was aged 15, of a German background, with a large build and an Asperger disorder. The others were of an Australian background, their ages ranging from 14-18 years. Altogether, there four males and one female involved in the first series of interviews.

The interviews took place in an office where there was no disturbance. Each lasted about 10 minutes. No notes were taken.

SB1 was the presumed ringleader. He had in the past behaved aggressively and abused others. This tended to occur when he felt threatened, in which state he sought to bully others. He liked to dominate situations and could be manipulative despite limited cognitive and social skills. Although SB1 was influential in some situations, others tended to back away especially when he became violent. At the meeting, SB1 was open and frank, acknowledged that T had had a bad time, and described just how he had been treated. He further listed ways he could have behaved better. He saw the incident as fun with no harm intended. There was a suggestion that T had in some unspecified way been provocative in the way he behaved. The degree of concern for T appeared to be low (rated 2). SB1 made suggestions about how the situation could be improved by his making an apology to T. (P felt that this was not necessarily genuine). In some ways, SB1 appears to have been insecure in his relations with the group. P thought it was important to point out that no-one was going to be punished.

SB2, SB3, SB4 and **SB5** were also interviewed individually and followed a similar pattern – they each recognised that T had had a hard time. They were, however, somewhat cagey in how they responded. An important consideration for all of them (according to P) was the possibility that if they were not cooperative they could lose the opportunity to go on future excursions. Hence they were motivated to provide factual accounts of what had happened and to suggest ways in which the situation could be improved. They promised they would not be 'nasty' and would henceforth behave in a polite manner.

P felt that some progress had been made, especially in getting the respondents to recognise the distress felt by T and to show a readiness to consider ways in which the situation could be improved. Although some empathy for T may have been elicited, the self-interest of members – not to lose privileges – seemed to be a more significant motive.

The Target

A short meeting of approximately 5 minutes was held with T. No notes were taken. Although T had at times encountered some harassment from students, the degree of the offensive behaviour was new and distressing. He had been called names, sworn at and experienced some threats. Another teacher who had witnessed events was more concerned about the incident than T. In the interview T appeared very open and trusting, and grateful for the proffered help. He disclosed that he may have provoked some of the bullying by being very angry. He did not necessarily want the bullies punished. T was happy for P to handle the matter using the Method of Shared Concern.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

Having met with each of the ‘bullies’ again individually and ascertained that the students had, for the most part, actually acted in a helpful way, P convened a group meeting. At this meeting he reiterated his concern about how T felt about the events and invited students to list appropriate behaviours that could help the situation. This task was taken seriously and positive suggestions were made.

Summit meeting

Prior to this meeting, P met briefly with T who confirmed that the situation had improved and was ready to meet with the SBs. At the summit meeting the atmosphere was relaxed. Individuals in the group acted constructively and reported that the situation had generally improved. The only reservation expressed (by a girl) was that some students were still ‘swearing around’ T. It was agreed that this should stop. There was some distancing from the ringleader. Since verbal agreements had been made, it was considered unnecessary to draw up a binding contract. It was confidently felt that the students would not re-offend, with the possible exception of the ringleader who was inclined to behave in an angry bullying manner when frustrated. His cognitive limitations seem to prevent him from maintaining a consistent mode of behaviour.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

The SBs each indicated feeling positive about having taken part in the process, and believed that the meetings had improved the situation for T. T felt that things had improved, the bullying had ceased and he was glad to have taken part. Notably, the ringleader was also positive about taking part and expressed the view that he had been treated better than was the case on earlier occasions.

The school principal

At this school, the problem was generally to stop the more able students from bullying the less able, and to gain the cooperation of students in addressing the issue. A high proportion of bullying at the school was physical. A school policy had been developed based on the *National Safe Schools Framework* (Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2003). Surveillance was seen as very important and two staff are always on duty at the same time. Lunchtime clubs involving access to computers and pool have been provided. A variety of

methods have been used to address cases of bullying, including disciplinary action, mediation, and promoting appropriate assertiveness and restorative practices, though the latter was seen as difficult to use among the more disabled. Because students come from widely dispersed areas parent meetings have not been organised. The Shared Concern approach – and the No Blame Method – were seen as desirable ways of addressing the problem of school bullying.

Commentary on the case

P believed that the Method of Shared Concern was a useful approach and would be used to address further cases at the Centre. He thought that the strength of the Method lay in effectively handling a potentially serious and threatening situation without establishing guilt or imposing consequences which could lead to resentment and further bullying. He saw it as enabling the ‘bullies’ to work out for themselves the steps needed to rectify the situation. P was very confident that, apart from SB1, the students would not bully T again. He was concerned, however, that when placed in a stressful situation, SB1 might revert to his bullying style of acting. The difference could be that he was very unlikely to be supported by the others. P indicated that he would definitely be using the Method again.

The use of the Method in this case was in some respects unusual in that:

- (i) it was being applied among students at a special school catering for students with cognitive and/or behavioural problems
- (ii) the Target of the bullying was a staff member.

The application of the Method followed the required procedure: individual meetings followed by group meetings, and was successful. This suggests that the Method is robust in being applicable to problems that may not immediately seem amenable. The students involved clearly did not have a high degree of cognitive maturity; in fact, the ringleader suffered from Asperger Syndrome. The Target of the bullying – a staff member – was an authority figure, not a peer. Yet some sympathetic understanding of the situation and empathy for T was elicited, enough to help change the behaviour of the ‘bullies’ and convince an experienced practitioner and T that the problem had been dealt with without the use of punishment. At the same time, this case does highlight the fact that some students may have special difficulties that require special counselling help, more than that provided by the intervention method.

Case Study 5: Girls bullying an overweight girl in a secondary school

The bullying in this case involved constant ridicule and name-calling by a group of girls, one of whom had been the perpetrator for a number of years. The Target, aged 13 years, had been repeatedly teased about being short and overweight and had become distressed. She informed her mother who contacted the school.

The practitioner was a female secondary school teacher. She had 10 years experience as a teacher and was the designated Welfare Coordinator at her present school which she had joined six months earlier. She was well qualified for the role, having a postgraduate certificate in education and a major in psychology. She was experienced in counselling, and had viewed a training video on the Method of Shared Concern and read about it prior to the intervention, her first use of the Method.

The case was referred to her by the Year 8 Coordinator who had received a call from the girl’s mother. P knew the mother and spoke with her informally about the case when they met. P explained the process of the Method of Shared Concern and the mother was happy to have it used to help her daughter.

Individual interviews

Information about the bullying indicated that one person was clearly the ringleader (she had bullied T at primary school). There were four others implicated as members of her friendship group which included T.

The Suspected Bullies

The SBs were interviewed in a room where no interruptions could occur. Notes were not taken. All the SBs were Year 8 girls, aged 13 and Australians. It was intended that the girl who was the most aggressive towards T (described as SB1) was to be seen first, but she was absent on the day the interviews started and was actually seen last.

SB1 had a history of challenging behaviour. It was reported that she had acted aggressively in her home, threatening a parent. In the interview, lasting 15 minutes, she was defensive and not sympathetic towards T. She felt the situation had been misrepresented and was inclined to blame others. She said that she had called T 'fat' but that this was a kind of joke. SB1 relaxed when she understood that she was not 'in trouble'. T was viewed as being in some way provocative – for instance, in the way she looked! Generally, SB1 wanted to be seen as victimised by other members of the group. She was not prepared to make suggestions about how things could be improved (thought nothing could be done), though as time went on she became somewhat more obliging. There were no indications that SB1 felt any sense of responsibility to help in the situation. It was made clear that no punishment was being considered. (Later SB1 came to see P several times saying that **she** was being bullied; other members of the group [she said] were saying nasty things about her and also ignoring her. She could not see how she could have brought about the negative treatment. P felt that the meetings with the other SBs had emboldened them to be critical of her.)

SB2, in a 10-minute interview, was open about the situation and stated that there had been some joking that had gone too far, and that life for T had become 'pretty uncomfortable'. She felt that SB1 had become increasingly abusive to T and that she (SB2) had actually stood up to her in support of T, but this had had no effect on the situation. SB2 indicated that she intended to continue 'standing up' to SB1 and would make a point of telling T some of the things she liked about her. Clearly SB2 was highly concerned about the situation.

SB3, in a 10-minute interview, expressed great concern for T. She acknowledged that she had also been making jokes about T that had made T feel uncomfortable, but like SB2 thought that they had gone too far and was inclined to blame SB1. She stated that she was prepared to help by giving support to T.

SB4, in a 5-minute interview, recognised that T was feeling uncomfortable but was not prepared to do much to help T. She explained that she personally was afraid of SB1 who had bullied and upset her. SB4 felt that she should not give any signs of weakness that might encourage SB1.

SB5, in a 5-minute interview, indicated that she was not closely associated with the group and hadn't noticed the bullying. She explained that she did not like SB1 and was interested in helping T in some way by consoling her.

In general, the meetings had been successful in eliciting from four of the SBs a degree of concern for the plight of the Target and promises were made to help in some way. However, from SB1 there was no concern, and a readiness to blame others. It was evident also that despite her obvious power and influence in the group SB1 was not liked.

Follow-up interviews: Interviews with the SBs four days later produced different responses: SB2 thought that not much had changed for T who was still feeling low. However, she felt that SB1 had ‘settled down’ and was evidently more restrained. SB3 felt more positive and felt that the group was behaving more positively towards T. SB4 felt that things for T were much the same but she had enjoyed helping her. SB5 felt things were getting better and that SB1 had ‘backed off’. In general then, it appeared that T was not feeling much better. However, she was receiving some help and support from the group that had been upsetting her; and importantly the ringleader, SB1, was no longer behaving abusively towards T.

T was interviewed for 25 minutes. T was described as open and inclined to ‘put on a brave face’ about what had been happening – and that she had been bullied in primary school by SB1. She was matter-of-fact, grateful to P for wanting to help, but did not sound desperate. She disclosed that ‘she hated her body’. (This clearly could have been induced in part by the ridicule she had received.) She saw no way in which she could have provoked the bullying. She was not wanting anyone to be punished. Although she was prepared to cooperate with P, she was pessimistic and had little confidence in what could be achieved.

A meeting with T several days later indicated that things had in fact improved for her. She felt happier, largely because of the support she had received from the other girls. However, she still saw SB1 as menacing. There were still some hostile looks and unpleasant facial gestures from SB1, and she had learned that SB1 was saying bad things about her. P suggested to her ways in which she might be more assertive in coping with SB1.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

P felt that sufficient progress had been made to justify the meeting with the suspected bullies. The meeting took place in a classroom with no other students present. It lasted 10 minutes. The general atmosphere was amicable and serious. However, it was evident that the rest of the group had distanced themselves from SB1 and had been active in helping T. At this meeting members were critical of SB1 who began to look downcast and speak quietly. A proposal was made by P to invite T to join them at another meeting and they all agreed to attend. The group was led to discuss how they would behave at such a meeting.

Summit meeting

T had agreed to attend. The atmosphere was positive, even enthusiastic. Members felt that it was time to resolve the matter. Although it was accepted that the bullying behaviour should not continue, it was generally agreed that T need not take offence at some behaviour.

In the course of the discussion it was agreed that none of the members would make ‘fat comments’ when T was present or jokes about T even in the company of girls who were not offended by it. If any such things did occur, T would not take them personally. The content of the meeting would not be discussed outside the room. SB1 urged others not to keep bringing up the agreement, as she just wanted it all to be over. In this application of Shared Concern no contracts were drawn up. Afterwards, P felt confident (rated as 4) that the bullying had stopped, though subsequent evidence threw some doubt on this judgement.

In reflecting on the application of the Method, P felt that it would have been better if the process had been completed more quickly, rather than dragging on. Regarding SB1, a referral was to be made so that she could receive special help. Finally, P thought that she would definitely use the Method of Shared Concern again.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

These interviews produced somewhat contradictory findings. Reports were provided by three of the bullies and the Target. Each of the bullies was positive about the meetings, despite in one case being ‘embarrassing’ and, in another, having felt bad about what had happened to the Target. A third thought the ‘process was good’. There was a general belief that the meetings had improved matters for the Target. The chief offender reported that the Target now felt ‘comfortable to eat in front of the group’ and there had been no ‘fights’; others confirmed that they were ‘getting along’ and ‘talking’. Two of the three were enthusiastic about the use of the Method to deal with bullying; a third was uncertain.

However, the Target was much less positive. She believed that there had been no real change. She reported that she had felt ‘scared and nervous’ taking part in the meetings and that recently the trouble had ‘started again’ and the ‘ringleader’ had not taken responsibility for what she was doing. It was also reported that the mother of the Target had spoken sternly to two of the offending girls. Unfortunately the practitioner had gone overseas for a month after the last meeting and was not able to continue with this case, which clearly needs additional work.

The school principal

This principal had promoted a great deal of work aimed at reducing bullying. This work included the development of a comprehensive anti-bullying policy, which was currently being developed further. Surveys were being conducted annually to monitor bullying behaviour and students were invited to submit names of those who were engaging in bullying. Students were also encouraged to distinguish between getting help for students who needed it and ‘dobbing’. Day sessions for staff had been provided by MindMatters, focusing on bullying. All staff were trained in the application of restorative practices. ‘Circle time’ was encouraged to enable students to identify and solve social problems. Some students had been trained as peer supporters, but this was not considered to have been effective, possibly through an absence of specialised staff support for this work. Disciplinary action to address cases was rare, although some students had been given detentions or required to engage in ‘community service’ at the school as a penalty for misdemeanours. Parents were being advised about the school’s anti-bullying work, but no meetings with groups of parents had so far been held. The overall impression was of considerable interest in preventing and dealing with bullying, especially through the use of restorative practices, which the principal saw as incorporating some of the principles of Shared Concern.

Commentary on the case

This case illustrates in rather an extreme way a classical situation in which a group of students, strongly influenced by a ringleader, are bullying a non-provocative peer. The grounds for acting aggressively towards T are clearly unjustified – the Target is doing the SBs no harm – she is just somewhat physically different from others – and at first it is mystifying why she is being attacked. Importantly, the Method brings to light several key factors. With one exception, in the individual meetings the Suspected Bullies readily acknowledged the plight of the Target and were prepared to help her. It became apparent that members of the group had been pressured by a recalcitrant ringleader of whom they were afraid. Finally, the group meetings provided an opportunity for the students who wanted the bullying to stop to confront the ringleader. The role of the practitioner in this case was to enable beneficent changes in the dynamics and power relations in the group to occur, leading to some improvement in the situation for T. However, post-intervention interviews indicated that although the bullying students were generally happy with what had happened, the

problem had not been solved to the satisfaction of the girl being targeted, nor her mother. This illustrates the need to follow up on cases, even those that seem to have been effectively handled, and to work further with them if necessary.

Case Study 6: Boys bullying in response to racial provocation in a secondary school

The bullying in this case may be described as bullying in response to racial provocation. It consisted of both verbal and physical harassment dating back to primary school. The case came to the attention of the practitioner following an incident in a Year 8 class. The Target of the bullying became involved in an altercation with three other boys who were behaving aggressively towards him, being verbally abusive and throwing things at him.

He became very angry and was asked by the teacher to leave the room and seek assistance from the counsellor. It transpired that he had been targeted by Italian kids who had from time to time niggled him – pushing, nudging, knocking, jostling to annoy him. One of the ‘bullies’ was a boy who had been bullying him since they were together at primary school.

The practitioner was the Year Coordinator for the Middle School. She had been teaching since 1975 and had been at the present school for the past eight years. She has an Advanced Diploma in Teaching, a Graduate Diploma in Social Science and a Master’s degree in Social Science. She had attended a workshop on the Method of Shared Concern, viewed the training video and read widely in the area. She had been implementing the Method with students over the last two years and instructed staff in the nature of the Method. Given that there was clearly a group involvement and the bullying was of moderate severity, Shared Concern was the selected method. It also appeared to be a relatively serious matter with a long history.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

Three male students (two with an Italian background, the other Australian) had been identified by T as the bullies. SB1, the Australian, was identified as the ‘worst bully’ and was interviewed first. Each SB was interviewed in P’s room which was free from interruptions. Notes were taken and their purpose explained. It was made clear that no punishments were being considered.

SB1 was in Year 8, Australian, aged 13. He had in the past behaved disruptively in class and was subject to angry outbursts. SB1 had bullied T since primary school. His demeanour was from the start accommodating and friendly. He appreciated that T had ‘difficulties’. Despite seeming rather ‘disconnected’ he acted cooperatively and showed a fairly high degree of concern (4) over T’s condition. However, he talked about how T had treated them negatively – provoking them through his anger and his prejudiced comments about Italians. During the interviews he stayed reasonably positive and agreed to meet again as an individual and as part of a group.

SB2 was in Year 8, Italian, aged 13, a relatively passive supporter of SB1 (according to T). In some respects he was brighter than SB1 but (according to P) inclined to be ‘silly in class’. In the interview, he was guarded and somewhat hostile – especially about comments T had allegedly made about Italians. He was not all that concerned about T (2).

SB3 was in Year 8, Italian, aged 13. Like SB2, he was guarded, suspicious and angry about T’s provocative behaviour. He was not concerned at all about T’s condition. P saw SB3 as

easily led. Importantly SB3 was not willing to participate further. (His mother had said it was up to him and after this first meeting he decided not to take part.)

P had assured each of them that there would be no punishment. There was a minimal amount of readiness apparent to help T, but P felt that some progress had been made, apart from SB3 who was not wanting to be engaged.

It was unfortunately not possible to follow up this case during the next six weeks. It was only after the school break and P's return from overseas that further work could be done. Conversations with the students indicated that the situation had improved somewhat.

The Target

T was in Year 8, Australian, aged 13. This interview lasted for 30 minutes. T had been diagnosed as having a degree of Asperger Syndrome and as 'high functioning' with average verbal and non-verbal skills. His behaviour was seen as unusual. He appeared somewhat paranoid and tended to see accidental contacts as deliberate. P described him as 'sensitive to touch', showing 'exaggerated reactions to pain'. He had been in trouble for behaving angrily and attacking others. P also described him as bossy and low in empathy. T appeared glad to meet with P and was ready to disclose what had been happening. He was angry and upset about the treatment he had received. He was aware that his behaviour could be seen as provocative, but amenable to receive advice from P. Both mother and T were happy for the Method to progress. In a subsequent meeting, T reported improvement in his situation and was glad to meet with the two others.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

At the joint meeting with SB1 and SB2 it was evident that more work needed to be done. The general atmosphere was positive. However, SB2 still felt somewhat hostile and needed some convincing that action was still needed to improve the situation. Eventually both 'bullies' suggested further ways of improving the situation – for example, by withdrawing when T acted aggressively or ignoring him, or reacting assertively, not aggressively. P suggested that the next stage was to talk to T. SB2 said: 'Let's talk to him now'. The students were then prepared for the final meeting and T invited to join them.

Summit meeting

At this final meeting the two students appeared ready to act to resolve the problem and acted constructively. They agreed to treat each other respectfully. P felt fairly confident that the bullying had stopped.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

Interviews were conducted with two of the SBs – SB1 and SB2. Both reported that the experience of taking part in the meetings was positive. Especially, each felt that he had been able to get everything off his chest and that the situation had improved for T. SB1 thought that the meetings had enabled him to 'stop and think' before he spoke or called out to T. SB2 thought that he had been helped to behave better and had become more settled. Each felt very positive about the way they had been treated by P. Both felt that the process should be applied to other cases. T had felt that at first what happened at the meetings was 'a bit annoying' but believed that things 'did work out eventually'. However, the improvement appeared to lie in T's attitude to what had been taking place. He felt good about having had the opportunity to talk about things and had gained a new perspective on the situation. But his

relationship with the SBs did not seem to have improved. Seemingly he had come to live with it.

Commentary on the case

The case is one in which work was needed with both the Suspected Bullies and the highly provocative victim. The Method of Shared Concern provided the opportunity for an examination of how racial prejudice on the part of a student could bring about bullying in the form of disproportionate reactions to a real grievance. Adjustments were needed on both sides. This made it a particularly difficult case to handle.

This case was carried out under difficult conditions, due to an unwillingness of the parent of one of the Suspected Bullies to encourage her son to take part. In addition, the long break before a group meeting could be arranged was unfortunate as it prevented the process proceeding as intended. Students were likely to have forgotten their promises during such a long interval. Despite these difficulties some progress was made. P felt that the situation had improved for T. and was confident that she would use the Method again. She stated: 'I believe it is a very good way of working with adolescents. It empowers them.' She believed strongly that the final group meetings were necessary, despite the fact that some practitioners do not use them and they are not mentioned in some expositions of the Method. One surprising omission was the absence of any counselling of the targeted person regarding his use of racially harassing language.

Although the students acknowledged that the process had been helpful, there were notable differences between the SBs and T about whether the problem had been fully resolved. The SBs felt that it had; T was not so convinced. Nevertheless, taking part in the process had been helpful to all the students, especially in helping them reflect on what had been happening and see events in a new and more positive light.

Case Study 7: Girls pack bullying a girl in a secondary school

This case came to the attention of the practitioner when a teacher expressed concern about a bullying situation that was ongoing and involved a group of female students. The Target was a Year 8 student at a secondary school who had been bullied by other girls at several schools she had attended: a primary school and two secondary schools. The bullying included name-calling, threats, confrontations, and having things thrown at her as she walked past during break times. As a consequence, she had become agitated, anxious and depressed. She had sought to avoid the large group of students who were harassing her by hiding in the library at lunchtimes and avoiding optional classes where she expected to be treated badly. They were, according to the practitioner, behaving mindlessly as in a pack. The practitioner learned that the Target was seeing a social worker related to incidents that had occurred at home. Given that this was an ongoing case of at least moderate severity, the practitioner chose to apply the Method of Shared Concern.

The practitioner was a female in the role of Student Support Teacher for Years 7 and 8 at a secondary school. She had been teaching for some 12 years, but was in the first year at her present school. She had recently heard about the Method of Shared Concern, had viewed the training video, read articles about the Method, and had limited experience in using it with students.

The case was reported to the practitioner by a teacher and the practitioner subsequently spoke with the Target briefly about the problem. The case seemed appropriate for the Method as it involved group bullying (according to the practitioner a 'pack mentality' at work) and was of moderate severity.

All the Suspected Bullies were Year 8 girls aged around 12-13 years. Four had been identified by the Target as having been involved in the bullying at the school.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

These meetings ranged from 5-10 minutes in length. Each meeting was undertaken in a room with no interruptions and without any note-taking. The students were seen in order of perceived aggressiveness towards the Target, as inferred from what the Target had said.

SB1 appeared to be the instigator of the bullying. Unlike the stereotype, she appeared polite and agreeable. She acknowledged that T was having a tough time, and confirmed that the unpleasant things that had been happening to her. SB1 agreed that T was feeling anxious and depressed about coming to school and acknowledged her own involvement in teasing her. She showed some empathy towards T – rated concern of 3. She felt that T was partly to blame and was inclined to justify her bullying behaviour. Nevertheless, SB1 agreed to stop harassing her. She said she would not speak to T at all – and definitely not to 'get involved in picking on her'.

SB2 came to see P without being asked (she had seen that P had been speaking to SB1). She was quite assertive, wanting to know just what was going on. She recognised that T was having a very hard time at school. She actually felt sorry for T (rated as 4) and said she wanted it all to stop; however, she pointed out that T was contributing to the problem and 'bringing it on herself'. SB2 agreed to ignore T and not get involved in any further confrontations with her.

SB3 acknowledged the problem but was not so forthcoming with ideas about solving it, showing some concern (rated 3). She agreed that she had been involved in the bullying of T, but argued that she was more on the periphery. As a result of our conversation, she agreed to stay out of it when others were harassing T. She also offered to urge her friends to get out of the situation, eg, by asking them to walk away with her from any situation taking place.

SB4 could see that T was getting a very hard time and claimed not to be involved to any great extent in harassing her. She added that T tended to be very oversensitive, paranoid and often 'overreacted' to things that were said or thought people had said about her. SB4 agreed not involve herself in harassment, and keep clear of T who got angry when criticised.

The Target

After P had met with each of the SBs, she met T again. She explained that she had been meeting with the SBs and that they had agreed to change their behaviour. P let her know that she would be keeping an eye on them and meeting up with them again to discuss the situation. Together they talked around the kinds of incidents T was experiencing. At first, T was reluctant to see that sometimes her actions had made matters worse and perhaps she could have acted differently on some occasions. P explained that she was in no way blaming her for these problems, but that she was attempting to look at things from both sides to try and find the best solution to the problems T was experiencing. They discussed some strategies T could use if confronted by one of the SBs, for example, walking away, trying to diffuse the situation and trying not to be tempted into making inflammatory comments (which she admitted to doing sometimes). P discussed with her the possibility of returning to 'options classes' – which she had been absent from and where a lot of the bullying had taken place – and also trying to be out and about during some lunchtimes to see if the situation was improving. The meeting ended positively, and T was keen to meet up with P again in a week's time to discuss whether things had in fact changed.

Further individual meetings: A brief 5-minute conversation was held with SB1 in the school grounds in passing. She said that things were 'not too bad' but admitted to making the occasional negative comment. P reminded her of her agreement and was assured that she'd 'try' to do better. In another brief exchange, SB2 explained she hadn't seen much of T and that there had been no further issues. With SB3 the meeting was in P's office. This occurred after T had told P that 'they' had been talking about her 'within earshot'. SB3 claimed that T was being paranoid and that T had in fact confronted her, accusing her of talking about her even though she wasn't. P told SB3 to make sure she continued to avoid confrontation.

P then met with T again. She indicated that SB1 was still making sarcastic comments to her but that SB2 and SB3 had 'got better' and she hadn't experienced any further incidents with them. She said SB4 had been OK, apart from the incident when she had been talking about her. (T didn't give P any further details about her own involvement in this incident.) P also observed T over a couple of days out of the library at lunchtimes with a different social group than before. P took this as an indication that things were looking up for her and that she was forming some new friendships. In general, some progress had been made, but some resentments on the part of the bullying students remained. Nevertheless, it was decided to hold a group meeting.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

This meeting revealed differences in the group. SB3 and SB4 were both as cooperative as ever, telling P that they had not had much contact with T and that there had been no further incidents involving them, although they had seen others harassing T. By contrast SB1 was

acting differently from how she had in past meetings. She related an incident in which she told T to 'pull her skirt down', T had 'overreacted' and they had had an argument. P informed SB1 that she was in fact breaking her agreement by making a comment like that to T. SB1 became a bit defensive, and tried to justify her comment by pointing out other faults that T possessed. P again reminded her that she was responsible for her own behaviour only and that she had made an agreement to avoid behaving in that way. P also pointed out that if she was unable to live up to that agreement in the future 'consequences' for her actions would apply.

SB2 started off well in the meeting, and although on an individual basis she had previously expressed concern for T's situation and a desire for this situation to come to an end, in this meeting she decided to back up her friend SB1. She did this by supporting SB1's criticisms of T. In the end, P thanked SB3 and SB4 for sticking to their agreements and their positive actions, and reminded SB1 and SB2 that their behaviour was their responsibility, and let them know that she would continue to monitor the situation once T returned to school. (T had been absent for several days.)

Overall, despite some negative aspects of this meeting, P thought that this phase of the intervention had been useful and she felt fairly confident of a positive outcome for T.

Summit meeting

The next stage was to have been one involving T with the group, but T remained absent. P intended to check up with the individual students after T had returned to school to ascertain whether they had acted positively – to reinforce those who had, but to apply 'consequences' to those who had not. Subsequently, she would have scheduled a whole group meeting to have a final discussion and make some whole group agreements. Due to T's continued absence, this did not occur.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies

These were conducted with two of the Suspected Bullies but not with the targeted student who had left the school. Both students who had engaged in the bullying asserted that they believed that the situation for the targeted student had improved before she left and that it was a good idea to use the process with other students to solve similar problems. Looking back on the meetings, one member felt 'it was good because 'we got to figure out the problem, what it was, and how to handle it next time.' This student expressed the view that both of the 'bullies' knew what they had done was wrong and if the Target had not left she would not continue to 'say stuff' to her. The other felt that it was 'good that both sides of the story were heard' and it was possible to 'speak freely' and 'safe to talk'. At the same time, this student still felt annoyed 'because I got accused of things I didn't do'.

The school principal

The principal was new to the school, and in the process of examining earlier work done by previous principals and also developing his own approach. He recognised bullying as a significant issue and was working in a number of ways to prevent it and deal appropriately with cases. To do so he was developing a general framework under the heading of Student Support. He saw dealing with bullying as being in part a matter of behaviour management. Surveys had been conducted to ascertain the nature and prevalence of the problem, and more work in this area was planned. He saw classroom work with students as important and especially the need to help children to feel safe, involved and respectful to each other. Help was being provided to students who needed to be able to act more assertively, and mediation was being practised in some cases of student conflict. It was felt that more staff training was

needed to acquire the necessary skills. Restorative practices were seen as a useful way of dealing with some cases. Disciplinary action was being taken in extreme circumstances, for instance, applying 'internal suspension' where students were isolated from contact with others for a day or so. Counselling and talks with parents were also used. Although the principal was not closely acquainted with the Method of Shared Concern, he expressed a great deal of confidence in the practitioner and was supportive of the approach.

Commentary on the case

This case was a difficult one for the practitioner. T was having problems outside school which were being handled by a social worker. A lack of coordination between those working on the case probably hindered progress. Arguably they should have worked closely together. Practical difficulties arose because of the erratic attendance of T. It was not possible to involve her in the crucial group meeting with the SBs, nor to discover from T whether she had actually been helped by the process.

Difficulties also arose because of the hostile attitudes towards T that persisted among some group members, despite acknowledgement of T's distressing situation. There existed in some of the SBs a feeling that in some way T was provoking the situation. The group meeting with SBs enabled the P to become more clearly aware of their conflicting views and it is possible that a subsequent meeting with T could have led to an agreed resolution.

Notably, on one occasion P departed from the strategy that is necessary in applying the Method of Shared Concern, in that she threatened 'consequences'. P's reactions are understandable in the light of the promises that were made and broken by some SBs. In some circumstances the Method requires a great deal of patience! At the same time, P felt that the Method was a positive way of dealing with the case, as it avoided blame and encouraged the students involved to think about how their own behaviour could improve the situation. She thought that the individual discussions were valuable and helped her to form positive relationships with each student.

In the end, P felt that the whole situation was a lot more complicated than the usual kind of bullying situation, in that the Target had a lot going on in her personal life which both affected her behaviour and reactions at school, and prevented her from being there for the last part of the process. She noted that the case might have been handled better if she had followed up with the SBs individually to make sure they were more 'on track' and demonstrating positive behaviour **before** meeting with them as a group.

The post-intervention interviews revealed that, according to some SBs, some improvement appears to have taken place; however, the intervention was not entirely successful in stopping the bullying. Here was a case in which the final mediation stage was needed and unfortunately could not take place because of the practitioner being unavailable when T returned to school.

Although the main factor in evaluating the 'success' of the intervention must be its effectiveness in stopping the bullying, the use of the Method can be seen at times as having benefits for the practitioner, especially if such a person is a beginner. In reflecting on her experience, P wrote:

Overall, I feel that I have definitely benefited from using this approach, it has involved a bit of a mind shift for me, I really like the 'let's solve this problem together' approach. In the past, I have experienced a more 'catch the crook' kind of approach, in which evidence and consequences (sometimes inconsistent and vague)

were applied. I feel that this approach creates a much more positive relationship between the students and staff than more traditional approaches. This is because staff and students are working together to fix a perceived social problem, rather than 'fixing' or catching out a person (does that make sense?) – the bullying is depersonalised, students are more able to step back and look at the situation, rather than just being caught up in the moment. This is more like a team approach to solving the problem, and I think that the meeting at the end of the process with all students involved would reinforce this. I also like the 'formula' for the meetings – giving them a clear direction and purpose. I am definitely keen to use this approach in the future.

Case Study 8: Boys bullying a socially inadequate boy in a secondary school

This case concerns a group of Year 8 boys who were bullying a somewhat older male student in Year 9 identified by the practitioner as having an Asperger condition. The group of students were finding it entertaining to tease, ridicule and bully the older child because of his 'oddness'. There were both verbal and physical elements in the bullying. According to P, the bullying had been taking place over a 2-3 week period.

The case came to the practitioner's attention following a report from a member of the teaching staff who observed 'unacceptable behaviour' from a group of students towards the Target. P knew the Target and was particularly concerned because he appeared to be very vulnerable and already quite isolated amongst the student population.

The practitioner was an experienced male teacher, having been employed in schools for 13 years. He has postgraduate qualifications in Social Welfare. He had viewed the training video, attended a training workshop and read about the use of the Method. His previous experience in working on problems of school bullying had involved the use of restorative practices. The practitioner saw this case as being a serious one in which there was group involvement that appeared appropriate for the application of the Method of Shared Concern.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

Four students had been identified as undertaking the bullying. All the SBs were male, in Year 8 and 14 years old. SB1 was of Maori descent while the others had Anglo-Saxon heritage. In accordance with school procedures, the parents of the participants were informed that the school was taking steps to solve the problem that had arisen. Contrary to the preferred method of applying the Method of Shared Concern, the Target was seen first (though briefly) to help in the identification of the perpetrators. The student who allegedly had used a physical means of bullying was seen first.

SB1 was interviewed for 20 minutes. Initially, SB1 was quite defensive and guarded. He was quick to provide excuses as to why he behaved the way he did. After he was assured that he wasn't being accused of anything, that P's concern was for T, and that the purpose of the process wasn't to administer punitive consequences, he relaxed considerably. In fact, it was made clear that neither the school principal nor his parents were to be told about what they might say. When asked what he knew about the incident and the general treatment of T, SB1 gave honest replies and provided the names of others who were involved. He acknowledged the inappropriate nature of his and their behaviour. He also showed a fair degree of concern for T (rated as 3). After asking what could be done to help improve matters, SB1 responded by suggesting that he could apologise and go out of his way to make sure T was being treated fairly.

SB2, SB3 and SB4 were interviewed for a shorter amount of time (around 5-10 minutes) and according to P the meetings were 'very straightforward'. After clearly outlining the process and desired outcomes the students were very relaxed, open and honest regarding what they knew about the situation and what they thought could be done to improve it. Concern was positive (around 3-4).

The interviews had evidently gone well. Each appeared remorseful, even though at the time they had seen their behaviour as pretty harmless. No-one suggested that there had been any significant provocation, although some annoyance was expressed at T's tendency to follow girls around. In retrospect there appeared to have been no ringleader. P felt that there had been a genuine recognition of the inappropriateness of their behaviour.

The Target

T was a Year 9 student aged 15 years, academically able, but with notable difficulties in expressing his feelings. P saw him as having a low level of social understanding and few friends: very much a 'loner'. T acknowledged that he had been having a hard time with the group of Year 8 students over a period of time. He appeared vague and confused in describing what had been happening. He was grateful for the help being offered, but said that he wasn't overly disturbed by the situation. He agreed to attend a group meeting with the bullies. The meeting with the Target took approximately 10 minutes.

Follow-up meetings: Subsequent individual meetings held with the bullies and the victim were brief and informal. P gathered from the SBs that they had discontinued their bullying behaviour and felt empathic towards T. The bullying appeared to have stopped. It seemed appropriate at this stage to convene a meeting with the group of SBs.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

The students in the group meeting of Suspected Bullies behaved in a very positive manner. All were happy to have T join them in a future meeting and all were very forthcoming with things that could be done to help the situation. It was agreed by the group that an apology to T would be desirable. At the same time, they decided that it would not be appropriate for T to become one of their group. It was thought that T's particular condition could possibly create further issues. The decision at the meeting was that each of the bullies would apologise to T and that they would leave him alone at all times.

Summit meeting

This meeting was attended by T, SB1, SB2, SB3 and SB4. The meeting was quite short, only 5-10 minutes. All members of the SB group behaved positively in the meeting and each of the bullies apologised sincerely to T. P was confident that the bullying had stopped and that the group had learnt from the process.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

The interviews with each of the SBs and T confirmed that the bullying had stopped, and that the meetings had helped to improve the situation. As one SB said: 'We stopped giving him a hard time and apologised for our behaviour.' Each of the SBs indicated that it would be a good idea to use this process with other young people to solve similar problems. Although T believed that the meetings had helped to improve his situation, he was not, however, sure that the process was necessarily the best approach for all similar cases. What was most striking about this case were the positive feelings the SBs had about the way the case was handled.

One said: 'I enjoyed the process as I didn't feel as though I was being punished for my actions.' Another said: 'Once I knew I wasn't going to be suspended I felt more confident talking about what happened.'

The school principal

In describing what the school was doing to counter bullying, the principal chose to focus first on the school's 'anti-bullying and harassment policy' which he saw as distinct from the 'behaviour management policy'. Bullying was described in the document as 'illegal' and 'not to be tolerated'. Offenders were to be dealt with promptly and appropriate consequences imposed according to the severity of the offence. Internal and external suspensions were used with approximately equal frequency; the latter generally for more serious offences and when it was thought that parental supervision was adequate.

Despite the emphasis in the policy on disciplinary action, a range of other measures were being taken. These included the use of training to improve the capacity of vulnerable students to act more assertively and, in some cases, to increase the ability to control anger. Recently, some senior students had been trained to function as Peer Educators and were providing advice to junior students on problems involving bullying. Positive student activities were being encouraged during lunch breaks, including chess, table tennis and reading in the library. As in an increasing number of schools, restorative practices were being used to deal with cases of bullying. This trend was seen as running contrary to views held by some staff members who believed that tougher disciplinary methods were needed. Although the principal strongly supported his counsellor (who was present during the interview) in implementing the Method of Shared Concern, he indicated that he knew 'zero' about the Method.

Commentary on the case

This was in some respects like other cases in that a group of students was bullying an individual. The main difference was due to T's cognitive disability. This potentially provided difficulties because of his low awareness of the nature of the social situation in which he was involved. Fortunately, T's behaviour was not seen as particularly provocative and did not require mediation by P. Empathy towards T's condition was readily aroused once the matter had been explained and changes in the SBs' behaviour were brought about. This may not have occurred if a punitive approach had been taken. Because of the positive responses of the SBs in the individual interviews, P felt that the group stages were perhaps unnecessary.

Looking back, P concluded that the case was best handled by the chosen method. P felt that the SBs responded particularly well to this process and he would definitely use the Method again. However, P also thought that he needed to be clearer about the specific objectives and probable outcomes in preparing for the initial interviews. P felt that he had experienced the importance and benefit of dealing with each participant separately before getting them together as a group. This element allowed him to develop an understanding of the students as individuals before allowing group dynamics to influence behaviour. Despite these positive comments, P expressed some misgivings about the amount of time that had been allocated to dealing with this case, and was concerned that schools may not have the resources to handle many cases in this manner.

Case Study 9: Boys bullying a depressed boy in a primary school

In this case three boys were identified as bullying another boy whose perceived overreactions appear to have encouraged them to continue teasing and upsetting him. Typically he reacted by kicking and screaming. This occurred in the school yard and sometimes in the classroom.

It was thought by the practitioner that his vulnerability and anger stemmed from experiences at home which had resulted in his being somewhat emotionally disturbed. His parents had divorced some years earlier and his mother had acquired a new partner. The boy was evidently feeling unhappy and unwanted, was generally depressed and possibly suicidal. The school had tried repeatedly to help him without success.

The case came to the attention of the practitioner from a 'bully audit' periodically undertaken at the school in which students could nominate students who were being bullied and their tormentors. The targeted child had been seen by teachers for some time as a 'problem' because of the way he reacted to being teased, that is, in a highly emotional and aggressive way. The bullying had continued for at least three years unabated. The Target had never asked for help but it was evident that he was in urgent need of help. Because there was a group of students involved, seemingly without much empathy for the Target, it was decided that the Method of Shared Concern would be tried.

The practitioner was school principal of a primary school with some 33 years experience in schools. It was his first year as principal of the school in which this case was addressed. His experience of the Method was limited; he had attended a meeting in which the Method was explained and also viewed the training video.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

Each of the three suspected bullies was male. They were interviewed individually in the principal's office for about 5 minutes. Notes were not taken.

SB1 was a 12-year-old Year 7 boy who had been identified as the main bully and ringleader. He was somewhat reserved and suspicious to begin with. He acknowledged that the Target was experiencing a hard time, but put it in the category of his having difficulties with others. He said that he himself had not had a recent interaction with the Target. He took no ownership of the problem and related several instances where the Target had aggravated the situation. At first he could not see how he could assist the Target with the problem, then suggested that he could just stay away from the Target. His level of concern for T was low (around 2). An agreement was made to have a future meeting to see how things were going. The prospect of a group meeting was raised. SB1 was unconcerned. Overall, the interview did not seem to be very productive,

SB2 (aged 11 years) was known to have assisted SB1 in the bullying. However, he was open and willing to chat about the Target. He readily acknowledged that T was having a hard time. He had known T since Year 3 and appeared concerned about him (rated as 4). He indicated that others were concerned as well. He further suggested that he could perhaps speak to the two friends that he knew T regularly played with. This he thought might encourage them to support T more. SB2 agreed to a future meeting in order to assess progress. Overall this was a positive interview. This boy had voluntarily made positive suggestions and had spoken seriously about the difficulties T was having.

SB3 (aged 10 and in Year 6) was initially reserved but quickly opened up to P. He was a willing participant in the conversation. He readily acknowledged that T was having a hard time and that he had been having problems for a number of years. He went on to show a genuine concern about T (rated at 4). He mentioned that they went to Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) together and had played together in the past. He added that that he could play with T at OSHC and perhaps even during the school day. Overall the interview went very

well. P felt that SB3 was the most responsive of the three bullies and the one most certain to follow things through.

The Target

T (aged 12 in Year 7) was very closed and guarded. He wanted to keep things superficial and was unwilling to engage in deep conversation. At first he did not acknowledge the importance of the issues he had with others and would not go into any detail. Subsequently he acknowledged that he was being repeatedly teased and that he responded by kicking and screaming at the others. He thought that no-one could help him. Eventually T opened up. He disclosed that he was unhappy at home, was being treated badly by his brothers and was continually being blamed for lying to his mother. He could not see how he could be provoking any bullying but agreed that his reactions to being teased were not helpful. T indicated that he thought his situation at school was not serious – at the same time he got teary and upset when talking about it. He indicated that he did not want to be helped. He reflected that on many earlier occasions teachers had tried to help him and had tried unsuccessfully to stop the teasing. He felt that he just had to put up with it and move on. Nevertheless he was willing to meet with the practitioner again.

Follow-up meetings: Further meetings were arranged with SB1 and SB3 to check on progress. In a 5-minute interview in the principal's office, SB1 explained that he had not had an opportunity to help T, but had tried to do so. He had noticed one morning that T was upset and crying when he entered the classroom. SB1 asked T what the matter was but was told that T did not want to discuss it. SB1 took the hint and did not pursue the matter. SB1 acknowledged that T's behaviour had changed in the last two weeks. He did not seem to have 'exploded' as much. SB1 felt that there had been less teasing going on. A similar interview was conducted with SB3, who disclosed that he had not had the opportunity to play with T at OSHC, as they had not been attending at the same time, but he anticipated doing so soon. Like SB1, he noted that T had not been acting angrily of late. P concluded that progress was being made and a group meeting could take place.

A meeting then held with T and lasting 10 minutes confirmed that progress was being made. There had been much less teasing over the last two weeks and T felt happier about being at school. Especially he had noticed that SB1 was not teasing him or saying silly things to him in order to stir him up. T began to discuss further what was happening at home. It was clear that this had impacted greatly on his school life. Yet he was adamant that he did not want counselling assistance from the Christian Pastoral Care Support Worker or any other agency.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

This meeting was quite short and included all three boys. The students behaved constructively and as individuals rather than as a 'mob'.. This was perhaps helped by the fact that they came from different classes. It was possible to congratulate them on what they had done. They had no reservations about meeting with T.

Summit meeting

This meeting included SB1, SB2 and T. The boys appeared comfortable and relaxed throughout the meeting. Eye contact was given to T on several occasions and the boys acknowledged that they had been able to put into place some of the actions that they committed to originally. At initial meetings T had clearly been nervous, whereas at the group meeting he was settled and calm. He spoke in a normal manner and appeared pleased with the outcome. T indicated that he was having a much better time with only several 'minor' teasing situations and that he had handled them satisfactorily. There was agreement to continue to

work positively, though there was also acknowledgement that they were not likely to play together. A formal contract was not employed as it appeared that there had been a resolution to the case. However, there was an understanding that they would meet again if necessary. At the conclusion of the meeting, P was fairly confident that the bullying would either not continue or certainly abate to a large degree.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

Interviews were conducted with two of the SBs; the other involved student not being available at the time. The responses were very positive. Both felt that the situation for the Target had definitely improved and that the Method employed was one that should be used with other young people in seeking to resolve a similar problem. As one said: 'It helped T. He started feeling better about himself and playing with other kids.' The other student thought that the process was good because 'he [the Target] could talk about how he felt if anyone was bullying him in the yard.' Strikingly, both students expressed some pleasure in having taken part. One said: 'I'm happy for myself because I've been helping people and helping him to feel better about himself.'

The interview with T confirmed what the SBs had said. T stated that the situation 'had definitely improved, now it makes me feel better not putting up with bullies'. Although at one stage T had been reluctant to take part in the meetings, feeling that little could be done to help, his subsequent judgement was very different. Asked how he felt about having taken part he said: 'Great. They don't do the big bullying any more.' At the same time, T was uncertain whether the approach taken would be appropriate in all cases, 'because it will depend on what the bullies and the kid being bullied are like.'

The school principal

The school had undertaken a variety of measures to counter school bullying. A school policy, formulated during the time of a previous principal, guided procedures, and was currently under review. Surveillance of student behaviour was encouraged during staff meetings and a bully audit was periodically conducted to identify cases. Activities designed to foster positive behaviours were provided as part of the curriculum, for instance, making use of Bounce Back literature and encouraging active bystander behaviour. Programs to overcome boredom among some children – conceived as a factor in inducing bullying – had been introduced and involved providing lunchtime clubs and the use of the school library. Cases of bullying had been dealt with in a number of ways, including disciplinary action, mediation, restorative practices and assisting vulnerable students to be more assertive.

Commentary on the case

This case was seen as typical of bullying incidents that P had handled in the past. In retrospect, it was a suitable case to be handled using the Shared Concern Method. Nothing previously appeared to have had an effect on the teasing and bullying of the targeted student. In the meetings, the bullies soon began to take on the role of helpers seriously and become involved in a conscious manner. They had previously not felt empowered to make a difference. There was an increased understanding of the impact of their bullying behaviour, both directly and indirectly.

Looking back, P believed that it would be good to set up the process over an extended period. A follow up was seen as essential to the success of the program. (As it turned out in this case – and in some others – not all participants in the process could be contacted when required.) P indicated that he would continue to meet with the bullies and Target several times over the

next school term. The process had allowed him to engage in a meaningful way with the Target who had initially been hard to help.

P reported that he had learnt the importance of having a scaffold for asking questions of the students in a case such as this. The Method made it possible to compare ways in which individuals involved in bullying interacted with each other. It enabled P to 'gain a very clear and succinct account of who the players were in the bullying scenario'. It uncovered the main perpetrators and main supporters of the Target. It allowed him to see where one could be the most influential in resolving such problems. Finally P expressed the view that he would definitely be using the approach again.

This case is also notable for the part that appears to have been played by the home background of the Target in rendering him particularly vulnerable to being bullied. His depression, thought to be engendered by the treatment he had received at home, and his tendency to react violently and inappropriately to teasing, singled him out as an attractive target for some students who had found bullying him a source of much mindless entertainment. It was an unusual case also in that the Target seemingly did not want help from the school, having experienced futile attempts to help him in the past. The application of the Method in this case required a very sensitive approach to the Target to get him involved in the process. Given the mob mentality of the perpetrators, individual meetings were needed to gain their active cooperation. Arguably this would not have been achieved if a traditional disciplinary approach had been used.

Case Study 10: Boys harassing an 'annoying' girl in a secondary school

Being continually irritated by the way a girl in their class behaved, two secondary school boys felt justified in giving her a hard time, making offensive comments and generally upsetting her. The boys had known the girl since primary school and their treatment of her was a long-standing problem. Recently they had engaged in damaging her property and throwing her things around.

The case came to the practitioner's attention when an Aide sent two girls from Year 9 to her office from an Art class. One girl was the Target, the other a bystander. Both girls had been crying. The bystander explained that T had frequently been treated very poorly by several boys in their year level. She felt their behaviour was mean and nasty and that T had suffered unfairly for most of the year. T was reluctant to say much but was clearly distressed. P learned the names of the two perpetrators from these girls.

P was concerned about T because she has always been a feisty, strong-willed girl who complained loudly in Years 7 and 8 if something was not acceptable to her. Her personality was described by many who knew her as 'grating'. Strongly independent and the youngest of four siblings, she was used to standing up for herself. To see her visibly distressed, expressing thoughts to her friend about leaving the school (where her siblings had attended to Year 12) was a matter of much concern to the practitioner.

Because of T's strong and at times grating personality, it was understandable that class mates might find it wearing to tolerate her manner day in, day out. While the initial evidence appeared to implicate two boys in an ongoing campaign of unpleasantness, P had some sympathy for the frustration they may have felt having to work in close proximity to T over a long period. The Method of Shared Concern offered a way to tackle the issues without apportioning blame and to promote tolerance of T's unusually strong personality. It also offered an opportunity for each person involved to talk together about how things might improve. Given that the students had potentially another three and a half years together at

school, it was thought preferable to resolve the situation without grudges being carried forward. A request had been made for the Method of Shared Concern to be used at the school and P was keen to try it out, especially as this was a case involving a group of students and moderate severity bullying.

The practitioner was an experienced female teacher with 23 years of work in schools. Currently she was the Wellbeing Coordinator and a member of the School Leadership team. She had been trained in the use of restorative practices and had only recently been introduced to the Method of Shared Concern through attendance at workshops and viewing the training video.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

SB1 was a male student in Year 9. He was seen first because he had been identified as the instigator. The interview was brief, around 5 minutes. He was described as ‘one of the lads’, having a casual attitude to school and with a sense of humour that sometimes resulted in him joking around at the expense of others and taking things too far, especially when there was a male audience to impress. Not always cooperative, SB1 tended to be very defensive when reprimanded. P thought that he had a low level of empathy with others. He had been in classes with T since kindergarten and found her very annoying.

SB1 initially claimed to know nothing about T’s situation. His attitude was offhand, defensive and non-committal. Gradually there was a slight softening of his attitude, possibly when it became clear he was not being directly accused of any poor behaviour. Focusing the discussion on T’s situation and how it might be improved rather than on what he had or had not been doing to her drew him into **some** recognition that T’s time at school may be fairly unpleasant. His concern for her wellbeing was nevertheless quite low (rated as 2). He claimed that T often annoyed others in class, though that didn’t really bother him. When it was suggested P might catch up with him again he seemed reluctant, but did not refuse. P felt this meeting had not been very satisfactory, and that SB1 was not being cooperative or interested in being involved in the process.

SB2 was also Year 9 male student. He had started at the school quite recently, having been a school refuser who had experienced being bullied at his previous school. He had settled well in his new school and wanted to stay here. During the last two terms he had developed a friendship with SB1. P described him as ‘very individual’ but at the same time wanting to fit in with his peers.

In the interview SB2 looked bothered but detached, seeming to think that he was in some kind of trouble. This attitude softened when T’s situation was outlined. He showed sympathy for her situation (concern = 4) but did not acknowledge his own or anyone else’s involvement. He agreed that life could be better for T in class and that any efforts made to assist this would have his support. He suggested that he could be more friendly to T on a regular basis. P surmised that SB2 was thinking about his own bad experiences at his previous school and feeling uncomfortable about having assisted SB1 in bullying T.

This interview was regarded as much more positive because SB1 showed genuine empathy and seemed willing to contribute to a scheme that might help T. He was nevertheless at pains to point out that he didn’t have much to do with her.

The Target

The interview with T (a Year 9 girl) occurred when she came to see P, together with her friend, in a highly distressed state. This made it difficult to discuss the matter unemotionally and impossible to inform T of steps that had been taken with the Suspected Bullies. The interview lasted 20 minutes. At first T was not keen to have any involvement with P. Her friend had brought her along and she was embarrassed to be 'caught' in a distressed manner. She also seemed to be close to the end of her tether. She seemed oblivious to the way in which she annoyed others with her behaviour. She was heartily sick of being treated in a mean manner by SB1 and SB2, and was annoyed on this occasion at damage to her property (a school diary had been hole punched and her belongings thrown across the room). T's general behaviour had apparently grated on others in the classroom and perhaps triggered the ongoing 'campaign' of unpleasantness that had developed. She reacted defiantly with an air of bravado, as one who dealt with her own problems. 'I have friends that will get them back,' she asserted, and 'they won't dare do anything more to me.' However, T finally agreed to P's suggestion that P would talk to the SBs and arrange a joint meeting to try to alleviate the situation.

In the judgement of the practitioner, T was self-absorbed and did not seem able to read social cues well. In this respect she seemed to have Asperger characteristics. She often annoyed other students and seemed oblivious as to how her behaviour impacted on others. Added to this, she complained a lot, and was often loud and disagreeable in the classroom. Rarely did she show any emotion other than annoyance or anger. Normally she seemed resilient, able to bounce back quickly and recover well from unpleasant situations. Not surprisingly, her behaviour was often seen as negative and provocative.

Follow-up meetings: In a follow-up meeting, SB1 was spoken with briefly in the yard several days later. He claimed that there had been no problem in class, T was now sitting away from him and he didn't 'notice her at all' any more. Things were fine according to him. He was reluctant to discuss the relationship and reiterated that he was doing nothing to annoy her. A similar meeting was held with SB 2 who indicated things had really settled and that T was being more pleasant and less demanding in class. The boys had stopped bothering her, he claimed, because she was further away from them and not so 'in their faces'.

A further meeting with T was held for 10 minutes a little later in P's office. T said that all nastiness from SB1 and SB2 had ceased. She noted some other concerns with a female student who had been mean to her that day, but claimed that she was friends with SB1 and SB2 and there was no longer a problem, stating characteristically that 'they wouldn't dare do anything to me again'. When asked why she felt that way, she smiled and replied: 'I have friends.' P did not believe that any intimidation had occurred however, rather that her response had more to do with T's need to be in control of any situation.

Term holidays intervened and there was a two-week break from school. Three days into Term 4, P again had brief casual contact in the corridor or in the yard with SB1, SB2, T and T's friend.

SB1 reported 'things were quiet' and that they left each other alone – no conflict, no problems. SB2 also assured P that everyone was more settled. T was much less annoying and no incidents had occurred with anyone in class. T's friend was not so convinced. Whilst agreeing that there had been no problems with SB1 or SB2, she still worried that T was unhappy at school and felt that more follow up would help her.

P then rang and spoke with T's mother, who felt that while it had been helpful to address the situation with SB1 and SB2, T had not been overly bothered by anyone in particular. She attributed the difficulties T had to mood swings that varied from animated to quiet and sometimes sullen, and that these didn't necessarily happen due to conflict with others. Currently she thought T was happy.

Contact with class teachers and the home room teacher indicated that with a new seating plan, the class seemed much happier and no incidences of conflict had come to light. Interaction between SB1, SB2 and T had been pleasant with no indication of any rift. It was decided that group meetings would be useful at this stage.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

This meeting was conducted a week later in P's office and lasted for 5 minutes. Considerable progress seemed to have been made, but P wanted to be certain that what had initially been described as a long-term case of bullying against T had actually ceased so readily. All evidence pointed that way, but P was not convinced it could be that easy! It was decided that a summit meeting would be held. This was despite the fact that SB1 was reluctant to be called up again, complaining that he didn't want to miss class and that there was no need for a meeting because there was no conflict between anyone as T was being quieter and more friendly and all was well. SB1 didn't see the point of meeting with T. SB2 was more willing to be involved in a meeting and supported SB1's assessment of the situation that things were reconciled and that T was more relaxed in class. (A further individual meeting was held with T. Like SB1 she claimed that there was no longer any problem. She didn't see the point of a joint meeting because 'we're all friends now'. P asked her to allow the meeting so that there could be an assurance by all concerned that this would continue to be the case – that is, no more conflict, and respectful treatment of each other at all times, regardless of whether there was a friendship as well.)

Summit meeting

A 10-minute meeting was undertaken later in the day. Again, SB1 was a reluctant participant, claiming that there was no point meeting with T, saying 'it doesn't matter any more' because 'it's over'. However, he agreed that the way T had been treated throughout the year had been unfair. Several times during the meeting he asked: 'Can I go back to class now?' He also said of the future: 'We'll be friends.' T replied: 'I agree.' SB2 said: 'Yeah, yeah.' The group then laughed together. T said: 'Honestly, everything is fine.'

Looking to the future and considering how each could contribute in maintaining the current good feelings, it was proposed that T needed to be a little more restrained in class and less inclined to complain loudly or needle others, while SB1 and SB2 agreed that showing greater tolerance, as had occurred during the meetings, had been productive. T responded that she was starting to see more 'mutual respect' shown in class. SB2 suggested that everyone needed to be more aware of other people's feelings and rights. All three declared there were no real difficulties beyond those mentioned and that all would be 'friendly' towards each other in the future. All three declared that there was no need for a formal contract, and laughed and giggled together as they left P's office.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

Interviews with the two Suspected Bullies individually indicated that each felt positive about the meetings, that the situation had improved, and that it was a good idea to use the process

with other young people to solve similar problems. SB2 said that he appreciated the chance to talk SB1 was less effusive, but confirmed that 'everything has been fine'.

Not surprisingly, the Target was less positive, claiming that the situation had already improved before the meeting. She stated that she 'felt annoyed because it interrupted a class that I enjoyed'. She added that she thought the Method should only be used 'if the people request it because it might already be resolved.'

The school principal

The principal saw the major task in the school in countering bullying as conveying to both staff and students an understanding and awareness of bullying behaviour, and building a community in which individuals relate positively to each other. He thought this was much more important than seeking to contain the problem by imposing rules. Working with children on the subject of bullying was being undertaken in the context of religious education. Staff were being encouraged to observe closely how students interacted in classrooms. Peer support training was being introduced. Surveys were being regularly conducted with both students and parents. Meetings with parents focusing on the issue of bullying and effective parenting had been held, though they were not always well attended. Linking with parents was seen as particularly important and they were notified when their children were involved in cases of bullying and their collaboration encouraged.

The school anti-bullying policy had been reviewed recently and it was felt that increasing attention should be paid to working constructively with cases of bullying. The main method currently employed was restorative practices, which had proved effective in the hands of capable practitioners. Other approaches were also tried, including assertiveness training for children who were often targeted, mediation in cases of conflict, and, in extreme cases, disciplinary action was sometimes taken. The Method of Shared Concern was seen as consistent with the school's social philosophy and the work of the practitioner in this area was strongly supported.

Commentary on the case

This was a difficult case primarily because the Target had little understanding of how she had, in part, unconsciously provoked the situation, and was reluctant to accept help to resolve the situation which clearly distressed her. Added to this, the ringleader (SB1) felt little empathy towards T and was reluctant to try to improve the situation. This case raises the question of whether victims of school bullying should be helped when they are not interested in receiving help. P decided that the problem needed to be addressed to prevent destructive and hurtful behaviour from continuing. In doing so she committed herself to working with somewhat unwilling participants and a Target who was far from grateful for the help she received. Despite these difficulties, the outcome appears to have been largely – and surprisingly – positive.

This case raises questions about what might be termed 'provocation'. Whatever provocation there was (and the SBs felt there was some) was seemingly unconscious on the part of T, and was related to the annoyance they felt at her seemingly insensitive behaviour. Overcoming the bullying behaviour appears to have been achieved largely through P eliciting from the SBs (SB2 especially) feelings of empathy towards the distress felt by T. P felt very confident that SB2's commitment was genuine and that he 'grew' through the process which allowed him to get in touch with his own feelings from his previous experience of being a victim. P was somewhat less confident that SB1 would not subsequently resume bullying T. The speed and apparent ease with which he modified his behaviour was somewhat perplexing to P, given his defensive attitude. But there seemed to be a genuine self-recognition that he had

'crossed a line' and having recognised this, he would be careful not to do this again with T. P also thought that that T had learnt a little about her own behaviour and felt moderately confident that there would be a reduction of her self-centred behaviour as a consequence of the process.

P reported that the problem was not different from others that she had encountered but the reactions of the students were somewhat different. In this case, the students seemed to 'self correct' very quickly and P was amazed at how easily resolution was achieved. She felt confident that the bullying had been brought to an end, at least as far as SB2 was concerned, and would definitely be using the approach again.

At first glance, the behaviour of the students in the final group meeting may appear surprising. They had in a way distanced themselves from P. Arguably this distancing and avoidance of any show of emotional reconciliation on the part of the SBs and T could be attributed to a desire to deny any 'deeper' feelings over what had happened and to assert their independence of the adult world. According to P, the Method of Shared Concern was successful in this case because it had been possible to completely take blame out of the equation and simply focus on how to interact respectfully in future. The resolution of the problem was important to her because the students involved would be in close proximity to each other for some years to come.

Finally P speculated on sending permission letters to the homes of the students, as required for the research, making the issue seem bigger than 'Ben Hur' in the eyes of SB1 and SB2, and this could have contributed to the speedy solution. In some other respects, she noted, the Method of Shared Concern was similar to the method she had developed during the last four years of Wellbeing Coordination. She had been using restorative practices without the focus on who was responsible for any conflict. She had usually managed to encourage a concern for others in resolving issues of harassment and bullying and this approach had been very successful. P concluded that the work in this project validated the approach she was already using informally.

Case Study 11: Girls 'cyber bullying' another girl in a secondary school

This case involved a serious case of cyber bullying, making use of a website in which a girl was described in highly derogatory and offensive terms. Two offenders were identified, one who provided information for the site and another who supported her and spread the news about the site to other students at the school. The seriousness of the case increased dramatically when a local newspaper discovered the site and quoted from it in such a way that the Target could be identified in the local community.

The case came to light when the practitioner was informed about it by students who had seen the site. The site (www.whozadog.com) has been created to enable people who are angry about someone or something to 'let off steam'.

The website invited people to express their detestation of others, as follows:

Ever had someone piss you off?? Well now is your chance to let the world know. Help us build the worlds largest database of assholes, bastards, pricks, police informants, asshole ex boyfriend, bitch ex girlfriends, lagers, asshole cops, asshole teachers, bastard headmasters, cheating husbands, cheating wife's [sic] bullshitting employees of government [sic] agencies, back stabbing friends, corrupt law enforcement, corrupt lawyers, dodgy tradesmen, shifty real estate agents, dodgy salesmen and anyone else who you think should need a flea bath.

When P was informed about what had been put on the site about T, the offensive information had been there for about two months. It indicated that the Target was a 'slut' who was having indiscriminate sex and constantly getting drunk. P was informed of the two girls who were responsible for the site entry and they were then interviewed by P.

P was an experienced male teacher, an ex-principal who currently had responsibility for the coordination of student wellbeing activities. He was also a trained social worker. His knowledge of the Method of Shared Concern was through attending a workshop and viewing the training video. He had previously dealt with bullying incidents using restorative practices which he saw as being similar in some respects to the Method of Shared Concern, with the latter being less accusatory and involving elements of mediation.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

SB1 was a 16-year-old girl in Year 10 who was intending to leave at the end of the year. The meeting was in P's office (as were all the interviews) and lasted about 20 minutes. According to some reports, SB1 overused alcohol and was sexually active with different partners. She was seen as the ringleader. Initially she was very defensive, but eventually acknowledged that T had been treated badly and that she had played a part in how she had been treated. At the same time, she pointed out that her actions had taken place outside school hours and were therefore of no legitimate concern of the school. She appeared to have some concern, albeit small (rated as 2), for T but believed that T deserved the treatment and what was on the site was in fact accurate. In her mind T's behaviour had provoked the response. The only suggestion SB1 was prepared to make was that the information on the site should be taken off. (For a time the site had been removed, but then it was reinstated, despite P's efforts to have it permanently removed). P suggested a joint meeting with T, to which SB1 offered some resistance. P insisted that it was really necessary and was part of the school's 'duty of care'. To a limited extent, SB1 had accepted some responsibility to help improve the situation and she became more cooperative over time. P had made it clear that he was not intending that anyone would be punished, though there was a possibility that others would want a punishment imposed. At the conclusion of the interview, P felt that some progress had been made.

SB2 was a 15-year-old girl in Year 9, identified as a 'follower'. Her role had been to use her mobile to tell other students about the site. She was more ready to recognise the harmfulness of the treatment T had received and expressed more concern for T (rated as 3), but like SB1 she felt that T had deserved the treatment. Nevertheless, she suggested that she might be able to influence SB1 in a positive way. At the end of the meeting P was more confident of progress having been made.

The Target

A 15-year-old Year 10 girl, T was engaged in a long (one hour) meeting at which notes were taken. She was from a well-respected conservative family, but had, according to some observers, 'gone off the rails' in recent times due to negative peer influence. She was clearly upset, embarrassed and humiliated by what had happened and no longer wanted to be at the school. In no way did she feel at fault. If the perpetrators had had a grievance against her, she believed they should have spoken to her about it.

Further meetings with SBs: There were brief follow-up meetings individually with the perpetrators, and some evidence of remorse and a readiness to meet with T. However, it was

decided that no group meeting of SBs was to be held and there was thus no opportunity for them to formulate with P an agreed plan for use in the final meeting.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

A group meeting with the SBs was not held.

Summit meeting

At the meeting with the SBs and T there was considerable tension. SB1 remained somewhat resistant, SB2 less so. The former persisted in trying to justify her behaviour, charging that T had been acting in an objectionable way with the boyfriends of other students. T wanted to know why she had not been spoken to directly about this matter. P suggested that an apology was needed on the part of SB1 and SB2 before further progress could be made. A written apology was provided and accepted by T.

Further work

In this case it was decided that the school principal should be informed of developments, and also the parents of the students. T's father was very angry and planned to take legal action on behalf of his daughter. However, in view of the apology he agreed not to proceed, which was welcome news for the cyber bullies. P felt that the bullying would not continue.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

SB1 only was interviewed. She indicated that she had been happy to meet with P as she had in the past. She felt she understood the situation better and had been able to help T. In general she had a high opinion of how P worked with students. She believed that the meetings had definitely helped to improve the situation for T and the approach used by P should be applied to other similar cases.

T was also very positive about the meetings, which she believed had helped to improve her situation. She 'was now friends with' SB1 and SB2. She described the situation as 'normal'.

The school principal

The work of the school in countering bullying was described as containing a number of features. The anti-bullying policy developed by the school was seen as useful mainly in providing practical advice on what can be done by staff and students. A version is provided in student diaries. Parents could request copies. Parents were generally invited to meet with the principal when their children were involved in bully/victim problems. No surveys specifically on bullying had been carried out, although students had been asked questions relating to their perceived safety at school. Some discussion of bullying issues was being conducted in Pastoral Care sessions. Negative bystander behaviour, as in egging on bullies, was viewed as a punishable offence. Lunchtime clubs were being provided for children to engage them in constructive activities, such as Chess and Robotics. The library was open and catered for children who wanted to read.

The primary method for addressing cases of bullying was restorative practices, about which staff members had received training. In addition, efforts were being made to assist some children to be more assertive. Conflict between students was sometimes handled using mediation processes. Disciplinary action was applied in extreme or persistent cases of bullying, and both internal and external suspensions had been used. Internal suspension could last for a day or more and was used in place of external suspension when it was believed that

parental control was weak or unreliable. An increasing worry was cyber bullying, given that the responsibility for taking action was being split between parents and schools. The principal noted that removing abusive content from sites which were damaging to members of the school community was difficult or impossible to achieve. Finally, the principal expressed support for the Method of Shared Concern as a means of addressing cases of bullying.

Commentary on the case

This was the only case to report on how cyber bullying had been handled using the Method of Shared Concern. Given that abusive use of the Internet is commonly viewed as a serious or even criminal offence, a legalistic approach may be deemed appropriate. There is also, the principal noted, some uncertainty as to who has the responsibility for dealing with it, especially when the perpetrator(s) operate outside school hours. Nevertheless, in P's opinion the case was handled appropriately and seemingly successfully, without the use of suspensions or the threat of legal action.

In some respects this was not a 'pure' application of the Method of Shared Concern. Although there was no threat of punishment on the part of P, a degree of authoritative pressure was used, for instance, in mandating an apology from the SBs. Given the unusually serious nature of the case, this is understandable. The omission of the group meeting with the SBs is also a deviation from the model. It seems possible that such a meeting could have led to a smoother and more effective final meeting. It would have been useful to have observed interactions between SB1 and SB2, and whether the latter could have exercised some moderating influence.

Clearly the case had further ramifications, not least of which was the need to remove the offensive material on the site. The practitioner reported that the school had been unsuccessful in achieving this and the problem in this regard was ongoing.

Case Study 12: Boys teasing a boy for being 'short' in a primary school

The bullied child was the target of verbal ridicule because of his physical shortness. News of the bullying had come from the boy's parents who had notified the school principal (the practitioner). The bullying had been going on for some months in the school playground. P felt that a direct confrontation of the Suspected Bullies would result in a denial. Two boys were involved.

The practitioner was a school principal of a primary school with 33 years experience working in schools. She has a Bachelor of Education, a Diploma in Student Welfare and a Masters in Theology. Her experience of the Method had been derived from attending a workshop and viewing the training video. Her previous work with bully/victim problems had involved using restorative practices.

Individual interviews

The Suspected Bullies

SB1, an 8-year-old boy in Year 3, was identified as the main perpetrator and interviewed for about 20 minutes. This child had often been observed as disruptive in class. He acknowledged that T was having a difficult time and that he was moderately concerned about the situation (rated 3). He pointed out that another boy (SB2) had also been upsetting him. SB1 did not disclose what he had been doing but was agreeable to 'keeping an eye out for what could be happening'. P was careful not to suggest that any punishment would be applied. Over time, SB1 became more cooperative and P saw the possibility of bringing about a change in his behaviour and his owning the change.

SB2, also a boy of 8 years in Year 3, presented as extremely detached and showed a comparatively low level of awareness or concern (rated 2) in relation to T's situation during the 15-minute interview. He seemed to be a follower of SB1. P formed the impression that SB2 would not or could not focus on the problem. In class he was reported to be unengaged in his work. His teacher found him disruptive and he was often sent out of the class. It seemed probable that his state of mind was due to his being disturbed by events in the home. Recently his parents had divorced and there had been a suicide in the family. P concluded that it would not be useful to involve him further.

The Target

T was an outgoing, somewhat boisterous boy who was very keen on sport. However, repeated comments about his physical shortness had upset him. According to P, his shortness was not extreme and he was not, in fact, the shortest boy in the class. Nevertheless he was very sensitive about the matter. There was no indication that he had in any way acted to provoke the bullying. He was happy enough to become involved in the process.

Subsequent individual meetings with the children were brief and indicated that the SBs had kept away from T and the bullying had ceased. P observed that she had noticed SB1 and T playing happily together and was confident that the problem had been resolved. No group meetings were held.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies and Target

The interviews indicated that the outcome had been positive for T. Taking part in the meetings with P was reported by the SBS as 'OK' and 'really good'. Both saw that the situation had improved. One said: 'People have stopped calling him names.' The other thought he was 'able to make more friends'. Both thought that the process could be used with students with similar problems. The targeted child confirmed that matters had improved: 'They stopped calling me names and picking on me.' He said he felt good about having taken part.

The school principal

In this case the principal **was** the practitioner, as is often the case in primary schools. As noted earlier, she was a very experienced in working in schools. School policy on bullying emphasised positive behaviours, but was supplemented somewhat paradoxically by 'a serious offences policy' which was concerned with situations meriting internal suspensions. The principal was strongly opposed to external suspensions, although they had occasionally been used in cases of serious offending. Periodic surveys of student behaviour were carried out using a peer nomination procedure, which she saw as providing more objective information than self-reports from students. Emphasis was placed as far as practicable on cooperative learning, although it was observed that its use depended on the nature of the cohort, some students requiring more structure. Social skills programs were being implemented by teachers as needed. Surveillance of student behaviour during breaks was seen as important and the playground area had been modified to facilitate it. Peer support activity was not seen as desirable as it led to the 'supporters' thinking that they had a right to boss others around and could 'empower the bullies'. Although it was recognised that promoting better bystander behaviour was desirable, no action had been taken by the school to systematically encourage it. Parents were being contacted in relation to the more serious cases of bullying, but no meetings of parents to address issues of bullying had been held.

In dealing with cases of bullying, restorative practices was the most common approach used. P saw this method as providing the 'first port of call' and was most appropriate when students readily admitted their involvement and acted remorsefully. Where students were not immediately ready to respond and act in this way, P felt that progress could be made using the less confrontative Method of Shared Concern.

Commentary on the case

This was very much an abbreviated application of the Method. Unlike other cases, the Target was neither provocative nor seemingly, in a general sense, lacking in power or resilience. His vulnerability lay specifically in his sensitivity to ridicule about his shortness. P was appropriately non-confrontative and sought to engage the children in one-to-one meetings. However, the approach lacked the wider dimensions of the Method and there was no attempt to explore and improve the relationship between the children involved in a joint meeting. This application raises the question of when it is unreasonable to interview children whose depressed or confused state of mind prevents them from focusing on the issue. When such individual interviews cannot be conducted, neither can subsequent group meetings, and the full application of the Method cannot be undertaken. A meeting between SB1 and T could have been arranged and this might have been useful. However, judging by the post-intervention interviews the outcomes were notably positive.

Case Study 13: Girls bullying two other girls in a secondary school

The situation was one of reported general conflict and bullying within the Year 9 girl student population at a district high school (Kindergarten to Year 10), with some Year 8 and 10 girls allegedly involved. The bullying behaviours reported included threats of physical harm, name-calling, put-downs, and social rejection. The problem was brought to the attention of the school by a group of bystanders who wanted the school to do something about it.

This application was more complex than most, as two students were being targeted by a group. Subsequently, a case of bullying developed in which one of the Suspected Bullies became a Target. The widespread nature of the situation made identifying who was involved and in what role more difficult.

The practitioner was a school psychologist and experienced with the Method of Shared Concern, having attended five days of training with Anatol Pikas in 2004. The practitioner had also conducted train-the-trainer professional learning in Shared Concern with other school psychologists and school staff in Western Australia. The practitioner was brought in by the school as an 'independent' consultant to assist in the implementation of strategies to address wider student behaviour issues at the school.

Individual interviews

Preliminary interviews were held with eleven girls, and three SBs and two Targets were identified for the application of the Method of Shared Concern. SB1 and SB2 were friends and cousins and the leading contributors to the bullying, according to school staff. Bystanders initially reported the situation to staff and indicated that name-calling, persistent put-downs and threats of violence had taken place. Due to a number of factors, including school events and school holidays, there was a four-week gap between the first round of interviews and the second round.

The Suspected Bullies

SB1 was a Year 9 Aboriginal student with a history of peer and family conflict in the community. SB1 was interviewed first as the school staff had identified her as the likely

ringleader in the current situation. Two specific Targets were identified as being on the receiving end of SB1's behaviour. SB1 was initially anxious but became more open when informed that she was not in any trouble. Overall she was confident in her interactions with P. Her concern for the Targets was limited, but she did acknowledge that the situation was bad and needed improving, without mentioning specifically what was actually happening and who was involved. After the practitioner asked her if she was a 'leader' or if she 'followed' others, SB1 was forthcoming in her suggestions about what she could do to improve the situation for those having a hard time. SB1 identified herself as a 'leader' and her suggestions included stopping others from name-calling. She was confident that she could successfully do this. SB1 was happy for P to follow up with her in the new school term in three weeks time. When asked, SB1 reported that she felt that this process could improve the situation.

SB2 was a Year 9 Aboriginal student and SB1's cousin. She was identified as a supporter/assistant of SB1 in bullying others, but to a lesser degree. SB2 was more anxious than SB1, but settled after being reassured by P that these meetings were about improving the situation currently affecting her year group and not about anyone getting into trouble. SB2 did acknowledge that the situation was bad, stating that there was name-calling and 'bitchiness' going on, and was able to identify one of the Targets (T1) by name and situation. (T1 had already been identified by school staff as having a particularly hard time.) SB2 identified herself as a 'follower' and initially struggled to think of something that she could do to improve the situation. With prompting, she suggested that she could say 'hello' and smile. She also responded that this process could improve the situation.

SB3 was a Caucasian Year 9 student who had recently come from another school where she had a history of engaging in peer conflicts and bullying. She was very much involved in the situation and had created conflict – along with SB1 and SB2 – directed towards others, including T1, but not particularly T2. She disclosed during her second interview that she had been friends with SB1 and SB2 when she first arrived at this school. (She had originally been interviewed as a potential Target, but was quickly reassessed as an 'ally' – not necessarily friends with – the first two SBs). She had in fact joined in on the conflicts, including those directed against the first two SBs. SB3 was particularly angry with SB1 and SB2 for their bullying of her friends. During the meeting SB3 was open about her involvement in sustaining the conflicts and in having engaged in the bullying previously, stating that she had since stopped joining in. She was able to identify by name and situation both of the students that the school staff were concerned about, and was able to generate ideas about what she could do to improve the situation for the Targets, including staying out of the situation and not adding to the conflicts affecting the peer group. She was very happy to follow up with P and felt that this process would improve the situation. .

SB4 was a Year 9 Caucasian who had been initially interviewed as a bystander, but was reassessed as having had some involvement in the past. This was based on SB4 admitting that she had been involved in bullying behaviours previously but had not been since the start of the year. This was confirmed by staff and through reports from other students. SB4 acknowledged that the situation was bad and was able to name the Targets. She reported that she would continue to stay out of the situation and say 'hello' to those students having a hard time at school in her year group. Meetings with SB4 were not continued as it was judged that she was not sufficiently involved to warrant further disruption to her schooling. When asked, SB4 reported that she felt that this process could improve the situation.

The bystanders

A further five girls were involved in the initial round of interviews, largely due to the lack of clarity about who was involved and who was being targeted. The bystanders were identified

as such due to their reporting centring on the situation affecting others (friends), rather than themselves. Good information was gathered through the interviews, with each student able to generate something they could do to improve the situation, generally including being more friendly and inclusive of others, supporting their friends, and ensuring they did not get caught up with it. These students reported varying levels of confidence about the process's potential success. Some reported a willingness to 'wait and see', while others remained uncertain, noting that previous attempts to improve the situation had failed. P encouraged each of these bystanders to 'look for improvements' and explained that the students suspected of bullying had already come up with some ideas about what they could do.

The Targets

Two Targets were identified as being victimised by SB1, SB2 and in part by SB3. Both T1 and T2 were willing to discuss the situation; however, T1 was more reluctant and a lot less optimistic about the outcome of the process. T1 and T2 were Caucasian Year 9 students.

T1 was identified as a more 'classical' target, in that there was no clear trigger to the bullying inherent in the target's behaviour such as might be derived from differential social status or previous or current friendships; nor had there been any reported actual or perceived social misdemeanour the group may have been 'punishing' her for. She freely disclosed what was happening to her, including name-calling, put-downs and negative comments, direct threats of violence, intimidation, threats to 'get her' when she left school and threats that they would get others to 'bash' her. T1 did not want to be friends with any of the SBs, but just wanted the bullying to stop. P explained that the students suspected of bullying had already come up with some ideas about what they could do, and that she should 'look for signs of improvement'. She was happy for P to follow up with her in three weeks time and the concept of a group meeting was also raised but received little support.

T2 was a former friend and group member with SB1, SB2 and SB3. T2 had previously engaged in the bullying relatively passively through contributing to the 'out-numbering', that is, building up pressure by being there when bullying took place, especially the bullying undertaken by SB1 and SB2. When T2 left the group SB1 viewed it as a betrayal of friendship, particularly after T2 joined up with some girls whom the group had previously been giving a hard time. T2 was forthcoming about her involvement in the situation affecting her and the wider year group, and was optimistic that the process could assist in improving the situation. P encouraged T2 to 'look for improvements' and explained that the students suspected of bullying had already come up with some ideas about what they could do. She was happy for P to follow up with her in three weeks time and was open to the idea of a group meeting later.

Further individual meetings: A second round of individual meetings was decided upon due to the long-term and complex nature of the bullying and peer conflict situation. This provided a means of measuring the students' potential to go on to the group and summit meetings. The second round of individual meetings scheduled with the three SBs and the two Ts was complicated by one of the Ts (T2) moving away from the school, and by one of the SBs (SB1) being excluded as a social outcast by SB2 and SB3 because of her previous behaviour. T1 and many of the peer group were concerned about this. In addition, a new conflict had arisen. SB1 was now in conflict with SB2 over a former boyfriend of hers who was dating SB2. This resulted in other students not recognising that SB1 was no longer engaged in bullying T1 (or T2 while she was still at the school). SB1 was not at school on the return visit of the practitioner, and this write-up was completed prior to any rescheduled meeting with SB1.

Group meetings

These took place **without** the practitioner being present.

The Suspected Bullies

SB2 and SB3 took it upon themselves to get together, discuss the matter and arrange for a summit meeting. Importantly this meeting included neither P nor SB1, a key member of the original group.

Summit meeting

Without the knowledge of P or school staff, SB2, SB3 and T1 and T2 met and discussed the situation. Apologies were made to the Targets and it was concluded that the problem had been solved without adult support. They also discussed how they might communicate with each other should a problem between them arise again.

Further individual meetings

The outcome of the ‘unofficial’ summit meeting was subsequently reported to P who gathered that the Suspected Bullies had approached T1 and T2 openly and of their own volition. It was claimed that the whole year was now getting along fine and there was no need for a further group meeting.

SB1 had ended up on the outside of the year group’s social circles, possibly due in part to an ongoing difficulty coming to terms with the changing dynamics. She had become a Target. (SB1 was not available for the follow-up meetings, being absent from school, and may need ongoing support.)

Subsequently, P discussed SB1’s situation with each of these students, and using a ‘shared concern attitude approach’ expressed the view that SB1 was now having a hard time and asked them what they could do to improve the situation for her and the whole group. Particular attention was paid to SB3 who seemed likely to help the situation with SB1. SB3 demonstrated a change in attitude during her individual meeting with regard to SB1, such as accepting that SB1 may never apologise for her behaviour, and that in fact if SB3 were in SB1’s position, she would not apologise either. SB3 acknowledged that she had liked SB1 and would like to be friends again.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies

SB2 reported being very happy with the outcome of the process for the wider year group, but now needed to focus on repairing her friendship with SB1 which had broken down after she had said to SB1 that she was not going to name-call/use put-downs, and after she had actively supported T1 in a conflict with SB1. SB2 reported that she would ask for this process to be applied if things started to go bad again.

SB3 reported being very happy with the outcome of the process for the wider year group and T1 in particular, but was still angry with SB1 for what she had said to SB2. SB3 felt that the process engaged upon to resolve the conflicts had been positive.

SB1 was not available for an interview.

The Target

As T2 had left the school, interviews could only be conducted with T1. T1 reported that she had not expected the intervention to work, but was happy with what SB2 and SB3 had done,

reporting that the group was 'now just talking and getting along'. She was still not happy about the situation with SB1 and not all that optimistic that this situation could be helped through the process. She felt that her own situation had improved but there was still a concern she shared with the rest of the year group over the plight of SB1. T1 felt more supported by friends now, including SB2 and SB3. T1 reported that she felt that the school could help if things got bad again.

The school principal

The school principal reported that cultural issues were getting mixed into the peer conflict and bullying issues. There had been threats of violence, even though they might not have eventuated. Statements were made like 'I'm going to bash you'. A lot of these behaviours had been going on for some time and were evident within a school/community environment with high family conflict and disadvantage. The school had used a range of strategies previously, including disciplinary approaches, parent contact, duty teacher strategies, student mediation, and supporting the victimised students through counselling.

Looking at the material provided and the processes undertaken, the principal had indicated that the process was useful in assisting students to solve bullying situations. The principal also reported feeling the skill of the practitioner in working with the kids would have helped the process.

Commentary on the case

This case was much more complex than others. In part, this was because there was more than one original Target and also because the situation changed radically in the course of the intervention, with the supposed ringleader of the SBs becoming a Target. A further feature not present in the other cases was that the SBs took it upon themselves to meet as a group to solve the problem without adult assistance and were partly successful in doing so. However, a further problem developed with the exclusion of SB1 and P felt that steps had to be taken with individuals to try to address this new development.

P saw some positive features in the intervention. A satisfactory outcome was created for T1. (It is unclear how T2 was affected.) P was confident that this case of bullying had been stopped even though the process had not run to plan. She felt that the actions of the students in proceeding with the process in the absence of the practitioner had been positive. In fact, this group of girls had previously demonstrated a tendency to problem-solve independently of adults. However, P reported that she would have felt more confident of a favourable outcome if she had been a part of the summit meeting with the students, and had been able to meet with SB1 again prior to the new conflict commencing, and thus ensure her inclusion in the group meetings.

There had been a problem-solving atmosphere at the initial individual meetings. In accordance with the requirements of the Method of Shared Concern, individual meetings were held initially rather than beginning with a group meeting at which the girls would have argued and reinforced each other. A non-punitive approach was applied. All the SBs initially interviewed by P opened up more when she said they were not in any trouble, and SB2 and SB3 on repeat interviews were very friendly and open with P, as well as being willing to enter into some problem solving regarding SB1's new situation. Individual responsibility was accepted and the situation was improved through the generation of things they agreed to do to make it better. Follow-up meetings with the students contributed towards a solution, even though group meetings were not held with the inclusion of the practitioner. For example T1 clearly felt better and was more optimistic in the repeat interview. However, she had needed

help to transform her ongoing dislike of SB1 into a concern for SB1's isolated situation. Finally, P felt that she was advantaged in not having been involved hitherto in the situation experienced by the students. This had enabled her to show 'true curiosity'.

In future, P thought she would follow up more rapidly, as it was evident that the students were ready to move on and were unwilling to wait for P to complete the process with them. P also recognised the need to be more aware of changes in the balance of power within groups, and the need to manage the potential side effect of the ringleader's power base/status causing conflict within the SB group. Further, P realised that new events – in this case it was revealed that SB2 was dating SB1's former boyfriend – could radically change the situation and a new problem could emerge.

There were both positive and negative aspects to this intervention. The SBs appear to have been strongly motivated by P to solve the problem and the individual meetings were highly successful. However, as P acknowledged, her presence at the group meetings was needed to ensure a comprehensive solution to the problem which included promoting positive relations among all the students in the group.

Case Study 14: A boy bullying a girl of different ethnicity in a secondary school

The case was brought to the attention of the practitioner as part of school processes to address issues of bullying. At the school, incidents of bullying can be reported by teachers using a specific referral form given to the practitioner, who follows up with the case.

In this instance, a class teacher made a referral after the Target, an 18-year-old female student, reported that she and her group of friends were being bullied by a group of Year 9 students, including the ringleader who had, according to the teacher's report, harassed her and made racist comments. The practitioner for some time has routinely adopted a variation of the Method of Shared Concern as the intervention process for all cases referred to him due to his strong support of the 'no blame' aspect of this approach. Since it is considered a strategy which increases the likelihood of eliciting a more positive response from the SBs, thereby making it easier to develop a shared concern for T, the practitioner, due to time constraints and the limited availability of space, has had to resort to a trimmed-down version of the Method which takes the form of short interviews. In this instance, it was decided to work with the ringleader and the main Target only, using the principles but not the specified format of the Method.

P was a male registered teacher with a background in teaching Maths and Science, who had previously worked as a youth worker for the Corrections Department Juvenile Justice team, as well as working for a time at a Department of Education and Training (DET) alternative education centre for students with extremely challenging behaviours. He was the Coordinator for the Respect Each Other (REO) school initiative to reduce bullying in the school and is currently a deputy principal. He had completed the five half days of training in the Method with Anatol Pikas, and applied it in about 50 cases over the past five years mostly informally, with about 10-15 cases conducted formally, and only one which included a summit meeting. He had been involved in training others in the Method. He chose the Method rather than any other approach because he considered it stops students from getting defensive which is reflected in their response and willingness to engage.

Individual interviews

The Target knew the students by sight only and P, drawing on her description, identified a Suspected Bully. Due to time constraints, he elected to concentrate on this one SB in applying a variation of the Method.

The Suspected Bully

SB was a Year 9 male student, approximately 14 years of age, small in stature and of mixed ethnic descent. SB had attendance issues, and when at school had a habit of hanging around the upper school area at break times. He was treated as a 'mascot' by some students of the upper school, possibly because of his shorter than average stature.

The interview lasted for approximately 2-3 minutes. The venue was the Student Services room, a big room with padded chairs and a large desk. SB's attitude during the interview was open and he became more cooperative during the course of the interview. After settling SB into the interview room, P said: 'I'm not going to accuse you of anything. But I'm a bit concerned that some people at this school are not comfortable. Have you noticed?' At this stage SB identified some students, amongst whom he mentioned T. P then suggested: 'I think everyone deserves to be comfortable. In fact I'm keeping an eye on these students who are not so comfortable, and I would like someone to help me to do this.' To reinforce the point, P stated: 'I know sometimes people develop a history of being nasty to people, and as they develop, it becomes a part of their reputation. I'm wondering if you can help me work with these students.' SB responded: 'Yes, sir.' P then confirmed that they would both know what was happening in the school with regard to bullying, and that SB's role of helping P to keep an eye on the situation would involve letting P know of any incident SB might see. SB was also empowered to 'tell them to stop' if he saw someone bullying another student. It would also be a good strategy, P told SB, to get the group to go to another area to avoid trouble. SB's response to all these suggestions was neutral. SB seemed more worried about being seen in a week's time than taking on the personal responsibility for bullying incidents. SB had no idea that T was the subject of the interview and did not indicate either particular concern for T's situation or suspect there was a 'dobber' of whom to be wary.

During the course of the interview, P had also informed SB that racist comments were being made against T's group. He stated that the people making those comments might not have realised that they had hurt the feelings of T's group. SB appeared to listen but he did not acknowledge any difficulties or concern for the T group or others in general. SB did agree, however, to help P keep an eye on the T group. SB was aware that no punishment was being considered as a result of the interview, but he was made aware that if he did not carry out his declared intention to help keep an eye on the bullying situation, there would be ongoing talks with P.

The Target

T was a new student who was previously in the Intensive English Centre, and still had language problems, due to English being her second language and only recently acquired. Her class teacher had reported racist taunts, harassing on the way to the toilets and on her way home when someone kicked her bag while it was on her back. Similar attacks had occurred during recess and lunch, toilet breaks, and both to and from school, and were carried out by a number of students of both sexes. Initially, P approached T, a Year 11 female student who was approximately 18 years of age, small in stature and of mixed ethnic descent, to request a physical description of SB, as T and T's group did not know SB's name. Two short interviews were held with T and each lasted for approximately 2-3 minutes. Preceding the second interview, P took T out of class and asked: 'Do you know why I am seeing you?' She replied: 'Yes, because I'm getting a hard time.' No difficulties arose from the first interview, as T was willing to provide a physical description of SB and did not seem anxious about providing the information. T's attitude during the second interview was initially concerned and worried, but she became more cooperative during the course of the interview, and seemed thankful someone was following up the bullying.

Follow-up meetings: One week later P checked with SB to find out how things went. SB said he had kept an eye out for students who might be uncomfortable in the school because of bullying. He reported that he had not witnessed any problems for T's group and reported steering his group away from this group. The interview lasted approximately 1-2 minutes.

A further meeting was held with T, and ongoing enquiries had been made in the interim by her teacher. P spoke with T every week for 3 weeks for 1-2 minutes and also with the teacher, who reported that no further incidents had been brought to her attention.

In this interview P asked how T things were going in general. She replied that things were going better. When asked if the issue had resurfaced, she said it hadn't. T then said: 'Thank you for keeping an eye on me.' Recent inquiries about 'How're you going?' have been met with a positive response.

Group meetings

In this case no group meetings were held as only one SB had been involved in an individual meeting, and it had been decided to employ an approach in which the SB and Target did not meet.

The school principal

When asked about the main challenges in dealing with cases of bullying in the school, the principal responded that a lot of the bullying was subtle, as cyber bullying through email and SMS was making bullying messages so much easier to transmit. She remarked that in the lower school the bullying was overt; in the upper school it was more covert, and therefore less able to be easily detected. The school had put in place many strategies to counter bullying. She went on to make the following points:

- There was a culture of vigilance by class teachers and other staff.
- The school had a countering bullying plan.
- The school had the REO (Respect Each Other) program.
- Year 8 had a peer support program.
- The school psychologist and the chaplain were involved in helping disseminate anti-bullying information through the curriculum presented to Year 8s.
- Parents were brought into the problem-solving process.
- 'Fleuro' jackets for teachers on yard duty facilitate ready access to staff at break times.
- Reduced time at lunch and recess has been implemented.
- The school psychologist and the chaplain were involved in mediation between students in conflict on a case-by-case basis.
- Restorative practices underpin the behaviour management plan and practices.
- The chaplain coordinates friendship groups and social skills training, with a focus in 2008 on Year 11 boys.

The principal strongly supported the Shared Concern Method. Although the principal admitted to instant results at times, it was not considered the panacea for all instances of bullying in the school. Used in tandem with the audit process (which encourages bystanders to report who might not otherwise do so, not seeing it as their responsibility), the Method was seen as extremely useful. The principal considered that training in the Method was essential to fuel the referral process.

Commentary on the case

This handling of this case was a radical departure from the usual approach. It nevertheless involved some of the underlying principles of Shared Concern. The approach was non-blaming and focused upon producing a change in SB's behavior by asking him to take a collaborative role in observing and reporting to P on any bullying behaviour he might observe. In some respects, it appears that this approach was successful; according to P, the intervention was successful. SB no longer made racist comments towards T's group, although he continued to make them elsewhere. T appeared to be happier about the situation. To some extent the improvement in SB's behaviour towards T may have been due to his limited access to T's group. SB had been banned from the upper school area where he had been gaining inappropriate reinforcement for his behaviours. In addition, T's group had chosen to remove themselves from this area during recess and lunch. It is therefore unclear how much the abbreviated use of the Method of Shared Concern had had the intended effect.

Importantly, there were no opportunities in this application for bringing about a mending of the relationship between the bully and victim, as the two of them were not brought together. Moreover, as indicated above, part of the outcome may have resulted from disciplinary actions that reduced SB's access to the Target. Not surprisingly, P expressed reservations about a successful outcome in view of the shortened process, the time constraints, and the fact that there were two groups involved and the decision to use a representative SB and T from these two groups was an unknown quantity.

Case Study 15: Girls multiple bullying in a secondary school

The case began when T was referred to the school psychologist (practitioner) by the school nurse for possible anxiety-related and general coping issues. Parental permission for the practitioner to see T was granted. T reported then that she had been verbally teased and had mean tricks played on her for most of the year. Psychology records revealed that in previous years she had experienced difficulties in her social relationships with peers. T was described as being young for her age, overly emotional and displaying inappropriate social behaviours that tended to alienate her peers (eg nose picking).

Discussions with the head of sub-school and class teachers revealed that there was widespread frequent, but subtle, low-level verbal teasing of T by a group of girls in her classes. Teacher reprimands had not stopped the bullying, leaving the teachers feeling powerless.

The practitioner is an experienced school psychologist, having worked in the field since 1984, and is experienced with the Shared Concern Method. The practitioner attended the five days of training with Anatol Pikas in 2004, as well as having attended previous training in the field. The practitioner has also conducted training in Shared Concern with other school psychologists and school staff in Western Australia. The practitioner is the contact school psychologist for this school and has been working there for nearly two years.

Individual interviews

Two students were identified through reports from T as involved in bullying her, with two other students identified as being mean to T but likely to be more like bystanders. All of the girls were 15 years old and attending Year 10 with T. T reported that SB1 was mean on a scale of 10 out of 10, while SB2 was described as 9 out of 10. The two bystanders were rated 5 out of 10 (By1) and 4.5 out of 10 (By2) respectively. T further described SB2 as 'someone else the practitioner should talk to who could help to solve the problem'.

The Suspected Bullies

SB1 was identified as the ‘ringleader’ in the bullying situation and presented as cautious but cooperative, acknowledging that T was having a hard time. Concern for T was evident, but reserved. SB1 was able to generate some suggestions to assist T and agreed to the idea of a meeting with a group of other individuals being interviewed and T at a later time.

SB2, identified as the ‘assistant’ in the bullying situation, presented as honest and direct, and was generally cooperative. SB2 demonstrated a concern for T’s situation. SB2 was able to generate some suggestions to assist T and agreed to the idea of a meeting with a group of other individuals being interviewed and T at a later time. Overall, the practitioner reported that the 5 minute interview with each of the SBs had gone well.

The bystanders

Both By1 and By2 presented as helpful and acknowledged that T was having a hard time. By1 was able to suggest some things that may assist T. Both agreed to the idea of a meeting with a group of other individuals being interviewed and T at a later time. The interviews with By1 and By2 each lasted about 5 minutes.

The Target

T presented as friendly, open and forthright. She described incidents where jokes were played on her, where she was teased (pencil shavings put in her hair, stationery borrowed and not returned, and frequent requests to borrow her belongings as a joke). T displayed general social skill deficits: she lacked awareness about the impact on others of her own behaviour, and tended to overact when frustrated by behaving aggressively or crying. She displayed socially inappropriate behaviour (such as nose picking in public) and tended to fixate on certain topics. T was willing and unconcerned about the proposed intervention.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

The members attending this meeting were SB1, By1 and By2; the latter attended somewhat reluctantly, complaining to her teacher about ‘having to go to the meeting’. (SB2 was not currently available having gone on overseas trip.) SB1 reported that she had ‘ignored her’ (T), but then replied to prompting from P that she had said ‘hi’, and that T seemed happier. By1 reported that ‘no-one is teasing her [T] now’. She added: ‘Some people had started to tease her, but no one was reacting.’ By2 reported that everyone stays away from her (T) and that a group meeting could help. By2 also reported that T made critical comments about other students not doing their work in class. The group had all supported the idea of a meeting with T (summit meeting) once SB2 had returned to school from her trip.

Summit meeting

In preparation for the summit meeting P met briefly with T. P discovered that some progress had been made. It was confirmed that the other girls were largely ignoring her, though they had sat with her in Maths and had been ‘sort of’ friendly. T complained that a few negative remarks had been made, for instance, by By1 after she had failed to catch a ball in cricket. Given the comments made by By2 in the group meeting, P advised T not to make comments to the other girls about not doing their work, as this might be causing some difficulties. Despite some issues still remaining, T reported feeling positive about the idea of a group (summit) meeting with the other students.

Unfortunately, this meeting failed to go ahead. SB2 had now returned from her overseas trip, and she and By1 were in conflict with SB1 and By2. This internal conflict escalated and required a new intervention. Plans for further meetings in regards to the original issue and

progress regarding T were revised and felt to be counterproductive, given the outcome for T was achieved. It was determined that the group's internal conflict may only serve to contaminate this outcome.

Post-intervention interviews

T reported positive outcomes during the initial meetings and the intervening period between the meetings. The bullying appeared to have stopped. T reported feeling very positive about the idea of a summit meeting and would be happy to undergo a similar process if issues started up again. The students formerly involved in the bullying reported feeling largely positive about the meetings.

The school principal/head of sub-school

It was reported that the head of sub-school is familiar with the Shared Concern Method and supportive of its continued use in countering bullying.

Commentary on the case

The practitioner reported that in her experience the case was typical in that those suspected of bullying changed their behaviour towards T and ceased to bully her. But she was surprised at the willingness of T to participate in a group meeting, and at the unexpected collapse of the bullying group's friendships due to the shifted power dynamic.

The practitioner reported that the bullying was diffuse, subtle and not supported by all students in the group. Two could be defined more as bystanders than actually involved in the bullying, at least initially. However the group's dynamics shifted, with By1 assuming a degree of power and excluding SB1, the original 'ringleader'. T was supported in developing better self-awareness and improved social skills, and that may have reduced the likelihood of her becoming a target for further bullying.

Although the case had not gone precisely to plan, the practitioner reported that the same process would be followed again. The practitioner noted that delay in bringing together the members of the group formally involved in the bullying may have resulted in the shifting dynamics, preventing movement towards more positive ways of interacting. The case demonstrated how quickly group dynamics can shift, and that groups involved in bullying are often built on a foundation of fear and obligation. They are often unsafe environments for the group members, let alone the targets of their bullying.

Despite the absence of a final group meeting or summit to resolve the situation in which T was being bullied by group members, the outcome was positive for T in that the bullying stopped. This suggests that the Method can be effective on occasions without the use of a final group meeting.

Importantly, this case illustrates one of the difficulties facing those who intervene to stop bullying. Relationships within groups are fluid, and can change and lead to new problems of bullying arising in the course of an intervention. In the present case, division within the group deterred the practitioner from holding a final meeting that could have improved and sustained better relationships within the group.

Case Study 16: Boys bullying a boy in a special school

This case concerns the bullying of a student by his peer group at an alternative education setting for students highly at risk and alienated from education due to challenging behaviours and non-attendance issues. The Target, a 13-year-old male student, was experiencing low

level bullying such as name-calling, pretend punching withdrawing the punch at the last second (activating the startle reflex), tripping and so on. As a result, the staff reported their concerns to the school psychologist and the Shared Concern Method was implemented.

In this case there were two practitioners. One was a female registered school psychologist (P1) who had six years work experience in school psychology (with 8½ years experience in other human services industries). She had been with the program for three years. She was trained in the Method and had attended a training workshop on train-the-trainer.

The second practitioner (P2) was a male staff member trained by the school psychologist. He was a registered school teacher and former tradesperson, with a Bachelor of Education and a Graduate Diploma in Psychology and 20 years school experience. He was the program manager and skilled in behaviour management. He had been with the school for two years.

Individual interviews

SB4 was identified as the leader or 'ringleader' of the group and was also consistently identified by other group members as someone who should be interviewed. Three other students were interviewed, each with varying degrees of involvement in the situation affecting T. All four SBs were 13-year-old males of Australian background, and non-Indigenous. They were all involved in the first series of interviews.

The Suspected Bullies

These students were interviewed in the program manager's office, which was spacious. The school psychologist interviewed one student, SB4, observed by the program manager, who then interviewed the other three students. Each interview lasted about 5-7 minutes and notes were taken.

SB1 was cooperative and open during the interview but did not admit to any bullying behaviours on his own part. He did not hesitate, however, to report the behaviours of SB4 and another student, who, he said, on occasions had switched off T's computer to annoy him. He claimed that in another school they had both attended, SB4 had also bullied a boy who wore glasses and SB1 stated he had protected that boy and could do the same for T. He suggested his role might be to stand near T in future and protect him. He recognised that T was having a difficult time and put all the blame on SB4. He seemed concerned about T's condition. He did not, however, accept any personal responsibility for the bullying, preferring to make the interview an opportunity for a personal attack on SB4. He did not consider that T's behaviour was provocative, but agreed that T was 'different'. He was willing to assume some responsibility to help improve the situation in the future and suggested ways in which he could help T by confronting SB4 and standing up for T. His demeanour suggested that he understood that punishment was not being considered as a result of the interviews.

SB2 was cooperative and open during the interview and said he had observed the bullying behaviour of the boys towards T, especially that of SB4. He remarked on how SB4 picked on T and would play 'cruel jokes'. SB2 commented that T did nothing to provoke the taunting but stated 'T doesn't talk a lot, he's just quiet'. He remarked that no-one would pick on him (SB2), as he would stand up for himself. He pointed out that even though the boys thought T was weak, he thought T was the one who was stronger 'in here' (pointing to his temple). When asked if there was anything he could do to help T in the situation, SB2 stated he could tell the others to leave T alone as he had done at his previous school when a similar case of bullying had occurred. SB2's relaxed manner and

his recent arrival at the program would have made it evident that no punishment was being considered as a result of the interviews.

SB3 was cooperative and open during the interview and claimed not to be part of the bullying. He stated that instead: 'I protect T, I always back him up and I talk to him. I'm his friend.' He recognised that T was having a difficult time and described how SB4 would pick on T and 'pretend to go and hit him'. He seemed anxious to put all the blame on SB4. He stated he did not feel that T's behaviour was provocative, but some of the bullying occurred because 'T does not fight back'. He was willing to assume some responsibility to help improve the situation and said that in future he would tell SB4 to 'back off'. SB3 seemed confident that he was part of the solution and not part of the problem, and his relaxed and confiding manner suggested he was aware that no punishment was being considered as a result of the interviews.

SB4 (the suspected ringleader) was cooperative, but not open, at the meeting. He acknowledged that he hadn't been getting on very well with T, but was not at all concerned about T's situation. He suggested that T had been provocative in the way he behaved, saying that he brings it on himself because he is a 'wimp, quiet, doesn't do much, doesn't fit in'. In terms of suggestions on how the situation could be improved, SB4 said he could leave T alone. When asked: 'Do you mean ignore him?', he said: 'No, just don't talk to him unnecessarily.' SB4 agreed to help improve the situation but did not admit to any personal responsibility. SB4 seemed wary there could be a trap in the conversation and may have suspected punishment could be an expected result from the exercise, even though he was assured otherwise.

The Target

T had been referred to the alternative program by a mainstream school, as he was consistently non-compliant, becoming verbally and physically aggressive if pushed to comply. His behaviours had changed from those of a non-compliant and very angry student in the mainstream to exhibiting total compliance in the program. A short meeting was held with T (7 minutes) and notes were taken. He was open and cooperative during the meeting. T admitted to being bullied in the past but did not acknowledge any current bullying and did not perceive a problematic situation. He said that SB3 had protected him from bullying in the mainstream school, but this was no longer necessary. His perspective on the current bullying, compared to what he had been used to in the mainstream, may have led him to conclude that the current situation was not as severe. In addition, T had been known to attend the program smelling like 'old wet clothes'. T is a quiet student, happy to work alone and stay back to help staff, and his small stature, with some effeminate gestures, may have contributed to him being perceived as 'different'.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

A group meeting was held with the group of students involved in the bullying. The co-practitioners (the school psychologist and the program manager) jointly facilitated the meeting. The boys were reassured that this was not a meeting where anyone was in trouble. The group was then asked how the week had gone for T since it had been decided to take a few positive steps to make his school life better. The boys were slightly wary to begin with, especially SB4. When asked how they had succeeded in being friendly towards T, each in turn asserted they had carried out their stated intention to act more positively towards him. When asked how they might take this one step further and actually let T know he was a valued member of the group, with a little coaxing, the boys came up with the idea of telling T something positive about himself. When prompted, each boy thought up a positive statement

they might say to T if he were 'sitting right here'. The boys were in accord with the inclusion of T in the group to give them an opportunity to pass on their positive messages, so it was agreed to go ahead right away with the summit group meeting.

Summit meeting

P2 had a few seconds with T as he collected him from his workstation for the meeting. He reassured T that they were meeting to reach a positive solution to what some had perceived as a situation which might lead to some not-so-nice outcomes if it was not resolved there and then. T came in looking a bit startled, but was soon at ease. The mood of the meeting was fairly relaxed and casual, though each spoke in turn and quite formally, as they had decided in the earlier meeting to do. SB1 said: 'I think you have a kind heart.' T acknowledged this with a nod and a smile. The statement and softening of SB1's features was seen as genuine from one not practised in the art. SB2, mostly a bystander and newcomer to the group, expressed the thought that T, although quiet, was stronger 'up here' (pointed to his forehead as he spoke). SB3 said to T, convincingly, with eye contact: 'I think you have a good personality.' SB4, identified previously as the ringleader, said: 'I think you are good at Maths.' None of the staff could recall SB4 ever smiling prior to this moment, his usual expression being either neutral or a pronounced scowl, with head lowered, and very little eye contact. However, on making his statement, he looked at T, then around the group. When asked about an ongoing plan, they all committed verbally to a plan proposed by SB3: 'When people pick on us we go to the teachers and talk.'

Follow-up meetings: P2 (the Program Manager) followed up with T about a week after the summit meeting to check how he was getting on. P2 reported that the situation had improved and there was an ongoing positive attitude towards T from the whole group.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies

A school-based representative conducted follow-up meetings with each of the SBs. She has a degree in Social Work and a Diploma in Youth Work and is a teacher in the program. SB1 commented on how the students 'probably listened because after the meeting T had a big smile, and he joined in a game of basketball'. SB2 remarked how it went 'real good, nobody feels blamed, just trying to find out how to improve everything'. SB3 thought it 'might stop T being picked on'. He particularly liked how: 'Everyone sat down together. T looked happier because we all said nice stuff.' He also thought 'it might stop another person being picked on'. SB4 said he felt it went all right. He said he felt comfortable. He noted how 'T seemed happier. Everyone's being nice to him.' He said: 'Good, me realising, doing it, T feels better, so do I.' The Target was unavailable for comment.

The deputy principal

When asked about the main challenges in dealing with cases of bullying in the school, the deputy principal responded that there has to be a greater balance between accepting higher levels of misbehaviour in response to expert advice on student inclusivity, and taking into consideration the factors which contribute to a student's acting-out behaviours. He added that the school had a strong Pastoral Care focus and has begun to develop a new countering bullying plan.

When asked what work has been done in the school to prevent bullying, the deputy principal outlined some strategies including:

- development of a new countering bullying plan
- systematic surveillance of student behaviour

- surveys on bullying behaviour (students, staff, parents)
- curriculum for classrooms on preventing and addressing bullying
- development of peer support processes; encouragement of improved bystander behaviour
- a Respect All People program
- yard duty structures and processes, including the wearing of fleuro vests and walkie-talkies
- improved playground design, and programs involving the design and appropriate placement of play equipment
- lunchtime and after school clubs.

Commentary on the case

Both practitioners agreed that having two people in accord with both the program and the process was an advantage, as they were able to bounce off each other and when students were not quite convinced with one view they might be open to a different view. Both were surprised at how amenable to inclusion the boys were. All seemed quite prepared to engage in the process and there was no evidence of disengagement whatsoever. The practitioners considered that good progress had been made. Confidence regarding the outcome was reinforced by the apparent genuineness of the participants, the renewed understanding of the situation they had been involved in, and the recognition that some changes in thinking and action needed to be made by each of them personally.

Many of the boys referred to in the program display an overdeveloped sense of ‘justice’, which tends to get them into trouble. It was thought that this might explain their unanimous willingness to become involved in the Shared Concern process. It gave the students a chance to have a say in the outcome rather than have someone else's decision or opinion about the situation imposed on them. The level of bullying was quite mild, but the fact that the Suspected Bullies and Target felt so good about themselves in taking part was certainly not predicted by either practitioner.

In addition to the changes brought about by improvements in the SBs’ social attitudes and behaviour, a practical improvement in T’s situation was made. It was realised that T’s workstation was the closest position to a thoroughfare and this made him an easy target for taunts and gestures from passersby. This led the program manager to move him to a computer further away from the traffic flow as a further preventative measure.

This report provides a very positive example of how the Method of Shared Concern can be used to resolve a problem of bullying, even among students whose behaviour was often considered too extreme for a mainstream school setting. An important element in the process was the preparation of the SBs in the group meeting for the summit meeting, at which they were able to speak positively and reassuringly to the person they had targeted. The use of two practitioners in addressing this case has both pros and cons. Clearly the practitioners felt that it was helpful for them to share with each other their perceptions of what was happening in the group. At the same time, it may be questioned whether the presence of two staff members at the group meetings might have provided an element of perceived coercion that runs counter to the philosophy of Shared Concern. Moreover, for many schools where counselling resources are scarce, the use of more than one practitioner for a case may be impractical. Finally, the reluctance of the Target to acknowledge that he had a problem, despite obvious signs that he was being bullied, was alarming, and challenges school authorities to discover ways in which they can encourage students to seek help when they clearly need to do so.

Case Study 17: Girls bullying another girl with perceived social skill deficits in an upper primary school

This case concerns a second attempt with a group of students to address a bullying problem using the Method of Shared Concern. The first attempt had involved a girl who was verbally harassed by four girls during a school excursion. Individual interviews with those concerned had been carried out and a positive outcome achieved. But it was not followed up. However, some work was undertaken with the Target of the bullying, involving a series of one-on-one counselling sessions with the school psychologist during the year to work on social skills and self-confidence.

Later in the year, a serious bullying incident occurred between T and four other girls. After some verbal harassment at lunchtime, after school four girls teased and threw sticks at T. A teacher intervened to stop this incident. T then went to the toilets and was followed by the other students who again verbally harassed her, and two of the girls punched T. Both these girls were suspended for two days while the other students received in-school suspensions. After reported teasing and exclusion of T by Year 6/7 classmates, it was decided that the full Shared Concern process would be implemented by including six participants identified by the deputy principal as involved in bullying T.

The practitioner was a female school psychologist with 10 years experience working in schools. She had attended the five half-day training sessions with Anatol Pikas in 2004, and had applied the Method of Shared Concern over a period of 5 years in approximately 20 cases, as well as training Student Services staff at various high schools. P chose the Method because she had found it to be successful in the past and was conversant with and comfortable using the process.

Individual interviews

The interviewees were girls in Year 6/7 approximately 12 years of age. There was no obvious ringleader. The bullying had taken place at school in the class, the playground and after school. The process was completed with only five of these students, as one girl was absent from school. One of the five girls suspected of bullying had taken part in the previous Shared Concern process while another was one of the two girls who had punched T in Term 2. The remaining three students had not previously had any contact with the school psychologist or participated in a Shared Concern Method process before. The interviews took place in a meeting room at the school.

The Suspected Bullies

SB1 was identified as a 'reinforcer' and interviewed for 10 minutes. She was cooperative and open during the interview, becoming more so as the interview progressed. She stated that 'some people don't like T, some people tease her'. She showed moderate concern regarding T's situation. She did not take responsibility for the bullying and gave as a defense for the actions of her peers that 'she smells unpleasant'. She thought that it would help if T moved house. On reflection, she volunteered that she would 'tell others to leave her [T] alone'. SB1 agreed to follow through on her proposed actions and to attend a summit meeting. SB1 seemed relaxed during the interview and there was no indication that she thought punishment might be considered as a result of the interview.

SB2 was identified as an 'assistant' and was interviewed for about 15 minutes. She was cooperative and open during the interview, remaining the same as the interview progressed. She stated that T never really had friends. She also remarked that T didn't go to camp, and reflected that she might have felt uncomfortable, adding: 'She puts her head down and mopes

away'. She was quite concerned about T's situation, and confirmed that people teased her and say things like: 'Would you go out with this person?' She added that 'everyone thinks she smells'. Although SB2 did not take responsibility for the bullying, she did state: 'I don't talk to her much. I'm not her friend.' SB2 also named the body odour problem as justifiable provocation for the teasing. SB2 suggested when prompted: 'In Year 5, I was really nice to her. I could ask her how she feels.' When P suggested SB2 should not join in with any teasing and should tell others to 'leave her alone', SB2 agreed to do so. At this stage SB2 seemed to be aware of how T must be feeling. SB2 was not concerned that punishment might be considered as a result of the interview. She agreed to attend a summit meeting and to carry out her promised actions. She seemed to display a greater concern for T and awareness of what to do to help as a result of the interview.

SB3 was identified as a 'reinforcer' and interviewed for 10 minutes. She was cooperative and open during the interview, becoming more so as the interview progressed. Commenting on T she stated: 'She's scared of coming to school because of the fight last term.' When asked how T might be feeling, SB3 answered: 'She might be feeling sad or lonely.' SB3 was moderately concerned about T's situation and said: 'There's still a bit of teasing going on.' She said that some people teased her but named two students who talked to her. She then admitted that she talked to her sometimes because she was always alone. When asked about provocation, SB3 responded in the negative but did mention the body odour problem. When asked if she could suggest ways to help T, SB3 suggested that she should stop teasing T, should compliment her if she did something well and encourage her and help her, for example, at sport. SB3 had clearly taken some responsibility to help improve the situation and she seemed to have a sense of direction regarding how to help. She did not appear to be concerned about punishment and agreed to attend a summit meeting.

SB4 was identified as an 'assistant' and interviewed for about 5 minutes. She was a little anxious to begin with but was more cooperative than in the previous Shared Concern interview in Term 2. She remained much the same as the interview progressed. She stated: 'She [T] looks happier than before and only smells sometimes.' She was only a little bit concerned about T's situation and disclosed, 'there is still a little bit of teasing happening'. SB4 also considered the fact that T 'smells a bit' as provocation which resulted in teasing. When asked, SB4 could not think of any ways T could be helped, but when prompted, agreed not to join in with any teasing and to treat T nicely. It appeared that she had taken a little more responsibility for her contribution to T's situation, especially in contrast to the last time she was in a Shared Concern interview, when she had accepted no responsibility. Because of her previous experience with the process, it was assumed that SB4 was not concerned that punishment might be considered as a result of the interview. She agreed to take part in a summit meeting, and a slight increase in concern for the victim was a perceived outcome of the interview.

SB5 was identified as a 'reinforcer' and interviewed for about 10 minutes. She was cooperative and open during the interview, remaining the same as the interview progressed. She stated: 'She [T] looks like she's unhappy.' When considering T's emotional state she proposed T was 'sad and quiet'. She exhibited quite a lot of concern about T's situation and when asked about how T had been treated, she responded by saying: 'Everyone says she stinks, but she just walks away.' SB5 did not see any provocation on T's part contributing to the bullying. She suggested: 'If someone's teasing her I could just say stop.' She stated her intention not to join in on the teasing and gave an undertaking to encourage her friends to walk away when tempted to bully. It was clear that SB5 had taken on some personal responsibility to help improve T's situation, as she gave realistic suggestions of her own volition in an attempt to contribute to the solution of T's problem. Her lack of any appearance

of anxiety or nervousness indicated she was not afraid that punishment might result from her participation in the interview. She agreed to attend a summit meeting, and her constructive strategies to help the victim indicated that some progress had been made as a result of the interview.

The Target

T was a 12-year-old Anglo-Australian girl in Year 7. She was relatively tall for her age and slightly overweight. She generally kept to herself, rarely smiling and walked around with her head bowed down. She socialised with much younger children in the playground. Both teachers and students had complained about T's body odour.

T was interviewed for about 20 minutes. Since she had been involved in one Shared Concern process with P and in one-on-one counselling sessions, she was comfortable in the interview setting. Although she has been bullied on an ongoing basis for the past few years, she expressed only a moderate degree of frustration, and although clearly unhappy, showed no undue emotional reaction to discussing the situation. She disclosed that ongoing teasing, mainly by two boys and also by a number of girls, was the main problem. It was not felt that T had provoked the bullying in any way. She was agreeable, but not overly confident, that the Shared Concern process would work, but did report that she was feeling more confident in standing up for herself and others. Even though only one hour had passed between the time P spoke to the bullying students and the interview with T, she reported that she thought 'they [the SBs] had gone crazy because they were talking to her'. After the concept of the summit meeting was explained to her, T willingly agreed to participate.

Group meetings

The Suspected Bullies

Two days had passed since the individual interviews. The atmosphere was chatty and sociable and there was a feeling that the meeting was a pleasant event. The exception was SB4 who remained reserved and quiet. She had been in the Shared Concern process before and previously had seemed resistant, but this time she did not show resistance, only reservation. The students did not require ground rules to be set as they were already acting positively and being polite. One talked about making compliments, so P suggested they needed to be genuine. There was a general sense of collaboration and a willingness to be friendly. SB2, who had been bullied herself and was a major contributor to the current actions against T, said she could imagine how T must feel. She added: 'We are going to be finishing Year 7 soon and when we look back on primary school, we want to have happy memories and for T to feel OK and us to feel good about ourselves.'

Summit meeting

During the course of the group meeting, the SBs were told by P of the plan to communicate positively with T. The atmosphere was positive, although T was reserved. This simply reflected her usual demeanour. The students said they were ready to stop their negative behaviour towards T. Some mediation was still required in the situation involving the group of boys who had been bullying T and had not been included in the process. Suggestions were made by the girls to tell the teacher if the boys teased T and to ignore them if they annoyed everyone. No written contract was completed, but rather a verbal contract was created. As an outcome of the meeting there was more acceptance of T and more awareness about little things individuals could do to reduce bullying. Although T had been reluctant to speak at first, at the conclusion of the meeting, when asked if she would like to say anything, she took the opportunity to deny one of the things about which she had been harassed: namely that L was her boyfriend. She stated quite firmly: 'I **don't** like L!' This assertive response was to set the record straight, and appeared to be accepted as such by the group.

Follow-up meetings: At a second meeting with T, she reported that things were going much better for her as a result of the intervention. She still had some problems to work her way through but was more confident and willing to engage in a solution-focused approach than previously.

Progress was also evident in the reports obtained from the suspected bullies. SB1 indicated she had kept to her agreement not to tease T and to tell others to leave T alone, and she reported she had not witnessed any other teasing. P noticed that both SB1 and SB2 were being friendlier to T. P considered that SB2 was now contributing to the solution. SB3 was also supportive and complimented (genuinely) T during the summit meeting. SB4 did not seem to have joined in any teasing since the interview. (It was she who had suggested at the summit meeting that T should tell the teacher if boys were still teasing her.) It was clear that SB5 had carried out her intention of showing more friendliness to T and contributing to the solution of T's problems.

Post-intervention interviews

The Suspected Bullies

The question: 'How did you feel the intervention went?' was answered as follows. SB1 stated: 'It was handled really well, we all got along.' SB2's response was: 'I liked it because I could tell P how I felt and things I could do. She helped me work things out.' SB3 remarked: 'Good. I had a little bit of shame talking to someone I didn't know.' SB4 said: 'It was good 'cause we are kinder to T and we are not teasing her any more.' SB5 stated: 'It went really good – made T feel more comfortable and happier.' The students unanimously agreed that the Shared Concern intervention had improved the situation. When asked in what way, responses included the fact that everyone now gets along, that T is happier, that she hasn't been bullied, that 'she is starting to smile a bit more', 'she contributes more', 'she is more outspoken, not hiding away' and 'T knows we are not going to tease her'. When the SBs were asked if it was a good idea to use this process with other young people in the same situation, their answers reflected a maturity not expected from Year 7 students. Answers included: 'Yes 'cause then people can get what they need and work on what they need to change' and 'It was good at our age.' Responses to the question: 'How do you feel the (summit) meeting you had with T went?' showed a high level of sympathetic engagement on the part of the students. SB1 replied: 'That actually went really good 'cause we told T about the boys and how they were trying to get to her – so just ignore them.' SB2 responded: 'It was pretty easy. I was comfortable. I know how T felt.' SB3 stated: 'OK, good. It was kind of easy and a little bit hard.' SB4 remarked: 'It was good 'cause we told her stuff about how we felt about her.' SB5 commented: 'Good. It was good 'cause we talked about lots of things and let her express herself in front of us.'

The Target

When the question was put to the Target: 'How do you feel it went?' her reply was: 'Pretty good. Better than I thought it would be. I thought there may be more fights.' She was also convinced the situation had improved for her in that the girls are being friendlier to her and sticking up for her. T expressed a positive response to the question of whether it was a good idea to use the Shared Concern process with other young people in the same situation, when she replied: 'Yes, because it worked pretty well for this pretty bad situation. It was the worst situation ever.' Commenting on the summit meeting, T answered: 'They were good about the meeting. We talked about what we liked about each other.'

The school principal

When asked about the main challenges in dealing with cases of bullying in the school, the

school principal responded that there is a community perception that it is a standard practice for schools to solve behaviour issues including nagging (?) and bullying. The principal reported that many condone bullying as an acceptable behaviour in cases of conflict; therefore, the challenge is in getting parents engaged and developing an understanding of better ways to deal with conflict.

When asked what work had been done in the school to prevent bullying, the principal outlined some strategies including:

- development of a countering bullying plan
- systematic surveillance of student behaviour
- surveys on bullying behaviour
- curriculum for classrooms on preventing and addressing bullying. The whole school approach, using the values program *You Can Do It* has been adopted to counter bullying
- development of peer support processes; encouragement of proactive positive bystander behaviour
- teacher training (the current focus); the school is also investigating parent-training opportunities
- organised activities every recess and lunchtime to support positive social behaviour
- disciplinary action
- follow-up assertiveness training for bullied students
- facilitated mediation between students in conflict
- restorative practices.

For deeply entrenched issues, the school is still trying to find the best approach. It was felt that one challenge, and another area really needing to be addressed, is communicating to the whole school community an understanding of what bullying is. This involves defining bullying and using the term appropriately, such as not using it to cover one-off incidents.

Commentary on the case

This case is unusual in that the effectiveness of the Method of Shared Concern was demonstrated in conditions in which a partial application of the Method had earlier proved to be not successful in the long run. A subsequent use of the Method which used not only individual meetings but also group meetings to empower the Suspected Bullies collectively appears to have been more successful, and is likely to produce a more enduring solution. An important element in this application was motivating group members to speak positively, as planned, with the person they had bullied, at the summit meeting.

P was very confident that the bullying had now stopped. She felt there was every reason to have confidence in the outcome of the process this time. The raised awareness of the students and their willingness to help had led to a feeling of optimism. For this practitioner the Shared Concern Method, properly implemented, remains the main intervention of choice where bullying is concerned. Nevertheless, P continues to monitor the situation in this school to ensure that the students remain aware of their stated intentions.

CHAPTER 5: THE FINDINGS

Drawing on reports from the seventeen cases described in Chapter 4, this chapter provides an account of how the Method of Shared Concern was applied in this study. It describes the contexts in which the interventions took place, and both the similarities and differences between how the Method was applied by the different practitioners. In addition, it summarises and describes the outcomes that were achieved and the views expressed by the practitioners.

The schools involved constituted an accidental rather than a random sample. The project was advertised through educational and informal networks in South Australia and Western Australia, and to a lesser extent in Tasmania and Victoria. However, it is unlikely that all users of the Method were contacted. As well, a high proportion of schools expressing an interest in taking part in the project subsequently withdrew, further reducing the representativeness of the sample. (The reasons for the withdrawal are discussed in the Discussion section of this report.) Clearly, under these conditions one cannot readily extrapolate the findings to the population of schools currently using the Method in Australia. This study must therefore be regarded as exploratory rather than definitive.

School context

Although there was considerable variation in the nature of the schools where the Method was practised, the schools had in common a practitioner with some training in the use of the Method of Shared Concern and, importantly, backing from the school principal. As can be seen from the reports of interviews with the principals in Chapter 4, the schools were ones in which a good deal of thought and action was evident in countering bullying through methods of both prevention and intervention. Further, the schools had established relationships with the students' parents such that in nearly all cases the parents consented to their children being involved in the process, as required in undertaking this project.

TABLE 2: TYPES AND LEVELS OF SCHOOLS INVOLVED

School context	Number	Cases*
Lower primary (Years 1-4)	1	12
Upper primary (Years 5-6/7)	3	3, 9, 17
Lower secondary (Years 7/8-9)	8	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13
Upper secondary (Years 10-12)	3	11, 14, 15
Special/alternative schools	2	4, 16

* See Table 1 for further details

As expected, the largest proportion of cases (65%) was from secondary schools, with the bulk of these from the first two years of their secondary education (see Table 2). It is known that bullying is most prevalent in these years (Rigby 2002). The Method of Shared Concern has been viewed as most applicable with adolescent students (Pikas 2002). However, there was some interest in applying the method in a primary setting and this study provided an opportunity to evaluate its effectiveness in this context. Further interest was expressed in participating in the study from two special or alternative schools catering for students who it was thought could not be accommodated in mainstream schooling because of behavioural problems. Hitherto no reports had been made on the effectiveness of the Method with such students.

The practitioners

As noted in Chapter 4, the practitioners were all conversant with the Method of Shared Concern and had received training in the use of the Method. In the course of further interviews with the practitioners, it was evident that the level of training and the extent of experience in using the Method varied widely. Some had attended workshops given by the originator of the Method, Anatol Pikas, in 1994 and again in 2004 when he gave workshops in Adelaide and Perth. Some others had attended workshops given by individuals trained in the Method by Pikas. Yet others had derived their understanding of the Method from the training video produced by Readymade Productions (2007).

Variations were also evident in the level of relevant professional qualifications. Some were registered psychologists or qualified counsellors. Others had undertaken the role of dealing with cases of bullying without any formal qualifications. With regard to experience, some had been using it for at least ten years and had used it with over 50 cases. Others were relatively new practitioners of the Method. Several were using it for the first time. In all but one case (Case Study 16), one practitioner handled each case; the exception involved two practitioners acting sometimes independently of each other and sometimes together.

How cases were identified

A variety of methods was used to identify cases of bullying. These included receiving reports from teachers who had observed the bullying or been told about it by bystanders or parents. In some cases, students informed the practitioner of what had been happening to them. In one case, bullying was revealed through the use of a bully audit completed by students. Typically, information was gathered from a number of sources.

According to the originator of the Method, Anatol Pikas, it was desirable for cases to be identified without making use of information from the Target. In this way the targeted person could not be accused of informing the school authorities, thereby incurring further hostility from those who were doing the bullying. However, it was rare for information about the Suspected Bullies to be obtained without the Target being involved. Case Study 1 appears to be the only one where it could be said that the Target had not provided any information about the identity of the bully or bullies prior to any interviews with a Suspected Bully. It would appear to be unrealistic to expect that information from or on behalf of the targeted child would not be available prior to the Suspected Bullies being interviewed.

The nature of cases that were addressed

Bullying behaviour

All the cases that were addressed could be classified as 'bullying'; that is, they involved the systematic abuse of power in interpersonal relations. In each case, a group of students had

been identified as deliberately seeking to hurt or threaten an individual who was unable to defend themselves adequately. The means involved a range of actions: direct verbal, as in name-calling and ridicule, direct physical, as in hitting or throwing things at someone or damaging someone's property, and indirect, as in exclusion and cyber bullying. In some cases, a combination of such means was used. The degree of severity in some cases differed. Some bullying was at a low level of severity, as in continual and annoying teasing; some appeared quite severe, as in physical assaults. In each case, the practitioner judged that the Method of Shared Concern constituted an appropriate means of intervention.

Gender and age composition

Most of the cases (12) involved bullying within same sex groups. Five of these were boys bullying boys, and seven were girls bullying girls. There were four cases of cross-gender bullying: in three cases, a boy or boys were the perpetrators; in one case, girls were bullying a boy. In one case, a mixed-gender group of students was bullying a staff member. Generally, the cases involved bullying between persons of approximately the same age. (The notable exception is the bullying by adolescents of a 53-year-old teacher, described in Case Study 4.) In all but one case there was a single target of the bullying. In Case Study 13 two targets were identified.

Classifications of cases

Some cases contained elements of harassment of a racial/ethnic nature (as in Case Study 14) or involved sexual harassment (as in Case Study 2). Others appear to have been motivated, at least partially, by an intolerance of children with certain personal characteristics or a desire to ridicule them. This appeared to be so in the case of a girl who was derided for being overweight (Case Study 5), a boy who was unusually short (Case Study 12), and students whose personality and behaviour was judged to be offensive (Case Studies 10 and 11). In some cases the motivation appeared to be simply to have fun at someone's expense, such as the vulnerable staff member (Case Study 4), the adolescent with an Asperger condition (Case Study 8), and a boy who was seen as overreacting to being teased (Case Study 9). Clearly the nature of the cases in this study varied widely.

A further classification of cases could be according to whether the Target's behaviour was viewed as 'innocent' or 'provocative'. In nine of the 17 cases there was no evidence that the Target had acted provocatively, a judgement confirmed by SBs in the individual meetings. In two cases, there was a significant amount of provocation present – in Case Study 3 in which the Target had engaged in name-calling, and in Case Study 6 in which the Target had engaged in racial abuse. Less obviously, SBs felt that there had been some provocation in the insensitive and irritating behaviour of the Target (Case Study 10); a boy following girls around (Case Study 7); antisocial behaviour as in nose-picking in public (Case Study 15); acting 'badly' with other people's boyfriends (Case Studies 11 and 13); and being 'smelly' (Case Study 17). If 'provocative' is applied to Targets who have deliberately acted to hurt those who subsequently bullied them, two cases could be identified. If a broader definition is used to include cases in which SBs felt that the Target was behaving in a way that seemingly justified treating them badly, a further five could be added.

How the Method was applied

Each of the practitioners sought to apply the Method in such a way as to help the students involved in the problem resolve their differences **without** resorting to any form of coercion. On the whole, this was accomplished, although in one case there was a threat of 'consequences' if a promised action on the part of an SB was not carried out (Case Study 7), and another in which an SB was pressured to apologise to the target (Case Study 11). Some

practitioners indicated that there were times when they were tempted to apply a more traditional disciplinary approach, but felt that on balance the Shared Concern approach would produce a better outcome.

In cases other than Case Study 14 (in which the identity of the Target was not disclosed), the practitioners were able to elicit from most SBs both a recognition of the plight of the target and a degree of concern for that person. Nevertheless, there were considerable variations between individuals in the degree of concern they felt. In some cases, a high level of concern was expressed by the SBs; in others there were notable differences between individual members, with some showing high levels of concern and others little or none. However, in all cases, in the individual meetings positive proposals were made on what could be done to help the situation, and the individuals making the commitments were followed up.

The individual interviews

The numbers of SBs in the individual Shared Concern interviews varied between 1 and 7. In most cases, the concern was rated as between 2 and 4 on a five-point scale. In Case Study 13, two students identified as bystanders were interviewed as well. Apart this case, in which two Targets were identified and interviewed, one targeted person was identified and interviewed. Generally, the SB who was the suspected ringleader was interviewed first. In some cases, it became evident that a different SB was the ringleader. In several cases, the availability at the time of individual students for interviews affected the order in which they were seen. Although not all practitioners were able to provide precise information on the duration of the interviews, variations between 2-3 minutes and 20 minutes were indicated for the SBs, and between 7-25 minutes for the Ts. The interviews were conducted in places where there were no distractions or interruptions. In general, practitioners did not take notes during the interview (to maximise confidentiality and promote optimum disclosure); however, in several cases notes were taken to assist the practitioner in recalling what transpired. Somewhat shorter follow-up meetings were held with individual students.

Variations in approaches

In all cases except Case Study 3, individual interviews were conducted with each of the SBs after they had been identified. In Case Study 3, the SBs were first seen in a group. This created major difficulties as, in the group context, they had reinforced each other's desire to continue with the bullying and resisted the efforts of the practitioner. It proved difficult to overcome this mistake, although the practitioner was subsequently able to work with SBs individually and produce a partially successful outcome.

Another variation in the intervention process was evident in Case Study 14 where only one SB was interviewed. Moreover, the practitioner did not share with the SB a concern about the Target, who remained anonymous. Instead the practitioner sought to motivate the SB to help students who were having a hard time, and especially to 'look out' for those who might be harassing anyone. (It is unclear whether the SB had in mind the person whom the practitioner believed the SB was bullying.) This intervention strategy has something in common with the Method of Shared Concern in that it was non-accusative and was focused on a solution to the problem. However, it cannot be regarded as a true application of the Method.

A further variation in the Method was employed in Case Study 13. In this case, preliminary interviews were undertaken with five students, designated 'bystanders', to ascertain who were the 'Suspected Bullies'. The use of this strategy could, unless carefully handled, result in a suspicion among students that an attempt was being made to identify the 'guilty ones' – an outcome the Method of Shared Concern is designed to avoid.

Finally, in one application (Case Study 15) bystanders were included in both the individual interviews and the group meeting.

Interview with the Target

In all cases, apart from Case Study 1, there were two interviews with the Target, the first being a preliminary interview necessitated by the Target coming, or being sent, to the practitioner for attention. With the single exception of Case Study 14, the interviews followed the same course. As required by the Method, the practitioner shared with the Target the news that the SBs had been seen individually and had agreed to help in improving the situation. Further discussions with the Target were directed towards understanding the situation better, and especially in ascertaining whether the Target had contributed in any way in provoking the bullying or making matters worse. In several cases, some degree of provocation was suspected. Care was taken not to convey the impression that the Target was not in any way responsible for being bullied.

Group meetings

Eleven of the 17 cases involved two group meetings, that is, first with the SBs only and then with the SBs plus the Target, that is, a summit meeting. In three cases, no group meetings were held. In two cases (2 and 12), the practitioner believed that the case had already been resolved through individual meetings. In the third case (case 14), the practitioner adopted an approach in which the SB was not told who the Target was. The remaining cases included one in which there was a meeting with the SBs but no summit meeting because the Target had left (Case Study 7); and two in which there was only a summit meeting – in one case (13) organised by the SBs without the practitioner, and in another (Case Study 11) because the practitioner believed that it was appropriate to move immediately to a summit meeting.

In summary, although most practitioners employed the full version of the Method of Shared Concern, some made use of a truncated version either because they thought convening the groups was unnecessary as the problem had been resolved, or because doing so was impractical, as when the Target was no longer accessible or a new problem had arisen that required a different strategy.

Variations in how group meetings were conducted

There was some variation also in the way the group meetings were conducted. In some cases, little or no preparatory work with the SBs was undertaken in the penultimate group meeting to improve the likelihood of a positive outcome in the summit meeting. On the other hand, in some cases the preparation was very thorough, as described in Case Study 16, and this contributed notably to the resolution of the problem. In some cases, preliminary preparation of the Target for the summit meeting was also undertaken (see, for example, Case Study 7) to make mediation between the SBs and the Target easier to achieve.

Identification of roles played by the participants

In the course of conducting the interviews and meetings with students, it became possible to identify roles being played by different students, such as ringleader, reinforcer, assistant and outsider (see Appendix 1). In some cases, this provided a useful way of understanding how the group as a whole was functioning and how individuals could be approached according to the roles they played. This was not always at first obvious; first impressions were sometimes misleading. The ringleader for instance was not always the most outwardly aggressive (see

Case Study 1). Moreover, the roles were not fixed. Over time, ringleaders could become Targets, as in Case Study 15.

Duration of the intervention

Variations also occurred in the period over which the Method was applied. In most cases, the intervention was undertaken during a period of one or two weeks. Where the intervention was protracted over several weeks there was the possibility that new problems might arise in the group. This happened in Case Study 15 where some students met together with the Targets, leaving out one key SB1 and without the skilled direction of the practitioner. In some cases, difficulties in completing the process within a reasonable time span arose because the bullying was first addressed just prior to the end of term. In one case (Case Study 5), difficulties arose because the practitioner went overseas before the case had been adequately addressed, and provisions were not made for a colleague to take over.

Parents

As required by the project, parental permission was needed to allow the students to take part in the process, that is, to be interviewed and participate in group meetings. The schools were successful in obtaining informed consent from all parents except one. This parent was the mother of a child suspected of being part of a group which had bullied a highly provocative victim whom she believed to have been racially abusing her child. Her son had subsequently joined in bullying that person. The parent did not personally object to the child's participation but left it for her son to decide. After participating in the individual interview he decided not to continue. As already indicated, several parents approached the school to request assistance in dealing with a problem of bullying at school. In none of the 17 cases did parents express dissatisfaction with how the school had proceeded in dealing with any case.

Outcomes

In assessing outcomes from the application of the Method, the main consideration was whether the situation had improved for the Target of the bullying, especially whether the bullying had actually stopped. A further consideration was how the Suspected Bullies had been affected by their participation in the process. Finally, it was of interest to examine how the practitioner was affected by having used the Method.

Sources of information upon which judgements of the outcomes were based were obtained from the post-intervention interviews conducted by a professional colleague of the practitioner with the Suspected Bullies and Target, and also from the practitioners' own appraisals.

A summary of the main outcomes for the student participants is given in Table 3 on the following page.

TABLE 3: REPORTED OUTCOMES FOR THE CASES

Case	Acknowledged T's situation	Demonstrated concern * for T's situation	Change in SBs' behaviour	Change in T's situation	P's confidence bullying stopped	P would use Method again
1	All	Range 1-5	Very positive	Much improved	High	Definitely
2	All but one	Range 2-5	Positive	Improved	High	Definitely
3	All	Range 1-4	Positive in some but not others	Improved but still mild bullying	Uncertain	Definitely
4	All	Range 2-4	Positive	Improved	Fairly confident	Definitely
5	All but one	Range 1-5	Positive	Improved according to SBs, only	Confident	Definitely
6	All but one	Range 1-4	Positive	Improved	Fairly confident	Definitely
7	All	Range 3-4	Positive	Unclear as T has not moved from the school	Confident of progress before T left	Definitely
8	All	Range 3-4	Positive	Improved	High	Definitely
9	All	Range 2-4	Positive	Improved	Moderately	Definitely
10	Both	Range 2-4	Very positive	Improved	High	Definitely
11	Both	Range 2-4	Positive	Improved	High	Definitely
12	Both	Range 2-3	Positive	Improved	Confident	Definitely
13	All	Range 2-4	Positive	Improved for one target #	Confident	Definitely
14	SB not asked to acknowledge	Not relevant	Positive	Improved	Fairly confident	Definitely
15	All	Range 3-4	Positive	Improved	Confident	Definitely
16	All	Range 1-4	Positive	Improved	Confident	Definitely
17	All	Range 2-4	Positive	Improved	High	Definitely

The other Target left the school and the outcome is uncertain

* Range of concern: 1 = no concern; 5 = very high concern

Changes in the Target's situation

In appraising the effectiveness of the intervention in reducing or stopping the bullying, the post-intervention reports obtained from the Target were the most relevant. These were available for 15 of the 17 cases. In two cases (7 and 16), it was not possible to contact the targeted child. Twelve of the reports from the interviews with the Targets of the bullying indicated that the bullying had stopped. Examples of the Targets' comments include:

- I was not bothered and their teasing stopped (Case Study 1)
- They stopped talking nasty and started talking nice – treated me like a friend (Case Study 2)
- Great. They don't do the big bullying anymore. It makes me feel better not putting up with the bullies (Case Study 9)
- They stopped calling me names and picking on me (Case Study 12)
- [Things are] pretty good, better than I thought it would be (Case Study 17).

There were several cases in which claims were made that the situation had improved or the bullying had ceased, but they were not fully corroborated, as when the Target was not included in the post-intervention interview and where there was some inconsistency in the judgements made by the interviewees. It seems likely that in some cases the bullying reduced without completely stopping. This is suggested in the somewhat ambivalent claim by the Target who said 'things did work out eventually' (Case Study 6).

Two cases are left where the Targets do not appear to have been significantly helped by the intervention. In Case Study 5, the Target reported that there had been 'no real change' and she was still 'scared and nervous'. The mother confirmed that this was so. At the same time, the SBs who were interviewed claimed that her situation had improved. The other case which ended rather unsatisfactorily was Case Study 3. The girl in this case claimed that there had been no change in her situation and that the bullies 'were still making faces and pretending to shoot her with a fake gun'. The SBs were divided as to whether things had improved for her. Opined one: 'It's like she wants to be harassed.' This case appears to have been a difficult one to handle, as the targeted student behaved provocatively according to the SBs, and unfortunately the application of the Method began with a group meeting of the SBs instead of with individual meetings.

There were some unexpected and less than positive outcomes that should be mentioned. These did not involve the Targets, which the interventions were designed to address. In two cases (13 and 15) bullying occurred within groups of SBs during the course of the intervention and required further attention.

In summary, out of the 17 cases only two showed no evidence of some improvement in the Target's situation. Based on the reports of the Targets, in 12 cases the bullying had stopped and in two other cases the situation had improved for them. In two other cases where the Targets were unavailable, the SBs claimed that the situation had improved for the Targets. The dynamic nature of intra-group relations among the students led to the emergence of new cases of bullying that needed to be addressed. It should not be assumed that the use of the Method 'caused' new cases, but their occurrence in the course of the intervention is a salutary indicator of what can happen. It is estimated that in approximately 90% of cases there was evidence of improvement in the situation of the targeted students, most commonly a cessation of the bullying, following the application of the Method.

Effects on the Suspected Bullies

The effects on the SBs may be considered under two headings:

- (i) how they were personally affected by their participation in the process
- (ii) how they evaluated participation in the process in retrospect.

Personal effects of participating in the process

The post-intervention reports provide evidence that, on the whole, the SBs were affected positively: they became aware that their behaviour had been inappropriate, and they were motivated to act in ways that contributed to bringing about better relations with the Ts to end the bullying. Such effects can be illustrated by examples:

- The meetings helped me to stop and think (Case Study 6)
- Looking back I felt bad about bullying (Case Study 2)
- T looked happier because we all said nice stuff (Case Study 16)
- We stopped giving him a hard time and apologised for our behaviour (Case Study 8)
- It was good, because we are kinder to T and not teasing her any more (Case Study 17)
- We are going to be finishing Year 7 soon and when we look back on primary school, we want to have happy memories and for T to feel OK and us to feel good about ourselves (Case Study 17).

There was evidence that some of the SBs felt better about themselves for acting as they did:

- I'm happy for myself because I've been helping people and helping him to feel better about himself (Case Study 9)
- Good, me realising how much I was doing it; T feels better, so do I (Case Study 16).

For one student a more general lesson was learnt:

- Looking back I have learnt that we have to solve our own problems (Case Study 1).

Evaluations of the process

With few exceptions, the SBs were positive about having taken part in the process. Some were enthusiastic:

- I enjoyed the process, as I didn't feel as though I was going to be punished for my actions (Case Study 8)
- Both sides of the story were heard and it was possible to speak freely (Case Study 7)
- I think because of these meetings it has improved the friendships T has made (Case Study 1).

Perhaps the most telling piece of support for the process came from a student who, during the course of the application of the Method, had become involved in a new case of bullying. She said she would ask for the process to be used to help her to overcome the problem (Case Study 13).

There were several exceptions to the positive evaluations of the process. Despite the emphasis upon a non-punitive approach, one SB felt annoyed at having been accused of 'something I did not do' (Case Study 7). Also, there was one case in which the SBs felt that the final summit meeting was unnecessary, as the problem had already been solved (Case Study 10).

Effects on the practitioner

Each practitioner in this study indicated that they felt positive about using the Method and would definitely use it again with appropriate cases of bullying. However, as indicated earlier, some practitioners were highly experienced in using the Method of Shared Concern

and their involvement in the single case that they examined in this project was unlikely to have much affected their appraisal of the Method.

Of greater significance were the evaluations of those practitioners who had not used the Method previously. Some commented upon the effectiveness of the Method and how it helped in countering bullying:

- A very effective tool for guiding students towards the resolution of issues of bullying. It provides an approach to achieve long-term restoration of respectful relationships within a group when normal social conduct has broken down (Case Study 1)
- I believe it is a very good way of working with adolescents. It empowers them (Case Study 6)
- The process allowed the practitioner to develop an understanding of the students as individuals before allowing the group dynamics to influence behaviour (Case Study 8)
- I have learnt the importance of having a scaffold for asking questions of the students in cases such as these [when bullying occurs]. It enables the practitioner to gain a very clear and succinct account of the players in the bullying scenario. Nothing previously appeared to have had an effect on the teasing and bullying of the targeted student (Case Study 9).
- The students seemed to 'self-correct' very quickly. I was amazed at how resolution was achieved. It was possible to take the blame out of the equation and simply to focus on how to interact respectfully in the future (Case Study 10).

For one new practitioner using the Method, it provided a personal benefit:

- Overall I feel that I have definitely benefited from using this approach. It has involved a bit of a mind shift for me. I really like the 'let's solve the problem together approach'. In the past I have experienced a more 'catch the crook' approach (Case Study 7).

A more experienced practitioner (Case Study 14) argued that the core principle in the Method of Shared Concern, which he saw as 'not getting the student's back up', needed to be incorporated into all interactions with students in pastoral care or teaching settings.

Perceived difficulties of practitioners in applying the Method in schools

Despite highly positive support for the Method, some difficulties in using it were noted. These were expressed forcefully by an experienced practitioner (Case Study 14) who felt that a full application of the Method of Shared Concern was currently hard to achieve. He argued that if time is to be allocated for the extended Shared Concern process, there needs to be recognition and an enabling directive from the educational leadership to facilitate the initiative. Further, he maintained, at times there needs to be recognition that the 'real world' constraints of time and venue in the normal school environment of a typical Australian secondary (or primary) school may not always allow for the type of structured interviews and meetings of all participants which the process requires. Therefore, some kind of compromise approach, such as the one undertaken here (in Case Study 14), which can be more easily slotted into the day-to-day schedule of the considerably overburdened practitioner, needs to be promoted in tandem with the full process which may be implemented by better resourced schools or less busy school staff. The view expressed by this practitioner needs to be considered further.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Applications of the Method of Shared Concern to reduce bullying were reported in 17 interventions in schools. These took place in a variety of types of schools and levels of schooling: lower primary, upper primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and special or alternative schools. The nature of the reported bullying varied widely in terms of severity, mode of bullying (direct, indirect, physical and verbal) and whether there was any perceived provocation. Each of the practitioners had been trained in using the Method of Shared Concern. Some were highly experienced in its use, although a high proportion of them were applying it for the first time. With some minor variations, the applications for the most part followed the procedure outlined in Chapter 2 and were broadly consistent with the intervention method originally proposed by Pikas (1989, 2002). Support for the project was provided by the principals of the schools, and acceptance of the procedure was provided by nearly all the parents of the students.

Outcomes from the reported interventions were generally positive. In approximately 90% of the cases, as reported subsequently by participants, there were notable improvements in the situation for the Target of the bullying, in most cases a cessation of the bullying. That such a positive outcome occurred in a wide diversity of situations testifies to the robustness of the Method. Generally, the Suspected Bullies expressed satisfaction in having taken part and the practitioners indicated that they would continue using the Method. These outcomes were consistent with some earlier reports of interventions using the Method of Shared Concern conducted in England, reported by Smith and Sharp (1994), and Scotland, reported by Duncan (1996); in both studies a high proportion of success was reported. In those studies, however, the estimates of success were provided exclusively by the practitioners rather than also being obtained from the students who had participated in the application of the Method.

Comparisons with the effectiveness of other specific methods of intervention are difficult to make, as results using the same or similar methodology are unavailable. However, some relevant results are available from students who reported that they had told teachers they had been bullied at school. In a large-scale study of over 38,000 Australian students reported in Rigby (2002), among students who had been bullied and had told a teacher (approximately 15% of all students) some 50% of the students reported that things did not get better and 10% that things got worse. On these figures, the Shared Concern intervention appears much more successful. At the same time, it should be noted that in the above study it was unclear what kind of intervention (if any) was undertaken after the teachers had been told. Further studies providing such information is clearly needed.

Applications of the Method

Generally, the applications of the Method were consistent with the procedure outlined in Chapter 2. The major exception concerned the stage at which the targeted person was first seen by the practitioner. Pikas, the originator of the Method, laid much emphasis upon the practitioner seeing the Target **after** the Suspected Bullies had been seen. This was thought to be desirable because it prevented the bullying students from being motivated to bully the Target further for informing on them. In practice, it proved extremely difficult to avoid seeing the Target first, because the targeted child almost invariably came to, or was sent to, the practitioner directly for help. In fact, in all but one case the Target was seen first. It would appear from this inquiry that insisting upon seeing the Target only after the Suspected Bullies have been interviewed is unrealistic. To reduce the likelihood that the Target's vulnerability

would be increased by informing about the identity of the ‘bullies’, the practitioner in each case took pains to point out to the bullying students that no punishment was being considered, and there were no indications that the Suspected Bullies were motivated to harm the Targets for having implicated them in the bullying.

There were some further variations between how some cases were handled. In some cases the variations were inevitable, such as when the targeted person became unavailable to come to meetings. In some cases, the judgement of the practitioner in not holding group meetings on the grounds that the problem had been resolved may have been justified, although further meetings would have made more certain of that. In one case, a summit meeting was not held because of the understandably strong reluctance of a Target to attend. Although it may be considered reasonable to seek to persuade the Target to attend (in the Target’s own interest), compelling attendance is incompatible with the application of the Method.

Another variation in procedure in one case (as previously noted) incorporated bystanders in the process in a preliminary meeting, to help identify the students involved in the bullying and generally assist the practitioner to improve the situation. As noted earlier, if the process in any way resembled a ‘witch hunt’ for the bullies it would not constitute an acceptable part of the Method. In another case, several bystanders took part in both individual and group meetings together with the SBs. In the latter case the bystanders could be viewed as providing peer pressure to promote more prosocial behaviour by the SBs, as in the Support Group Method proposed by Robinson and Maines (1997). However, social pressure from other students could reduce a sense of individual responsibility for the actions the SBs might take – and be inconsistent with the rationale of the Method of Shared Concern. In practice, it should be observed, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between ‘bystanders’ and those who are suspected of bullying. For instance, in Case Study 15 students identified as bystanders in one situation acted as ‘bullies’ in another.

The question is sometimes raised as to whether note-taking during meetings is an acceptable part of the Method. Generally, it is thought that note-taking can convey the impression to the Suspected Bullies that ‘evidence’ is being collected to use against them. The advantages for practitioners in taking notes as an aid to memory needs to be weighed against the possibility that interviewees or group members could be inhibited or inauthentic in what they are prepared to say. The use of multiple interviewers is also problematic. In one case, two practitioners worked in tandem, sometimes together, sometimes independently. This was helpful in that they could compare notes on what was happening, but it could have had the effect of intimidating the interviewee. Another variation in approach involved a targeted person attending the summit meeting with a friend when it seemed that the Target would be fearful. Again the advantages to the Target in feeling more comfortable must be weighed against a possible polarising effect on the meeting.

In a few cases, the variations did not appear to be justified. Contrary to the recommended approach, in one case the practitioner first met with the Suspected Bullies as a group rather than as individuals. This produced major difficulties from which it was difficult to recover and arguably led to a less successful outcome. As Pikas (1989) argued, seeing the Suspected Bully first provides an opportunity to ‘re-individualise’ the student and overcome a persistent ‘mob mentality’. A further deviation in the application of the Method was the absence of the practitioner when students met and tried to resolve the problem themselves in their own summit meeting. In this case, there appears to have been too much of a delay on the part of the practitioner in convening a summit meeting. The group members clearly needed some guidance from the practitioner both prior to and at such a meeting. In another application, the practitioner did not share a concern with a Suspected Bully about a specific individual, but

rather sought to get him 'on side' by asking him to look out for students who were engaged in bullying, with the expectation that this would help to improve the situation with the person he had bullied. Apart from these cases, the applications generally followed the recommended process.

However, in one important area the process could have been improved in some cases where there was little or no preparation of the Suspected Bullies and/or the Targets prior to the summit meeting. Notable exceptions were Case Study 16 in which the Suspected Bullies were well prepared for their subsequent meeting with the Target, and Case Study 7 in which the Target was well prepared for her meeting with the group of Suspected Bullies. Inadequate preparation for the summit meeting is a weakness practitioners should be urged to overcome.

Generally, the basic thinking underlying the Method was observed; that is, not to blame individuals but work towards empowering them in producing an acceptable solution. This was not always easy, as when students promised to undertake a helpful action but did not. (In one case this led to the threat of 'consequences'.) In another case where a serious offence had been committed involving cyber bullying, a Suspected Bully was pressured to apologise. These cases were exceptional. In general the philosophy of the Method of Shared Concern was well observed.

Issues arising

The role of the school principal

In two cases the principals, both in primary schools, were also the practitioners. But in other cases the principal had authorised the use of the Method in the school without necessarily having a working knowledge of what was entailed. However, each indicated strong support for the practitioner. This is important, as not all staff members in a school necessarily endorse a so-called 'no blame approach'. Some staff members cling to the idea that a traditional disciplinary approach is always needed.

Interviews with the principals revealed that they invariably favoured a whole school approach in which the Method of Shared Concern played a part. Although it had been agreed that the Method of Shared Concern should be used in each school sampled in the study, other methods of intervention were being used concurrently. The most commonly mentioned approach was restorative practices, seen by some principals as similar in some respects to Shared Concern. In addition, traditional disciplinary approaches were being used, leading at times to internal or external suspensions. What appeared to be lacking on the part of some principals was a clear rationale as to when one or another method should be used.

The role of parents

In the formulation of the Method of Shared Concern, its originator, Anatol Pikas, saw the school as having no obligation to seek permission from parents regarding its use. He pointed out that no accusations were being made of any students and the application could be seen as a normal and legitimate activity of schools seeking to empower students to help resolve interpersonal problems. Parental permission was required for this project. One consequence was that the external validity of this study was reduced, as most of the schools would not, in the normal course of events, have sought parental permission. This procedure did not, however, significantly reduce the number of Suspected Bullies or Targets being allowed to participate, as only one parent did not encourage her child's participation. This suggests that the Method of Shared Concern is acceptable to parents generally, despite a commonly held view that the parents of targeted children demand disciplinary action being taken against the bullies.

Community matters

The question arises as to whether practitioners should take into account what is known or believed about the child's situation outside the school. In some cases in this study, the practitioner was aware of difficulties being experienced by the child at home that seemingly had contributed to the child's behaviour and resulted in some involvement in bully/victim problems. It is generally thought best for schools to avoid any involvement in matters inside the home or in the community. At the same time, it can be useful for the practitioner to be aware of relevant issues that impact upon the child's wellbeing and behaviour.

Another issue is whether the practitioner should seek to coordinate what is being done at the school with external agents who may be working with the child on a related matter. In one case, the practitioner knew that a social worker was also working with the targeted child, but no steps were taken to share information and coordinate their activities. Arguably it would have been better for the targeted child if the two professionals had worked together.

Ease and difficulty of cases

Some cases were decidedly easier to handle and bring to a satisfactory outcome than others. In some cases the ease with which seemingly intractable problems were resolved was surprising to the practitioner, and in some cases to the Target who had believed that nothing could be done to stop the bullying. (This suggests that many children do not seek help because they think that any helping will be unsuccessful.) On the other hand, some cases where the SBs perceived a high degree of provocation by the Target presented substantial difficulties. In what appeared to be the most difficult case – where ethnically provocative statements were made by the Target – the difficulty was compounded because of the anger felt by the parents and other community members who were sensitive to the abuse. Here the problem could be located less in the psychology of individual Suspected Bullies or the social dynamics of their group, and more in the existence of racial or ethnic prejudice in the wider community. Hence action was needed at the community level as well as within the school.

As discussed earlier, one option suggested by Anatol Pikas that may be useful, especially with 'difficult cases', is to encourage the participants at the summit meeting to work towards a verbal agreement, or alternatively a written contract, that sets out how the SBs and T intend to behave towards each other in the future. In the cases reported in this study the practitioners did not feel that this was required.

Unforeseen contingencies

Twists and turns that may occur in the course of interactions between group members can be hard to anticipate. When students become 're-individualised' in the course of the Shared Concern meetings, attitudes towards other group members may change. For instance, a person who was the ringleader may find themselves rejected or even targeted by a person who was a follower, as in Case Study 15. Changes in the dynamics of a group may be positive for the former targeted student but a new Target may well emerge. This event may require a further round of individual and group meetings. In this study such a development was exceptional, but should be seen as a possibility.

Relationship between the Method of Shared Concern and other intervention methods

The confusion between restorative practices and Shared Concern was evident among several practitioners who claimed that the two methods were highly similar. In some applications this

may be so. However, there are some important differences. Although both aim at treating with respect the person who has bullied someone and focus upon obtaining a solution in which relationships are restored or acceptable to the parties, restorative practices assume that the person who has bullied is in a sense a ‘wrongdoer’ and needs to act restoratively to become acceptable to the community. In fact, the starting point for using restorative practices is the ‘bully’ recognising their wrongdoing. This is not the case with the Method of Shared Concern, although in some cases described in this project it appeared to be a consequence of being involved. In Shared Concern, no authoritative pressure is applied to get the Suspected Bully to acknowledge any guilt. As a result, subsequent actions by the Suspected Bully are likely to be taken willingly rather than in response to external pressure.

Differences between the Support Group Method (formerly known as the No Blame Approach) and the Method of Shared Concern also need to be distinguished, as for some counsellors they are conflated. They are similar in that both seek to avoid blaming the Suspected Bullies. However, Shared Concern does not make use of organised peer pressure from students introduced into meetings to motivate the ‘bullies’ to act constructively. Further, Shared Concern recognises that the practitioner can work effectively with the Suspected Bullies **as a group**, acknowledging that there may be important differences between members and that a Target who has acted provocatively may need to compromise. The Method of Shared Concern demonstrates its uniqueness largely in its recognition of the importance of group dynamics as well as individual factors. In working with the cases, practitioners in this study repeatedly were able to take into account changes that occurred in relationships between and among group members, and the roles, sometimes changing, which were adopted by individuals.

The breadth of application of the Method

The originator of the Method, Anatol Pikas, has suggested that the Method is most appropriate for use with adolescents. His view is that cases of bullying among younger students can be treated more effectively using a procedure he called ‘persuasive coercion’. In defence of this view, it may be argued that:

- (i) older students are generally not susceptible to influence by authority figures
- (ii) younger students commonly do not have the level of cognitive development and insight necessary to participate in group discussions about their relationships with others.

On the other hand, pre-adolescent students tend to be more empathic in their attitudes towards victims of school bullying (Rigby 1997) and for that reason can be expected to show a higher level of concern. Little empirical evidence has been obtained to confirm that pre-adolescent students cannot benefit from the Method being applied. In this study, interventions were successful in two cases with pre-adolescents, although it should be noted that in one case group discussions were not held. In a third intervention with pre-adolescents the outcome was not successful, arguably because of the misuse of the Method (the students were seen in a group first). The issue of whether Shared Concern can be used effectively with younger students remains uncertain.

It may be questioned whether there are certain people or situations in relation to which it is better not to use the Method. Where there is some degree of mental impairment or psychological disorder the practitioner may hesitate. However, evidence from this study suggests that under some circumstances at least, students with Asperger Syndrome or symptoms of that condition and/or a history of aggressive behaviour may still benefit from the approach. In Case Study 4, the Suspected Bully with a presumed Asperger condition was

helped by the process, as were Targets with similar problems in Case Studies 6, 8 and 10. Notably, two cases in which bully/victim problems occurred in a special or alternative school catering for adolescents with behaviour problems were solved successfully using the Method. An intriguing question is whether the Method can be used with cases where school staff are targeted by students. The successful outcome in Case Study 4 suggests that it can.

The future of the Method

At this stage, the Method of Shared Concern is being used in a minority of schools and in somewhat different ways. As this study shows, some practitioners apply the full version of the Method and others use abbreviated versions. The pressure towards using the shortened versions derives partly from a belief that its application heavily uses time and resources and a suitable venue for conducting group meetings, which some schools find difficulty in providing. Certainly, if the full version is used frequently the demands on some schools could be burdensome. Hence a choice of which versions are to be used needs to be made. Some cases in this study appeared to be handled much more easily than others and possibly required less expenditure of resources. However, where the Target was seen as provocative, rightly or wrongly, a greater degree of effort was needed, first in the group meeting at which contentious issues needed to be carefully discussed, agreed proposals formulated, and preparations made for a resolution of the matter at the summit meeting. Schools considering using versions of the Method also need to address the question of what conditions are most appropriate for its use. Alternatives such as mediation, training the Target to be more assertive, restorative practices, the Support Group Method and the traditional disciplinary approach should all be considered. In addition, schools will need to take into account the available resources; especially whether trained practitioners of the Method are available and what training in the use of the Method can be accessed.

How far and with what success the Method of Shared Concern will be implemented in Australia will depend largely upon the knowledge and skills required for its use being made available to educators in general, and teachers and counsellors in particular. It will also depend on the willingness of schools and school systems to commit necessary resources. Attention has been drawn to the dearth of content relating to school bullying in teacher education internationally (Nicolaidis, Toda & Smith 2002). Despite the recommendation made in the *National Safe Schools Framework* (Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2003) that pre-service training on countering bullying in schools should be made a priority in teacher education, little has been done to bring this about. With the rapidly increasing knowledge in the field and the continued rise in community awareness of the problem of bullying in schools, the matter has become even more urgent.

Limitations of the study

The sample of schools included in this study was not a random one, consisting of those with staff (a principal and practitioner) who were prepared to undertake the somewhat arduous procedure of obtaining permission from parents, writing detailed reports, and subjecting themselves to lengthy interviews – usually over one hour in duration. Not surprisingly, a large proportion of schools that showed interest initially did not form part of the sample. As indicated above, the act of obtaining parent permission further jeopardised the external validity of the study. Finally, no comparison study was undertaken to ascertain whether an alternative intervention or none at all would have produced significantly different results. Given these limitations, the study should be viewed as exploratory and requires confirmation through further inquiries.

Conclusions

Despite its limitations, this study provides the first in-depth examination of the application of the Method of Shared Concern in Australia and results which suggest that the Method can be highly successful in improving the situation of students targeted by those who would bully them. In addition, it proved generally helpful in improving the attitudes and behaviour of those who suspected of bullying others, and was, on the completion of each application, well endorsed by practitioners who unanimously indicated that they would continue to use it with appropriate cases. However, further work is needed to determine in what kinds of cases it can most appropriately be applied.

Recommendations

1. Given the demonstrated effectiveness of the Method in successfully addressing cases of bullying, schools be provided with information about the Method of Shared Concern and how they can access appropriate training (see Appendix 3).
2. The Method of Shared Concern be taught in pre-service and in-service teacher training, along with other methods of intervention.
3. Guidelines be developed for users of the Method to help them make appropriate judgments regarding what aspects of the Method of Shared Concern should be included in particular applications, especially in deciding when to employ group meetings as well as individual interviews.
4. As part of the application of the Method, interventions should be routinely evaluated, as in this study, through interviews with the participants individually at an appropriate time after the intervention. These should be conducted by someone other than the practitioner in order to minimise bias.
5. Opportunities be provided for the practitioners to meet and share their experiences in actually using the Method and discuss the issues arising in doing so. This could be achieved by means of a Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) sponsored conference or symposium.
6. Further research be undertaken to assess the comparative effectiveness of different approaches in addressing cases of bullying. This research would be directed towards establishing the success rate and areas of applicability of the major intervention methods, including the traditional disciplinary approach, mediation, assertiveness training, the Support Group Method, restorative practices and the Method of Shared Concern. Such research is urgently needed.

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Van der Wal, M F, de Wit, C A M & Hirasing, R A 2003, Psychosocial health among young victims and offenders of direct and indirect bullying, *Pediatrics*, 111, 1312-7

Vreeman, R C & Carroll, A E 2007, A systematic review of school-based interventions to prevent bullying, *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 161, 78- 88

Youth Justice Board, United Kingdom 2004, *National Evaluation of the Restorative Justice in Schools Programme*, London, Youth Justice Board

Appendix 1: Common roles in group bullying

Ringleader

These students are leaders in their immediate social group and may have an inflated view of their own popularity generally, but may not be liked by the wider peer group despite their influence over others. Many of these students are socially adept and are able to conceal their aggressive motives and behaviour from others. It has been found that children who bully can often talk themselves out of trouble, and influence others to carry out a great deal of the bullying on their behalf.

Assistant

These students are usually the 'best friend/s' of the ringleader and actively support the ringleader's bullying behaviour towards others. They will carry out bullying alongside the ringleader. The assistant/s also supports the ringleader to maintain power over other members of their immediate social group.

Reinforcer

Reinforcers or colluders in the bullying children's peer group may actually carry out a great deal of the bullying on behalf of ringleaders/assistants, but largely they tend to join-in on incidents of bullying, such as jeering, passing on rumours, anonymously contributing to hate websites and passing on threats.

Defender

These students actively support students who are bullied either at the time of the bullying incident/s by supporting bullied students within social groups, or by seeking help on behalf of bullied students.

Outsider

These students are also commonly referred to as bystanders. They usually are not directly involved in bullying nor are they themselves directly bullied. Evidence indicates that bullying can be either supported or discouraged by this group of children depending on the actions they take. Bystanders, who are passive observers of bullying, give a form of permission and reinforcement to those that bully by providing them with an audience who appears to condone the bullying through inaction.

Appendix 2: Interview schedules used in the study

2a: Interview schedule used by the researcher in interviewing the practitioner

KEY: T= Target or Bullied Student; SB= Student suspected of bullying; P= Practitioner

I PRACTITIONER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Demographics

A1. School:

A2. Practitioner:

A3. Gender:

A4. Position in school and role:

A5. Years of teaching/counselling in schools:

A6. Years at the school:

B. Qualifications and experience

B1. Relevant qualifications e.g. psychologist, counsellor, teacher.

B2. Specific training in Shared Concern Method e.g. attended workshop, viewed DVD, self-learning

B3.1 Experience in applying Shared Concern – over what period?

B3.2 Approx how many cases?

B4. Have you been involved in training others or acting as consultant on the Shared Concern?

If so, please describe extent.

C. Background to the Case

C1. How did it come to your attention? (more than one answer is possible)

- I witnessed the bullying happening

Yes

No

- I was informed about it by:

- the bullied student

Yes

No

II PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS SUSPECTED OF BULLYING

For **each** interview provide details. Note: this requires a duplication of all the following in Section D (e.g. SB1, SB2, SB3 etc)

D1. Where did the interview take place? Describe the setting.

D2. How long did this interview last (in minutes)?

D3. Did you take notes during the meetings?

D4. Demographic details of SB.

Gender: _____ Age: _____

Year: _____ Ethnicity: _____

Other (specify) _____

D5. Any background information SB that could be relevant (e.g. whether previously involved in bullying, whether they have been subject to disciplinary action/counselling; reputation).

D6. In your opinion, what role did SB play in the bullying?

Ringleader Assistant Reinforcer Defender Outsider

(See definitions in Appendix)

D7. Attitude of SB during the interview (e.g. anxious, hostile, cooperative, open)?

D8. What, if anything, was acknowledged by SB suspected of bullying regarding the T's condition (e.g. had been upset, depressed, absent from school etc).

D9. How concerned was the SB about the T's condition

Not at all
○

A bit
○

Moderate Amount
○

Quite a lot
○

A great deal
○

Any further comments:

D10. What, if anything, was disclosed by the student about how T had been treated?

D11. What, if anything, was disclosed about the role played by the SB or other student's in the treatment of the T?

D12. Did SB indicate that there was any provocation by T?

If so what?

D13. What suggestion, if any, did SB make about how T could be helped?

D14. If you made suggestions, how did SB respond?

D15. Did you feel that SB had taken on some personal responsibility to help improve the situation? Please explain:

D16. Was it evident to SB that punishment was not being considered? Please explain:

D17. Did the presenting behaviour and attitude change of SB during the course of the interview; such as they become more relaxed/helpful/chatty?

Change or less relaxed/helpful/chatty More The Same Less

D18. Was an agreement made to meet again?

A – as an individual

OR

B – as a group

If so, how soon after the initial meetings?

D19. What was your overall impression of what had been achieved at this meeting?

D20. Add any further comments you would like to make about the interview not covered above.

D21. Did a follow up meeting actually occur with

A – individuals

or

B – group

If no, do not proceed.

If yes, proceed to next question.

D22. If you had a second individual meeting, did the SB indicate that he/she had actually fulfilled their agreement? Yes No

What actions did they take?

D23. In your opinion had SB taken action that had brought about progress towards solving the problem for T?

D24. Add any further information about this follow-up meeting.

Code N°:

III PRACTITIONER MEETING WITH THE BULLIED STUDENT (TARGET or T)

E1. Where did the interview take place? Describe the setting.

E2. How long did this interview last (in minutes)?

E3. Did you take notes during the meetings?

E4. Demographic details of T.

Gender: _____ Age: _____

Year: _____ Ethnicity: _____

Other (specify) _____

E5. Any background information of T that could be relevant (e.g. previously bullied, whether they had been getting support; other.

E6. How ready was the T to disclose what had been happening?

E7. What did you gather about the feelings of T regarding what had happened?

E8. What was disclosed about what had happened?

E9. Was there information indicating or suggesting that T had acted provocatively?

If so, in what way did you feel T had been provocative?

E10. How did T feel about being involved in the process of Shared Concern, e.g. enthusiastic, anxious, resistant, wanting the bullying students punished, conciliatory?

E11. Add any further relevant information about what was discovered during this meeting.

E12. In any subsequent individual meetings with T, did you learn that the situation had changed for T? If so, in what way?

E13. If you introduced the concept of coming to a meeting with the students formally suspected of bullying them, how did T react to this invitation?

E14. Add any further information from this/these subsequent meeting/s.

IV PRACTITIONER MEETING WITH THE GROUP OF STUDENTS FORMERLY SUSPECTED OF BULLYING (SBs)

F1. Prior to this meeting were you satisfied that enough progress had been made to justify a meeting? What were your grounds?

F2. What was the general atmosphere like when the meeting was held? e.g. tense, relaxed, thoughtful, cynical, rowdy etc.

F3. Were the positive things that each person had done to improve the situation acknowledged at the meeting? Yes No

How did they respond to each other?

F4. How did a proposal to invite T to a meeting with them arise? Spontaneously by the group or suggested by the Practitioner?

F5. How ready were they to accept the ground rules for a meeting with T, e.g. such as respectful behaviour

F6. Did you prepare them to say some positive things about T at the meeting?

F7. Did you detect any reservations or reluctance to resolve differences with T? If so, what?

F8. Were there significant differences within the group about how to respond to T in the up and coming meeting?

F9. Add any further comments about the group meeting.

v **PRACTITIONER MEETING WITH STUDENTS
FORMERLY SUSPECTED OF BULLYING (SBS)
AND THE TARGET (T): THE SUMMIT MEETING**

G1. What was the atmosphere like at this meeting?

G2. Were the former SBs ready to stop behaving negatively towards T? If not, what do you think they were?

G3. Were there some unresolved issues that become apparent and required some mediation?

G4. If mediation was required, how was it done and with what success? (Describe what happened)

G5. Was a written contract created? If so, why and how?

G6. What did you see as the main outcome of this meeting?

G7. How confident do you feel that the bullying has now stopped?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Confident | Confident | Unsure | Not Confident | Very unconfident |
| <input type="radio"/> |

G8. If you had this case over again would you have done anything differently?

If so, what? _____

G9. Are you likely to use Shared Concern again?

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Definitely | Probably | Don't Know | Probably Not |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

G10. On the basis of your experience, what advice would you give on the use of the Method of Shared Concern?

2b: Post-intervention schedule used by a nominated colleague of the practitioner interviewing (i) the former Suspected Bullies and (ii) the Target(s)

(i) Interviews with students formerly suspected of bullying (SBs)

Note: this requires a duplication of all the following in Section I e.g. SB1, SB2, SB3, etc.

1. How did you feel it went?

2. Did it change the situation?

Worse The Same Improved

If so in what way? _____

3. Do you think it is a good idea to use this process with other young people in the same situation?

4. How do you feel the meeting you had with (insert name of Target/s) went?

I have read the above and am happy that it reflects what I said. I agree to have my contribution included in this study. I understand that my contribution will be anonymous.

Name: _____

(ii) Interview with the Target or Targets

1. How did you feel it went?

2. Did it change your situation?

Worse

The Same

Improved

If so in what way? _____

3. Do you think it is a good idea to use this process with other young people in the same situation?

4. How do you feel the meeting you had with the students who had bullied you went?

I have read the above and am happy that it reflects what I said. I agree to have my contribution included in this study. I understand that my contribution will be anonymous.

Name: _____

2c: Interview schedule used by the researcher in interviewing the school principal

J1. What have been the main challenges in dealing with cases of bullying in your school?

J2. What work has been done in your school to prevent bullying?

- The development of an agreed countering bullying plan/policy.
- Conducting systematic surveillance of student behaviour.
- Surveys on bullying behaviour.
- Curriculum for classrooms on bullying.
- Developing peer support processes; encouraging bystander behaviour.
- Meetings with parents.
- Teacher and parent training on bullying.
- Yard Duty structures/processes.
- Playground design/programs – i.e. play equipment, lunch time clubs

J3. Which of these approaches do you also use in dealing with cases of bullying?

1. Disciplinary action.
2. Helping the bullied students to be more assertive.
3. Mediation between students in conflict.
4. Restorative practices.
5. Support Groups for students – social skills, friendship classes
6. The No Blame Approach.

J4. What are your views on Shared Concern and in what kind of cases would it be used?

J5. What is your experience of its effectiveness?

J6. Are there any more comments you would like to make?

Appendix 3: Resources on the Method of Shared Concern

Descriptions of the Method by its originator

Pikas, A 1989, The common concern method for the treatment of mobbing, *Bullying, an international perspective*, E Roland & E Munthe (eds), London, Fulton

Pikas, A 2002, New developments of the Shared Concern Method, *School Psychology International*, 23, 3, 307-36

Accounts and comments on the Method

Duncan, A 1996, The Shared Concern Method for resolving group bullying in schools, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 12, 2, 94-98

Erceg, E & Cross, D 2008, *Friendly schools and families: teaching and learning handbook*, Camberwell, Victoria, ACER Press

Griffiths, C 2001, *Countering bullying in schools training package*, Perth, Australia, Western Australian Department of Education

McGrath, H & Noble, T (eds) 2006, *Bullying solutions: evidence-based approaches to bullying in Australian schools*, Sydney, Pearson Education

Murphy, E & Lewers, R 2000, *The hidden hurt*, Ballarat, Wizard Books

Rigby, K 1996, *Bullying in schools and what to do about it*, Camberwell, Victoria, ACER

Rigby, K 2005, The Method of Shared Concern as an intervention technique to address bullying in schools: an overview and appraisal, *Australian Journal of Counselling and Guidance*, 15, 27-34

Rigby, K 2008, *Children and bullying: how parents and educators can reduce bullying at school*, Boston, Wiley-Blackwell

Smith, P K & Sharp, S (Eds) 1994, *School bullying: insights and perspectives*, London, Routledge

Sullivan, K 2000, *The anti-bullying handbook*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

Training resource

Readymade Productions 2007, *The Method of Shared Concern: a staff training resource for dealing with bullying in schools*, Adelaide, Readymade Productions. See www.readymade.com.au/method for a full description and video clips

Griffiths, C & Weatherilt, T (2008) *Pikas Shared Concern Method (SCm) Staff Skills Training Package*. Perth: Department of Education and Training.