

Module B: VISTA: A Whole School Approach (WSA)

Unit B5: Working with Teachers

Astrid Mona O'Moore and Stephen James Minton
Ireland

Objectives of Unit B5

- To understand and appreciate the key role that teachers have in the application of the WSA in addressing school violence
- To be familiar with the skills involved in planning and conducting work with teachers in school communities
- To be able to motivate and support teachers in developing an understanding of the central role that teachers themselves and young people play in countering and preventing violent and bullying behaviour in schools
- To consider strategies for engaging teachers in activities that will support them in taking their part in the promotion of non-violence and the reduction of violence
- To enable teachers to work productively in the classroom with young people in promoting anti-violence/pro-social attitudes

Facilitation skills to be developed through this Unit

Knowledge and understanding of:

- the range of underlying causes of challenging, aggressive and anti-social behaviour
- designing improvement plans for individual pupils, groups and the school as a whole
- the range of provision for pupils whose behaviour causes concern
- the operation of school systems
- the requirements of legislation and formal procedures relevant to aggressive and violent behaviour
- the importance of creating a supportive and caring school community
- the importance of promoting non-violence to enhance learning

Personal qualities and attributes include:

- having an appropriate, pupil-centred set of beliefs and values which informs their decisions and actions
- being able to influence the ethos in a place of work and effect and sustain change there
- being an effective communicator
- being an effective trainer of and adviser to staff, governors, parents, carers and pupils
- being a strategic thinker
- having a good understanding of and models effective behaviour management strategies
- managing, motivating and supporting staff teams through empathy and understanding
- managing time effectively and being well organised

- being able to establish effective partnerships with other relevant organisations

Pre-unit reading

- Beane, A. L. (1999). *Bully free classroom: Over 100 tips and strategies for teachers*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing.
- O'Moore, A. M., & Minton, S. J. (2004a). *Dealing with bullying in schools: A training manual for teachers, parents and other professionals*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing. (Especially chapter three pp. 28-48).
- Sullivan, K. (2000). *The anti-bullying handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Summary of current thinking and knowledge about working with teachers

Work with teachers is central to the practical implantation of whole school approaches towards the prevention and countering of violence in schools. This sort of work, as was also the case with the role of parents (see Unit B4), was established in the first application of a WSA to school bullying behaviour in the Nationwide Campaign Against Bully/Victim Problems in Norwegian Schools of 1983 (see Olweus, 1993; 2004). As well as 'awareness and involvement on the part of adults' being seen as the 'general prerequisite' of the programme, a 'school conference day', 'better supervision during break periods', 'class rules against bullying', 'regular class meetings with the students', 'serious talks with bullies and victims', 'serious talks with parents of involved students', 'class parent-teacher association meetings and 'teacher and parent use of imagination' were seen as 'highly desirable components' (Olweus, 1999). All of these factors put the classroom staff member at the very heart of anti-bullying and anti-violence intervention efforts (Olweus, 1999). Work with teachers – usually around training them to deal with and to help prevent incidents of bullying and violent behaviour - has been a part of all such whole school intervention programmes ever since (Ortega & Lera, 2000; O'Moore & Minton, 2004b; Roland & Munthe, 1997; Slee, 1996; Smith, 1997; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2000; see also Rigby & Slee, 1999; Roland, 2000; Smith, 2003; Smith & Brain, 2000; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004; Smith & Shu, 2000 for reviews).

Many researchers have come to rely upon teachers to deliver the content of anti-bullying programmes applied on a broad-scale, and even to act as trainers within those programmes (in so-called 'train-the-trainer' models – Olweus, 2003) (see Olweus, 2004; O'Moore & Minton, 2004b; Roland & Munthe, 1997). In the day-to-day context, too, all teachers are and always have been very much in the 'front line' in terms of having to deal with incidents of violent behaviour in their schools, and, as a professional body, have tremendous potential in the promotion of non-violence (i.e., engaging in preventative practise). Very often, it seems, we rely on teachers to deal with and attempt to resolve problems located inside the school that society outside the school gates cannot or will not cope with through their potential means. Society, it seems, expects a lot from teachers; as researchers/practitioners, we should do our best to resource and equip them to make their contributions to anti-violence efforts in schools.

The focus of this Unit is to provide facilitators with the resources and information that will permit them to engage participants fully in efforts made against school violence. Classroom staff members can subsequently be made aware of the issues of school violence, and be enabled to act positively against it – through participation in school policy formation, and the conducting of classroom work with students. Activities 1 to 3 inclusively are designed to help the facilitator to raise participants' awareness and tease out attitudes towards school violence and the educator's role in intervention. Activity 4 allows teacher participants to generate their own practical ideas for classroom work. Each activity has been employed successfully many times in schools in the Republic of Ireland by the authors of this Unit. Notes on the practical implementation of all resources and exercises have been included throughout the course of this Unit.

Responsibilities of the Unit facilitators

Your tasks within this Unit are to:

- send to all participants information about when and where the session will be held and details of preparatory reading to be done
- familiarise yourself with the Unit text and the facilitators' notes
- plan the session to meet the needs of the participants
- ensure that all relevant resources/materials are copied and/or prepared
- lead the session and all the activities

Sequence of activities for Unit B5

Introduction

Teaching staff are in general, in the authors' experience, less concerned (although not necessarily less interested) in the theoretical side of students' involvement in aggressive and violent behaviour, than they are with learning *practical ways* by which such behaviour can be dealt with in the school in general, and in the classroom in the 'here-and-now' in particular.

Teachers are very much in the 'front line' concerning the practical aspects of dealing with violent behaviour in schools, but unfortunately, teachers have sometimes (rather courageously) informed us that whilst their training has not always prepared them adequately for this role, concerned parents will often require that teachers 'do something' about problems of aggressive and violent behaviour. The activities that follow could be used in a typical training session for a mixed group of educators (i.e., teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and policy makers), and are, whilst both reflective and discursive, ultimately very much geared towards the practical. Such a training session might last from half a school day to a school day in length, depending on the number of participants. In such a session, input concerning the following issues should be given:

- (a) *What do we mean by 'Violence in Schools'?* (see this Unit, Section A, below and Unit A1);

(b) *the 'VISTA' philosophy* and its practical application (see Units A1 and A2);

(c) *countering strategies* (see this Unit, Section B, below);

(d) *preventative strategies* (see this Unit, Section C, below).

(v) *achieving consensus*: For any school rule, policy or programme to 'work', that is to say, for it to be effectively implemented by the staff, the majority of the staff must 'buy into' it. In terms of harassment, violent and aggressive behaviour, it is absolutely essential that all of the teaching and non-teaching staff are 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. Naturally, consensus should also be aimed at vis-à-vis all aspects of the countering and preventative strategies (see also Unit E6).

The four activities that are included below provide content for use by the facilitator in such a session and represent a one-day training plus breaks.

A – What Do We Mean by 'Violence in Schools'?

Dan Olweus, the forefather of anti-bullying research, defines violence thus:

'Aggressive behaviour where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body or an object (including a weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon another individual' (Olweus, 1999, p. 12).

He also notes that the dictionary definition of violence '....is similar, implying the use of physical force or power', and that the definition of violent offences in criminal law '....(including murder, homicide, aggravated assault, assault, robbery and rape) is based on a closely related understanding' (Olweus, 1999, p. 12). Violence and bullying are both sub-categories of the more general concept of aggression, with the intersection between bullying and violence being characterised by physical bullying (Olweus, 1999).

It should be noted that the first activity within Unit A2 provides an opportunity for participants to think about what is meant by 'violence in schools'. If this activity has not already been undertaken as part of that Unit, it could be usefully included at this point. In this way, participants can raise awareness of and come towards a personal understanding of such definitional issues.

B - Countering Strategies

A comprehensive school policy should include directives for both countering strategies – dealing with any current incidents of violent behaviour in the school – and preventative strategies. It is important that a consensus is achieved amongst the classroom and management staff (that is to say, those involved in the practical and day-to-day implementation) as to all details of these strategies during the policy formation process and in subsequent work undertaken in the school. Countering strategies should include means by which incidents of violent behaviour may be *reported, investigated* and

recorded (see Units B1 and E1), and sanctions and supports for those involved in incidents of violent and aggressive behaviour.

Activity 1 (immediately below) provides means by which VISTA participants may come to reflect upon how they themselves, their colleagues, and their respective institutions typically intervene in situations of bullying and violence, and what the assumptions (explicit or implicit) are that underlie these intervention strategies.

Activity 1 Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs around Intervening in Situations of Violence and Harassment (120 minutes if done in its entirety; however, the design of the exercise allows for it to be shortened if necessary (see instructions, point (ii) below).

Purpose

- This activity is designed to tease out participants' attitudes and feelings about interventions in situations of violent behaviour, and can usefully be employed (say) as a pre-cursor to the participants' subsequent involvement in policy formation

Materials

The materials consist of five hypothetical scenarios, which may be printed out on separate cards. These hypothetical scenarios are as follows:

Situation One: Patrick, Alan, Colm and Sean are pupils who often play football together after school. Patrick is very good at football, but he gets cross with Sean, because Sean often misses the ball. When this happens, the game has to stop whilst the ball is fetched back. Patrick is always making rude remarks to Sean, who usually jokes back. But one day, after a particularly nasty remark from Patrick, Sean ran off to fetch the ball, but didn't come back with it. Sean then told his class teacher that he is being bullied.

- *In your opinion, does this behaviour constitute bullying?*
- *If so, why, and what form of bullying is it? If not, how else might the behaviour be explained?*
- *How do you think Sean feels about the situation?*
- *Why might Alan and Colm not have stopped Patrick from calling Sean names?*
- *What should the class tutor do now?*

Situation Two: Dean and Gerard are in the same class at school, and sometimes sit together. One day in art class, the teacher asks the two of them to share in the task of painting a picture. Unintentionally, Gerard knocked over the water they were using to clean their brushes, which spoilt the section that Dean was painting. Dean reacted by pushing Gerard off his stool, and a fight broke out.

- *How do you think Dean feels about the situation?*
- *How do you think Gerard feels about the situation?*
- *Do such incidents ever occur in your classroom? If so, how would you manage them?*

Situation Three: Sinead was in the schoolyard one day, and two older girls asked her for money. Sinead said that she did not have any, and the older

girls began to push her around. Whenever they saw her afterwards, they purposefully knocked into her, and called her nasty names. Mary told her mother about the bullying, and also her class teacher. An appointment has now been made for a meeting between Sinead's mother and the class teacher.

- How do you think Sinead feels about the situation?
- What do the older girls think about Sinead, and about their own behaviour towards her?
- How might Sinead's mother feel about the meeting with the class teacher?
- How should the class teacher handle this situation?

Situation Four: A teacher who is new to the school, but has taught elsewhere in the area, is having a difficulty with some pupils in a class. At his former school, the teacher was given an unkind nickname by the pupils, which the pupils at his current school have heard about. Now, whenever he turns to write on the board, he hears the pupils repeat this nickname. A few of the pupils also use bad language whenever he has to discipline them, which has led to the suspension of one pupil, although the bad language continues. The teacher has approached the principal with a view towards resigning from his post.

- Do such incidents ever occur in your school? If you heard such a thing was happening to a colleague, what would you do?
- Should policies against harassment, bullying and aggressive behaviour exist to primarily serve the needs of pupils, teachers or both teachers and pupils?
- How should the head teacher handle this situation?

Situation Five: At staff meetings, Joseph often offers opinions that he thinks are helpful. However, being close to retirement, many of his colleagues feel that he is out of touch with current views in education. Every time he attempts to offer what he considers to be an informed view based on his lengthy experience, a group of younger teachers belittle it. One time after a staff meeting, Joseph, feeling angry and upset, attempted to challenge two of his younger colleagues, Rosie and Mark, when they are sitting in the staff room. Rosie and Mark got up to leave, with Rosie stating that she was upset with Joseph having raised his voice, and that she will complain to the principal about him. Mark said that he would back this up. Joseph entered the principal's office feeling angry and upset, and told the principal about the incident.

- What do Rosie and Mark think about Joseph, and about their own behaviour towards him?
- Do such incidents ever occur in your schools? If you witnessed such an interaction between your colleagues, what would you do?
- How should the principal handle this situation?

Procedure

- (i) Divide the group of participants into sub-groups of about four to six members.

(ii) Present the sub-groups with the scenarios above. Each group can be provided with either one or a number of these, depending upon the overall number of participants and time available.

(iii) Each sub-group should be allowed 10 – 20 minutes' discussion time per scenario.

(iv) The 'large group' (i.e., all the participants together) should then be re-formed from the sub-groups. The facilitator should then lead a discussion of each scenario in turn in the large group. The best way of doing this is by allowing spokespeople from each sub-group to provide a summary of their group's discussion, and conducting feedback from the other sub-groups. The emphasis should be on achieving (at the end of the discussion process) consent upon key issues around anti-violence intervention.

Debrief

In the whole-group situation, participants can be encouraged to reflect upon:

- which they felt was the easiest scenario to achieve consensus upon;
- which they felt was the most difficult scenario to achieve consensus upon;
- having aimed for consensus, is consensus important, and why;
- what they feel they have learnt about themselves and each other, and the subject matter at hand, via undertaking the activity.

C - Preventative Strategies

The old adage goes that 'prevention is better than cure', and in the field of violence in schools, it is very obviously applicable. However, it takes more than good intentions and 'wishing away' problems to work towards the non-occurrence of incidents of violence in schools. Merely *stating* that one's school has (for example) a 'zero-tolerance' policy on bullying will *not* ensure that students do not engage in bullying! Instead, a concerted effort must be made by the school staff as a whole to explore their own values, beliefs, and roles as educators. Activity 2 is designed to bring out that much prized but often sidelined quality of 'reflective practice' amongst mixed groups of educational professionals in a way that helps us build towards the promotion of pro-social behaviour, amongst staff and students alike, in our schools.

Activity 2 Elucidating Reflective Practice amongst Educators (The authors have found that the typical time taken for this exercise is between sixty and ninety minutes for a group of up to sixteen persons. However, if the number of participants exceeds this, the time allotted should be increased accordingly in certain sections of the exercise (see instructions, points (ii) and (iii), and the section on 'debriefing').

Purpose

- The purposes of this activity are various. The primary aim, as documented in this activity's title, is to promote reflective practice in general, through the facilitated experience of the same in the course of the exercise. What is reflected upon has a direct relationship to the idea of promoting pro-social relationships within the classroom. By promoting the pro-social, we take very positive steps in the direction of developing sound preventative practices

Materials

The following prompts can be printed out on separate worksheets (with ample room for the participants' responses and notes), or projected overhead.

- (i) In your own experience as a school student, which of your teachers had a positive influence upon you? Why?*
- (ii) Why did you choose to be an educator?*
- (iii) How do you think that your professional role impacts upon young people under your care?*
- (iv) How do you think that your professional role impacts upon your own feelings about yourself?*
- (v) How do you think that the interpersonal behaviour of young people affects their levels of self-esteem?*
- (vi) When you retire, how would you like to be remembered by your former students?*

Procedure

- (i) The participants first answer the questions alone (i.e., without consultation with other participants).
- (ii) The whole group of participants is then divided into smaller sub-groups (of between four and six members). The sub-groups are then given around twenty minutes to openly discuss their responses to the prompts. It should be pointed out to the participants that they need only discuss the responses that they feel comfortable discussing. It can be helpful for the facilitator to mobilize himself or herself around the sub-groups in tasks like these, in order to keep the participants 'on-task'.
- (iii) In this, the second phase of small group of activity, the small groups each elect (i) a 'scribe', who will take notes on behalf of the sub-group, and (ii) a 'spokesperson' who will relay the sub-group's responses to the group facilitator. The sub-group then attempt to find similarities and differences in the individual members of the sub-group's responses.
- (iv) A 'large' group (i.e., composed of all the participants) is reformed from the sub-groups. The facilitator then works through the prompts, giving each group's spokesperson a chance to relay their findings in turn. The facilitator's task is to draw together the responses of the participants as a whole, paying attention to common emergent themes and points of dispute, offering tentative suggestions to the resolution of the latter.

Debrief

In the whole-group situation, participants can be encouraged to reflect upon:

- which prompt they found most interesting;
- which prompt their sub-group spent most time talking about;
- which prompt produced, in their eyes, the most important type of discussion within (i) the sub-group, and (ii) the 'large' group;
- what they feel the purpose of each prompt was. Please note that there is no definitive answer to this one! However, our experience has been that participants enjoy discussing this point, and that the discussion can prove both lengthy and fruitful.

Activity 3 is a shorter one, and is essentially a think-piece for policy makers:

Activity 3 Thinking about Preventative Policy (in the region of 60 minutes)

Purpose

- The purpose is essentially to review school policies on violence/bullying/discipline, in order to ensure that adequate provision is made for the promotion of preventative practice

Materials

The relevant school policies, and the instructions for this exercise that follow below.

Procedure

Consider that O'Moore and Minton (2004a, p. 92) deem that the following points are key to an effective anti-bullying policy:

- (i) 'How bullying is defined, and the forms it takes';
- (ii) 'How incidents of alleged bullying behaviour are to be reported, investigated and recorded';
- (iii) 'How incidents of bullying behaviour are to be dealt with, including support and intervention'; strategies for those involved (both perpetrators and victims) and, where necessary, the specification of sanctions for perpetrators';
- (iv) 'Preventative strategies in the school and classroom';
- (v) 'The role of school management staff, classroom staff, parents/guardians, students and relevant others in the above'; and,
- (vi) 'Measures for dissemination, evaluation and review'.

However, it has been the authors' experience that school discipline policy will generally reflect the first three of these points, but be rather less clear concerning the last three of these points. So, with preventative practice in mind, and the relevant school policy documents in hand*, the participants (after being familiarized with the above comments) should discuss, as a group:

- (i) Is it the case that is true of our school(s)?*
- (ii) How far have we moved towards preventative practice?*
- (iii) How is preventative practice realised in the classroom(s) in our school(s)?*
- (iv) What supports (in terms of policy, personnel, training, and physical resources) do the teaching staff of our school(s) need in order to engage further in preventative practice?*

Debrief

The participants are given a simple discussion question: '*What else can be done?*' The facilitated discussion of this could take some time (!) as there is, as we (as educators and hopefully as a society) move away from tackling anti-social behaviour and towards promoting the pro-social behaviour, *always* more to be done. As a variation, this simple question ('*What else can be done?*') can be discussed at (say) the *school*, *societal* and *international* levels.

* = The policy documents that are (i) compulsory and (ii) advised for a school to have will of course vary from country to country.

Activity 4 is designed specifically for teaching staff in the planning of preventative work in the classroom.

Activity 4 Planning Preventative Work in the Classroom (for Teachers) (variable; for a group of twenty or so members, probably not less than ninety minutes)

Purpose

- The purpose is to enable teachers to ‘think through’ the planning of preventative sessions that are enjoyable and relevant to the young people whom they teach. Rather than merely providing resources, within this activity, we seek to skill the teacher as acting as his or her own resource generator

Materials

The key prompts that follow in the ‘instructions’ section below could be placed on individual worksheets, or projected overhead for the group.

Procedure

Working at first individually, and then in groups (in the same manner as in Activity 2), a number of things may be considered.

Firstly, in O’Moore and Minton (2004a, pp. 32-46), a variety of creative media are reviewed in terms of forming a methodological basis for preventative work in the classroom. These media are:

- *circle time group work;*
- *‘mobility’ and ‘introduce yourself’ games;*
- *use of videos/DVDs;*
- *posters, pictures, and sculpture;*
- *music, drama, film-script and role-play;*
- *class charters.*

For each of these media, participants should ask themselves:

- *how easy would it be to access this medium?*
- *how comfortable am I using this medium?*
- *how comfortable am I in facilitating young people’s use of such a medium?*
- *how can this medium be used, as a tool, in a preventative session on violence in schools, with the young people that I teach?*
- *how can I be sure that the medium doesn’t take over as a creative task, but instead serves to illustrate the anti-violence/pro-social message? (Hint: combining creative tasks with ‘circle time’ discursive tasks usually provides a good framework).*
- *what other physical equipment/would I need (if any) in implementing such a session?*
- *what safety issues and concerns (both physical and psychological) would such a session raise?*
- *how could such a session fit into the school’s overall efforts to address issues of violence?*
- *how could such a session fit into the general fabric of the school day/week/year?*
- *what support can I expect from my colleagues and management in implementing such a session?*

Then either alone, or facilitated in small groups (as in Activities 1 and 2 above), participants can create lesson plans (say, of a single period’s

duration) using their responses to the prompts above, and their past teaching experiences.

Debrief

In a 'large' group (i.e., all the participants together), can address a question in general discussion: '*How can an anti-violence message be imparted in my regular subject teaching?*' O'Moore and Minton (2004a, pp. 45-46) make some tentative suggestions, but the group members' own ideas would probably be more relevant!

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Further reading and additional materials

Textbooks and Resource Books

- Asher, S. R., & Coie, J. D. (1992). *Peer rejection in childhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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