

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

A REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS'S (RCLS)  
UNDERSTANDING AND

RESPONSE TO BULLYING IN THEIR SCHOOL:

AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

By

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requirements for the

degree of

Masters in Education

School of Education

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# Declaration

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
declare that

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# Abstract

Bullying at schools is a problem that has recently gained much media exposure highlighting its increasing occurrence and violent nature. It has also gained attention in the educational field with an increasing number of pertinent studies. The link between school bullying and school violence has been drawn by educators and researchers alike. Of great importance is the positioning of school bullying in the sphere of Peace Education in the school. Despite bullying being mentioned in many relevant educational policies and documents pertaining to school governance, incidents are on the increase. The severity of bullying incidents is also worsening.

This context led to the interest of addressing bullying amongst the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) at my school. As the Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO) to the RLC, I decided to initiate an Action Research project with the RCL of this school. The study explores and acts on the RLC perspectives on bullying at their school and their perspectives on suitable interventions. The methodology of action research suited an intervention goal. Learners need to be involved in processes of creating a peaceful learning environment for all. As stated by McNiff and Whitehead, “Working out ideas *is* the learning, working out how to live with one another *is* the peace process” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p.13).

The study is framed by Freire’s theory on pedagogy and Butler’s theory of gender. It involves several data collection methods, including questionnaires, focus group interviews, creative writing responses, posters, workshops and observations. My findings are presented as discussions based on various generative themes which emerged from the data.

The findings of the study revealed that learners had difficulty formulating a comprehensive definition of bullying. Many initially felt that few incidents of bullying occurred at their school and were unaware of the full range of incidents of bullying. Boys and girls experienced bullying differently while different age groups had similar experiences of bullying. Features such as power, aggression and abuse were commonly raised in learners understanding of bullying.

While a broader knowledge on bullying was generated through the action research process, many silences still emerged. Learners failed to draw the link between bullying and violence. They also did not mention any incident related to new age bullying or incidents involving the educator as a victim or as the bully.

The study acknowledges that in order for bullying at this school to be reduced, a second and possibly a third cycle of the action research process is needed. The study indicates that bullying is not a simple problem that can be dealt with in a short period of time. It needs to be incorporated annually in the school programme dealing with pertinent societal dynamics which affect teaching and learning.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Laika Maharaj. I hope that the work that is covered in this thesis will help to make schools a safer place for you and your generation. To my parents, Mr and Mrs P. Mathaparsadh, your unconditional love and unswerving faith in me has enabled me to walk this path in life. Thank you for all you have done for me.

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# List of Acronyms

AR	Action Research
DOE	Department of Education
LO	Life Orientation
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SAPS	South African Police Services
SASA	South African Schools Act
TLO	Teacher Liaison Officer

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# Chapter One – Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

“Sometimes I just want to hit myself and ask myself why. Is it all my fault?” These are the words of Chase, a 13 year old boy who appeared on the television show, *Oprah* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2009. His agony was clearly visible to the millions of viewers worldwide. His pain and depression about being bullied is what he bravely discusses. He is one of the lucky ones. Ryan Halligan, another bullied teenager, was not so lucky. He hanged himself when the bullying became too much (*Oprah*, 20 July 2009). Shocking, but true. Suicide is but one of the many consequences of bullying (Behr, 2000). Debra Patta, while reporting on the South African context of bullying during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree show (E-TV, 26 October 2010), stated that this type of suicide is called “bullycide” as it refers to a person who has killed him/herself after being bullied. Other consequences include depression, delinquent behaviour and school leaving. These can be serious and are often long lasting. This study aimed to investigate experiences and contribute to finding solutions to the problem of bullying at a Pietermaritzburg High School. The focus is on how the Representative Council of Learners of the school views bullying and how they plan to alleviate it through the means of an Action Research Project.

Bullying seems to have no set pattern or prerequisite. It involves both male and female learners. However, it seems that bullying is more prevalent among boys than girls. A differentiation, in the South African context, was also made on the bullying methods used by the different genders with boys being more likely to engage in direct or physical bullying and girls engaging in acts of spreading rumours and ostracism (Kassiem, 2007).

Over the past few years there has been an increased concern over the increasing incidents of bullying. Unfortunately, rather than contributing to a decline in bullying, this has in no way impacted on the incidence of bullying. Many theorists and experts feel that bullying is becoming a serious problem at schools (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Walter, 2008; Mlisa et al, 2008; Kassiem, 2008 and Orpinas and Horne, 2003). Rather than bullying being dealt with seriously, it is seen as just another problem to deal with at the level of the school. Thus it seems that in order to reduce the levels of bullying at schools, the major concerns of parents, educators and other relevant stakeholders of the school should be focussed on the areas of the causes and reduction of bullying.

According to Burton (2008), contributing factors to the problem of bullying were the use and abuse of drugs and the use of and exposure to violence in the family and community. Attitudes of the surrounding community on aggression also contributed to the incidence of bullying in the neighbouring schools. It seems that factors such as geographical location, academic achievement, conventional school involvements and school domain contributed to the identities of bullies, victims and bully-victims in South African schools (Mlisa et al, 2008).

Orpinas et al (2003) emphasised the importance of the school environment to the incidence of bullying. The role of the educators in reducing bullying in the school environment is also emphasised. Parents are also encouraged to become more involved in and aware of the environment in which their children are engaged (Walter, 2008). But most importantly, Fekkes et al (2006), Orpinas and Horne (2003) and Varnava (2002) all advocate and reiterate the role of the learners themselves in being involved in creating a safe learning environment for all stakeholders of the school. Thus, in trying to find a solution to the phenomenon of bullying, while many have looked at how educators could address the

problem, this study focuses on how learners, constituting a Representative Council of Learners (RCL), understand the concept of bullying and what they propose as solutions.

## **1.2 Purpose and Rationale for the research project**

As an educator, I am often confronted with concerns pertaining to bullying in my school. This has become a cause for concern as it seems that the incidents of bullying and school violence are on the increase. One is acutely aware of media reports of the escalation of violence in schools and violence involving learners (Done, 2002; Kassiem, 2007; Mngoma, 2008; Walter, 2008; Comins, 2010). Threats of suspension and other forms of legitimate punishment for the perpetrators of bullying have been futile. As an educator who is entrenched in the schooling system, and as a mother of a school-going daughter, I felt that it was time to look at attaining peace in the school from a different perspective. I looked at the bullying and felt that a new approach needed to be adopted and felt that the way to do this was through the student leadership body that is already existent in the school. This is the Representative Council of Learners (RCL).

I felt that the impetus for the reduction of bullying needed to come from the very people the learners had elected to represent them in the various structures of the school society. My access to the RCL is direct as I am the Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO) to the RCL. This office of TLO necessitates me interacting with the RCL about all concerns pertaining to and directly involving the student body at the school. I am involved in helping the RCL set up and run various projects in the school. One such project is an initiative to try and create a more peaceful environment of learning and teaching. One aspect of the peace initiative that the RCL is exploring is that of trying to reduce bullying in the school.

For my study, I have chosen an Action Research Project which supports the aim of the RCL to reduce bullying in our school. The methodology of action research thus suits the aims of this study best. I believe that a better learning environment can exist with the co-operation and understanding of those involved. I thus felt that I needed to involve the learners in processes required to create a peaceful learning environment for them. Learners needed to be involved in this peace process. They need to take ownership of it and learn from it in order to take it seriously and for such an initiative to be sustainable. As stated by advocates of action research, McNiff and Whitehead, "Working out ideas is the learning, working out how to live with one another is the peace process" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p.13). Action research is furthermore strongly linked to education as well as to growth (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). The key research questions guiding this study were therefore:

1. How does the RCL understand the phenomenon of bullying in the school?
2. What is the prevalence and features of bullying in their school context?
3. What actions do learners recommend to reduce bullying in their school?

### **1.3 Positionality**

I am an educator at the school. I am also the Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO) for the Representative Council of Learners at the school. As such, I have direct access to the RCL and am involved in all of their projects and discussions. I am also positioned as a MEd student and researcher at the school.

## **1.4 Ethical Considerations**

Written consent was obtained from the Department of Education (see annexure 3 and 4), the Principal of the school, the parents of the learners, as they are minors and the RCL members themselves (see annexure 1). Verbal consent was also sought from the educators of the school. This study also complied with the ethical requirements for research at the University of KwaZulu Natal (see annexure 5).

## **1.5 Limitations of the study**

The project on bullying is the first of its kind to be driven by the RCL at this school. The outcome thus depends on the capacity of the RCL to drive such a project. Furthermore, bullying is a very sensitive topic and learners may be reluctant to reveal the facts pertaining to it for fear of retribution and punishment. My roles as TLO, educator and researcher may be difficult to balance as I have to gain the trust of the learners as the subjects in this project. This could prove to be difficult as I am also their educator who has to enforce discipline.

Further to the above, is the limitation imposed by the school timetable. Completing an Action Research Project within the school time-table can be difficult considering that it has to be fitted in with all the other programmes that are already planned or sometimes, unplanned.

## **1.6 Structure of Dissertation**

Chapter one focussed on introducing the topic of the dissertation. It summarised information that is expanded upon in the following chapters. Chapter two is made up of the literature review pertaining to bullying.



Aspects such as a definition of bullying, causes of bullying, types of bullying, the impact of bullying, and international and South African viewpoints are discussed here. The theoretical framework is also discussed in this chapter and relevant key concepts by theorists are identified and explained. Chapter three focuses on the research methodology utilised in the project. The access to the research site, research design and methodology as well as data collection methods are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter four discusses the research findings of the project and analyses and interprets the data obtained from the various data collection methods used. Recommendations and implications for future studies are discussed in Chapter five.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to discuss the purpose and rationale for this study, as well as, explain the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. My positionality and the structure of this dissertation were also discussed. In the next chapter of this study, I discuss the literature pertaining to bullying as well as the theoretical framework that was used in this study.

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the relevant literature dealing with bullying in schools. Most of the literature consulted, refer to schools in South Africa while others reflect studies conducted in schools in other countries. Several theories are consulted in order to make sense of the project. Other empirical studies as well as the various policies related to the school and its safety were also consulted.

### **2.2 What is bullying?**

Bullying is defined as being the “intentional, repeated, hurtful acts, words or other behaviour, such as name-calling, threatening, or shunning, committed by an individual or individuals against another individual or individuals” (de Wet, 2006, p.62). However, Olweus (cited in Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001, p.19) says that, “in order to use the term bullying there should be an imbalance in strength, where the student who receives the negative actions is unable to defend him/herself and is helpless against the bully”. Continued teasing, over an extended period of time could also be classified as bullying (Roberts, 2006).

### **2.3 Understanding Bullying**

Research has shown that some people seem to have a higher predisposition towards bullying behaviour than others (Varnava, 2002; Orpinas and Horne, 2003 and Walter, 2008). Theorists, such as Varnava (2002), Orpinas and Horne (2003) and Walter (2008), also agree that bullying is the result of several factors such as abuse, exposure to

violence and family background. Much of the literature on bullying in schools has focussed on bullying from the point of view of the educator. Many articles and books also focus on how educators can reduce bullying in their particular schools. Most of these have a very similar definition and outlook as to what bullying is. Implicit in literature is the notion that bullying seems to be more prevalent amongst male learners than amongst female learners. Crozier (1997) went so far as to state that to some, bullying seems to be a show of manliness and that is what makes it so difficult to deal with.

Types of bullying have been found to differ between the genders with males displaying more aggressive, physical bullying behaviour and females resorting to ostracism and the spreading of rumours (Kassiem, 2007; Burton, 2008). Literature reveals that bullying is also linked to the notion of power and aggression. Walter (2008) felt that bullying was a result of power plays in the school environment. Learners were seen as either those who had power or those who did not. Walter felt that the strong and empowered were favoured by educators and students alike, while the weak and disempowered were taken advantage of.

Another important point that is raised is that of the influence of the surrounding environment on the behaviour of learners and the resulting bullying behaviour that is displayed in the school. Varnava (2002), Orpinas and Horne (2003) and Walter (2008) all suggested that bullying was an extension of the community and the wider context of violence in the surrounding society. Thus they, like others, felt that the role of the school and the community in reducing bullying was vital. Parents should become more involved and aware of their children's schooling environment and experience so as to help their child should the need arise. de Wet (2006), reports that educators can also be the targets of bullying. This could take on various forms such as noisiness and teasing which would in turn lead

to the confidence of the educator being undermined. In addition to this, it is reported that educators themselves, could also be bullies (de Wet, 2006; Walter, 2008). This would then undermine the school's responsibility to provide a safe learning environment which is a legal obligation on the part of the school and its educators.

Another reason for the increasing incidents of bullying seems to be that the country's constitution is not taken seriously and that values such as honour, justice and respect were not advocated strongly enough. If the constitution and the aspects that it refers to were taken seriously, then sanctions that would be imposed to ensure that the constitutional rights of people were upheld, could control bullies (Walter, 2008). The expectation thus seems to be that both learners and educators would become more informed and educated about the ideals and values presented in the constitution of the country (de Wet, 2006; Walter, 2008).

## **2.4 Types of Bullying**

Bullying is a complex phenomenon that can manifest itself in many different ways. Some of these ways are discussed below.

### **2.4.1 Physical Bullying**

Physical bullying involves physical contact between the victim and the perpetrator. For example, hitting, punching and kicking. Kassiem (2007) felt that age had an impact on bullying because it seemed that incidents of physical bullying decreased as age progressed. Boys were also more likely to engage in this type of bullying behaviour than girls (Kassiem, 2007).

### **2.4.2 Verbal Bullying**

Verbal forms of bullying were seen as more subtle and existing to a greater degree in behaviours by girls who would engage in acts of spreading rumours and ostracism. Suckling & Temple, (2002) felt that bullying could be seen as a form of maliciousness which would cause distress to another person thus making the bully feel powerful.

### **2.4.3 Non-verbal Bullying**

Non-verbal types of bullying encompass a wide range of aspects such as sexual bullying, where the victim is targeted with obscene behaviours that they do not want to engage in; racial bullying, where a victim is targeted due to their race; exclusion, where victims are deliberately excluded from activities or groups and extortion, where victims are forced to give the bullies money (Suckling & Temple, 2002).

### **2.4.4 Modern Forms of Bullying**

As with everything in this world, even bullying seems to be influenced by technological progress. Modern day bullies use modern technology to effect their bullying practices. The cell phone and the computer are now the tools most commonly used to do so. According to The Queensland University of technology in Australia, “93% of teenagers worldwide will experience some form of bullying at least once. E-TV (26 October, 2010) reported that one third of all cases of bullying reported, was conducted through cyber space. This type of cyber-bullying involves a text message or phone call that is inappropriate and makes you feel uncomfortable” (*Teen Zone*, 2009, p. 32). Oprah Winfrey dedicated a special show on 20 July 2009 entitled “Bullied to Death”, to teenagers who fell victim to cyber-bullying and then killed themselves. The boys referred to were ruthlessly bullied on the internet and on their cell phones until they could no longer handle it. E-TV (26 October, 2010) referred to this as “bullycide” (bullycide is discussed further in chapter 4). The programme reported that sites such

as Facebook, You tube and Mixit, were used to bully people. Bullying using these sites was regarded as being worse than conventional bullying as the messages were instant, anonymous and could be seen by any person logging onto the relevant site. Furthermore, the victim did not have to be in the physical proximity of the bully. This is similar to incidents reported to educators at my school recently where “Lists” were circulated via MXIT which contained derogatory comments and details about specific learners at this and various other schools. The effects on these learners were profoundly negative with many suffering from serious depression, panic attacks and some even contemplating suicide.

## **2.5 Characteristics of a bully**

According to Smith and Sharpe (1994), some children are predisposed to become bullies while others are predisposed to become victims. Some of the factors which predispose children to become bullies are temperament, family and home environment, exposure to aggression, lack of family affection and monitoring, perception of family relationships in terms of power and concern with personal position in the family. Roberts (2006, p49) states that one reason for the bullies’ behaviour is that they experience feelings of being “unloved, unimportant, and inferior”. These feelings are then projected by the bully, onto the victim. Roberts goes on to state that the physical stature, age and energy levels of a bully are, on average, greater than that of the victim.

## **2.6 Bullying in South African Schools**

Recent media reports have highlighted the increase in bullying behaviours in South African schools (Comins, 2010; Gwala, 2010; Abrahams, 2009; Denny-Dimitrio, 2009; Mngoma, 2008; Kassiem, 2007). In his paper

delivered at the School Safety Summit which was held in Pietermaritzburg in October 2008, Patrick Burton stated that the public perception of the occurrence of serious and violent crimes in South African schools was inaccurate as it was fuelled in the main by sensationalist media reports. He did however, acknowledge that bullying did exist in South African schools and it was essential to monitor this (Burton, 2008).

In her investigation into the incidence of bullying in South African schools, Squelch (cited by Behr, 2000) found that bullying existed in all schools regardless of their demographics. She reported that a significantly high percentage of South African school-going children were bullied on a regular basis. de Wet (2006) reported that while bullying existed in Free State schools, recognition of learner on learner bullying was not always accurate because educators were not always privy to the more intimate and detailed relationships and interactions of the learners. It was also acknowledged that bullying was context bound. In the light of this, the present study is important as it seeks to explore learners' views and experiences of bullying.

Race is also a prime motivator for bullying at several schools. The Human Rights Watch (2001) reported that of all the cases of violence reported to them in 2001, 62% were racially motivated.

## **2.7 Bullying, violence and Peace Education in Schools**

According to Carl and Swartz (1996, p.2), "The level of violence in South Africa has reached frightening proportions". They felt that violence was the favoured tool when dealing with conflict resolution. The prime perpetrator for this was the way the media exposed and portrayed this culture of violence. The violence then overflowed in to the surrounding schools as these were representations of the societies and communities within which

they existed and operated. This has in recent years been seen in many, much publicised, violent episodes within the parameters of the school boundaries. These include the Samurai sword killing and the shootings of various learners across the country. As a peace educator in a school situated in this violent society, I felt it my duty to try and get peace to prevail at my school. I felt the need to work towards peace education for all my learners.

The significance of Education for Peace is highlighted in its definition which reads as follows, “Education for Peace is an educational process aimed at instilling in people essential values, attitudes, knowledge and skills which will enable them to resolve conflict and situations of violence in a positive manner thereby promoting peace” (Carl & Swartz, 1996, p.3). The conflict situation targeted in this study is that of bullying.

Bar-Tal (2002, p.1) felt that the school was the most suitable place for a peace education initiative as, “Schools are often the only institution that society can formally, intentionally and extensively use to achieve this mission”. Violence, as described in Bar-Tal, is a social problem. Thus, for the purpose of this study, it is assumed that the violence that stems from bullying can also be seen as a social problem. To try and stem the incidents of bullying at the school, the embracing of the five postulates of peace education are fundamental. These five postulates are listed in Harris (2004, p.6) as follows:

1. It explains the roots of violence
2. It teaches alternatives to violence
3. It adjusts to cover different forms of violence
4. Peace itself is a process that varies according to context
5. Conflict is omnipresent.



I found that taking the above postulates into account could help forge the way from bullying to peace in the school. The tool to do this was action research as it enabled lots of interaction and reflection between the learners and between the learners and researcher. As has been seen in many of the works cited above, bullying is a form of power over others and is very similar to other forms of inequality and oppression which are major concerns of social justice. By addressing bullying in the school, the levels of bullying and violence can be decreased thereby creating a more peaceful and free learning environment for all.

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.8.1 Paulo Freire's Theory of Oppression**

This theory arose from Freire's experiences as an impoverished child in Latin America. Being a victim of poverty and hunger in the 1930's, Freire vowed to do what he could to eradicate this form of suffering from the lives of other children. Freire's work initially emerged as a way to deal with literacy training of adults in third world countries, namely Chile and Brazil. His work made an impact on the education of the marginalised masses such as women and the workers in Europe. Freire's work was viewed as a major turning point in critical pedagogy worldwide. Freire felt that "the struggle for humanisation, breaking the cycles of injustice, exploitation and oppression lies in the perpetuation of oppressor versus oppressed" (Freire, 2006). To Freire "oppression can be transformed through collective struggle" (Freire in Hudak & Kihn, 2001, p13). This could be seen as a broad aim of this project, to transform the oppressive situation of bullying through the collective work of the RCL. A further reason for looking at Freire's theory of oppression as a lens to explore the data of this study, is that Freire believed that "any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (Freire in Hudak & Kihn, 2001, p.14). In the

case of this study, as is seen in chapter four, bullying involves the bully hindering the progress of the victim/target in various ways. It could then be reasoned that bullying is a form of oppression.

### **2.8.1.1 The Culture of Silence**

Early in his life, Freire found that “a culture of silence” (Freire, 1970, p.12) existed amongst the dispossessed and that this culture of silence was perpetuated by the whole educational system. People tended to rationalise difficult situations that they found themselves in. Rather than seeing these as negative situations, people tend to normalise and rationalise them and see them as part of everyday life. Freire, (1970, p.12) found that the ignorance and lethargy of the children was the “direct product of the whole situation of economic, social and political domination”. This study aimed to probe the silences that may exist in the school regarding bullying. It focused on this culture of silence and the learners’ normalising of the different situations that arise due to bullying. The project aimed at breaking the silences that may exist by engaging in dialogue with the learners and conscientizing them about bullying. To Freire, (2006, p.1) conscientization meant “breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness – in particular, awareness of oppression, of being an object in a world where only subjects have power”.

### **2.8.1.2 Generative words and themes**

Paulo Freire, as discussed in Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006), felt that people were the subjects of (their) own lives and narratives, not objects in the stories of others” (p.120). He felt it was the individual who was responsible for shaping and changing reality and that, “Those who do not acknowledge this, those who want to control and oppress are committing a kind of epistemic violence” (p.120). In his studies, Freire used generative words to try and help him understand communities and members.

Generative words emanated from Freire's work on literacy. He felt that in order for literacy to work, people needed to read the *word* and use this to read the *world*. Generative words were words that were used to generate discussion and stimulate a discourse about issues that oppressed and blinded people such that these issues become visible.

In the course of this project, I aimed to use generative words to generate discussions that would conscientize learners about bullying. This took the form of descriptive paragraphs, discussions and posters that learners created. The actual words that were used in these samples of data were used to generate words that were used at a later stage in the project. The praxis of the project was to help the victims, who were the oppressed, free both themselves and the bullies, who were the oppressors and unable to free themselves, by using an action research project.

Once these descriptive paragraphs and posters were collected, they were analysed to ascertain if any generative themes emerged. Fleischer citing Freire (Fleischer in Hudak & Kihn, 2001, p.115) felt that themes were very important in freeing the oppressed as "recognising contradictory circumstances as a problem is one method by which those within the underclass or oppressed can become critically conscious of their schools and societal surroundings".

### **2.8.1.3 Limit Situations**

Freire states that in order for change to occur, people had to recognise the causes of the problem that they experience. Once this was done, then only could they transform or change these problematic actions, thereby creating a new reality. Freire refers to these situations as "limit situations" (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p.120). According to Hudak & Kihn (2001, p.25), "Limit situations refer to social, political and historic encounters with the world; they are revolutionary moments in confronting

oppressive situations”. Limit situations imply that the world acts on you. You are an object. In a limit situation, people tend to adopt a world view that becomes habitual. They become limited by the “boundaries created by an external reality” (Freire in Hudak & Kihn, 2001, p.25). Freire believed that people,

because they are conscious beings – exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others, people overcome the situations which limit them” (Freire, 2006, p.99).

The limit situation of bullying were established during prior discussions with the RCL. The investigator then set out to establish the cause of this problem of bullying and with the help of the RCL, devised an action research project which would help transform the actions of bullies so that a new reality of a bully-free-school could emerge. Central to this process was dialogue which Freire describes as “collective reflection or action” (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p.121). This continuous dialogue about bullying amongst the RCL members and the researcher and the RCL members and their colleagues, could transform the limit situations of the school.

In order for the limit situations to change, the RCL members had to empower both themselves and the other learners of the school. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006, p44), Freire talks about dehumanisation which he says affects, “not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it”. He felt that the concept of power was central to the issues of

humanisation and dehumanisation. People oppressed others “by virtue of their power” (Freire, 2006, p.44) but could not free either themselves or others. He felt that only when the oppressed gained power could they free both themselves and the oppressors.

This is what this action research project aims to achieve. It aims at empowering the victims of bullying so that they can free themselves and the bullies in their school. It aims at achieving true generosity such that the hands of the victims “need to be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work, and working, transform the world” (Freire, 2006, p.45). Freire says that this must occur hand in hand with those who are in true solidarity with the oppressed. In this project, I feel that those in true solidarity with the oppressed learners of the school would be their democratically elected leaders, the RCL and myself as a social justice educator.

Freire felt that the reason that people became oppressors was because that was how they were shaped by the situations within which they existed. He felt that the ideal was “to be men” and this meant that if one was to be a man, one had to be an oppressor. This is one of the notions that will be investigated in this project. It would be interesting to note if this theory of Freire’s holds true in this study on bullying. Do boys really bully others to show off their masculinity?

Expanding on the above mentioned notion of masculinity is the idea that the oppressed see the oppressor as encompassing their idea of “manhood”. This idea will also be looked at in this study. Do the victims of bullying see bullies as encompassing the qualities of their concept of the ideal man?

Freire felt that the oppressed became resigned to the oppression that they experienced and that freedom will only be achieved through praxis. This means that in order for freedom to be achieved, informed action in which theory and practice balance each other in practice, would have to be done. In this project, the oppressed, namely the victims of bullying as well as the school population, will be conscientized by the project into realising that they can re-shape their schooling environment into one which has minimal bullying.

#### **2.8.1.4 Conscientization**

Conscientization is a concept that was developed by Freire in order to describe “the process of developing a critical awareness of one’s situation and oppression, and learning how to change such a situation” (John, 2009, p.46). It involves the creation of an awareness of ones’ world and involves a person moving towards a critical awareness of things that inform one’s world. Through conscientization, one moves from prevailing knowledge of the world to a newer, more critical awareness of the world. This critical awareness then allows one to change from a position of powerlessness and oppression to a position of power. John (2009, p.46) states that “conscientization through education allows for those silenced through various forms of oppression to be able to read the word and their world.” In this study, I aimed at conscientizing the learners about bullying such that they could move from their prevailing knowledge of bullying to a more critical awareness of bullying. This new critical awareness could then help them to respond to bullying by creating a new understanding of concepts associated with bullying. Thus the RCL would be able reduce bullying in their school by responding to incidents appropriately.

#### **2.8.1.5 Praxis**

For Freire, praxis involved people becoming critically aware of their world and acting on it. Praxis involved a series of actions and reflections and

conveyed “the dialectical relationship between making meaning of one’s social reality via dialogue and reflection, and transforming one’s social reality via action, and thereby creating new meaning” (John, 2009, p.46). This study was an action research (AR) project. As such, action and reflection, as advocated by Freire, was central. The study involved the constant reflection of the actions taken as the cycle of AR progressed.

## **2.8.2 Judith Butler**

### **2.8.2.1 Notion of Gender**

In her book *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990), Butler focuses on the distinction between the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’. She focuses on how the meanings vary between sexuality and homosexuality. Issues pertaining to what is normative for gender are examined. Butler (1990, p.xx) states that the systems that exist in a society “produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine”. She felt that one could not separate gender from the cultural and political ethos in which it existed because “gender intersects with racial class, ethnic sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler, 1990, p.6). According to Butler (2004, p.1) “One does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary”. She states that a person is “understood differentially depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognisability of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, (and) the categorical understanding of that ethnicity” (Butler, 2004, p.2).

Butler, (2004, p.2) felt that the “social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood”. She goes on to state that the viability of our individual personhood is

fundamentally dependant of the social norms” (Butler, 2004 p.2). In other words, if one did not conform to the representational claims of being a woman, then exclusion could be a resultant consequence. The representational claims of a woman would be ruled by the hegemony present. It would be interesting to ascertain from this study, if bullies bully others because the victim’s individual personhoods do not conform to their views of social norms.

For Butler (2004, p.2), schemes of recognition are available that can either “do a person by conferring recognition, or undo a person by withholding recognition”. By so doing, recognition becomes the site of power by which the person is differentially produced. This simply means that the people who have the power will have the means of qualifying who is recognisable and who is not. Butler (1990, p.xxviii) also felt that “Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between subject and other”. She refers to Foucault who claimed that “judicial systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent” (Butler, 1990 p.4). In terms of bullying, it would be interesting to see if it is that those with power can become the bullies. They could either ostracize those who they felt did not deserve recognition or recognise those who they felt did. The victims of bullying could then be dependent on those with power for their social existence.

Butler is clear in her position that gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the question of what maximises the possibilities of unbearable life or, indeed, social or literal death” (Butler, 2004, p.8). She quotes Katherine Franke as stating that gender subordination “is part of a larger social practice that creates gendered bodies – feminine women and masculine men” (Butler, 2004, p.55). For the purpose of this study I will look at this concept of socially constructed identities. Do bullies become bullies because bullying is part



of the social practices that they are exposed to and which they internalise and normalise?

### **2.8.2.2 Related discussions of gender**

According to Morrell (1994, p.80), “The school, its teachers and organisational structures, generated a tough masculinity through physical conditions, the harsh treatments and the hierarchies which are utilized in conducting its business.” Morrell stated that masculinity was created by boys and men who, had to develop ways in which to “deal with the ‘toughening’ processes of school life” (Morrell, 1994, p.57). This toughening process could manifest as bullying behaviour which would be overlooked by educators as they viewed it as part of the toughening process. A result of this process could be the formation of gangs which were seen as a source of power. Morrell (1994, p.73) found that acts of violence “and the ever present potential for male violence against other men, whether at the individual or state level, are reactions to power”. It would be interesting to see if boys in this study bullied in order to gain power over others.

Bhana (2002, p.2), like Morrell, felt that the “threat of violence and hurt can derive from certain gendered practices”. These practices then disadvantaged both boys and girls in that it affected the way in which they viewed their relationships. Bhana found that boys were the ones who were seen to have power and that this possession of or lack of power was derived from socialisation. Bhana (2002, p.51) cites Morrell as stating that “gender is a relational construct involving boys and girls who make meaning in schools and who are moulded and shaped by the school environment and its social structures”. Like Morrell and Butler, Bhana suggests that one’s gendered identity is a result of social construction.

Morojele (2009) adds that the construction of gender identity was also impacted upon by cultural hegemony. Morojele stated that boys and girls were gendered differently to fit into societies, and respective cultural constructs, of boys and girls. He found that children “will be socialised by and into the patriarchal regime and related practices and will live on through their relationships with their parents, teachers and grandparents” (Morojele, 2009, p.38). Thus, it seems that boys and girls would spend a large amount of their formative years assimilating these constructs. It is these social constructs that inform the relationships that children have with other people. Furthermore, boys were socialised to be more masculine while girls were socialised into being more subdued. Boys were the ones who were seen as more deserving of power than girls. Morojele also found that the desire and pressure to conform to the dominant hegemony can cause anxiety and stress for both girls and boys alike.

### **2.8.2.3 The Face of the Other**

In writing her book “Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence” (2004), Butler engages with Levinas’ concept of the “Face of the Other”. Levinas coined the phrase in the wake of the 911 bombings in America and discusses the “Other” as the American enemy who is “the sole being I wish to kill” (Butler, 2004, p.138). It was the notion that Levinas used “to explain how it was that others make moral claims upon us, address moral demands to us, ones that we do not ask for, ones that we are not free to refuse” (Butler, 2004, p.131). The other was seen as the enemy, person or persons who represented a danger to the general population. Levinas attempted to identify this *other* and make him/her less threatening by trying to create “The Face of the Other”. This “face” did not represent the face as we know it, the one that consists of forehead, eyes, nose, chin and mouth. Rather, it is a figure of something that is not literally a face (Butler, 2004, p.144). In order to understand the face, one has to understand the concept of the face, one has to be aware of the

precariousness of life and one must have an “understanding of the precariousness of the Other” (Butler, 2004, p.134). Levinas looked at the face as one that is “not exclusively a human face, and yet it is a condition for humanization” (Butler, 2004, p.141). Once one identifies with a particular representation of a face, the recognition of that face alone can lead to violence. People therefore need to ask, “in what narrative function these images are mobilised” (Butler, 2004, p.143).

For the purpose of this study, the Face of the Other will be that of the bullies as the ones who make demands on the learners and whom the learners were unable to refuse due to various reasons that will be discussed in the course of this dissertation. The concept of the Face of the Other was utilised in this study in that learners were, in the final data collection process, asked to draw a poster depicting the face of the bully.

#### **2.8.2.4 Humanization and Dehumanization**

Butler considered the issue of humanization and dehumanization as one that is very important when addressing the face of the other as it can determine how we react to the others in our lives. She felt that:

When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all (Butler, 2004, p. 141).

For the purpose of this study, the bullies will be regarded as those that gain self-representation by bullying others and thereby gaining power and popularity. They will be seen to deny humanization to their victims or

targets in that the victims are unable to represent themselves due to various reasons that will be discussed in chapters three and four.

## **2.9 Other empirical studies on Bullying**

### **2.9.1 Mlisa, Ward, Flisher & Lombard (2008)**

Mlisa et al felt that a hiatus existed in the academic literature regarding bullying in South African schools. Their study was thus designed to identify and explain some of these aspects, namely, “The prevalence of bullying in South African rural high schools” and the notion that “factors in the school and family domain are indeed associated with bullying” (Mlisa et al, 2008, p.262). It focussed on grade eleven pupils from two rural schools in South Africa and involved the identification of bullies, victims and bully-victims. These identities, it seems, were affected by factors such as: geographical location, academic achievement, conventional school involvements and school domain. Mlisa et al acknowledged that school bullying has a very high prevalence and is a serious problem that has many adverse effects. It has also not received as much attention as it should.

The study found that while gender, age and family factors did not contribute significantly to violence, aspects such as exposure to violence and neighbourhood income did. They also acknowledged that it was difficult to link to international literature about bullying because “different operationalisations of bullying have been used” (Mlisa et al, 2008, p.264). The study also revealed that high levels of violence and aggression were experienced by South African scholars.

### **2.9.2 Done (2002)**

Done’s research is entitled “How do teachers and learners at one Durban Primary School understand and cope with bullying?” Her rationale for

doing the study was that bullying was topical and as an educator, she felt the desire to create an added understanding towards bullying as well as developing a more progressive way for educators to deal with the dynamics of bullying that they were constantly faced with.

The study took place at a Durban primary school. The study looked at how educators and learners of that school understood, experienced and coped with bullying practices. Four causes of bullying were discussed, namely, personality characteristics, family factors, school ethos and peers. The research population was one hundred grade seven learners. The frameworks utilised were those related to gender and power. Done used questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis as her methodologies.

At the end of her study, Done found that there was a high incidence of bullying amongst learners in schools. She also found that both the educators and the learners tended to misunderstand the concept of bullying and as the result of this poor understanding, when bullying occurred at the school, the appropriate action was not taken. Another finding was that both physical and non-physical bullying occurred. The difference was that girls were more likely to engage in the non-physical forms of bullying than boys. Furthermore, bullying was not thought of as a problem. This was reflected in that none of the schools policies mentioned bullying and there was no anti-bullying policy. Thus when bullying occurred at the school, it was dealt with in an ad hoc manner. Done (2002, p.47) stated that “different cultures constructed masculinity differently”, a position also advanced by Morojele (2009). Done also found that “Hegemonic masculinity is highly visible” and that the other learners of the school often admired the bullies.

### **2.9.3 Houndemadi & Pateraki (2001)**

Houndemadi and Pateraki focused their study on elementary school learners. Pupils' attitudes towards bullies, bullying and their perceptions of how parents and educators viewed bullying were examined. The study also examined parent and teacher awareness of bullying in the school. Houndemadi and Pateraki found that boys and girls experienced and perceived bullying differently and that there were different forms of bullying. For the purpose of the present study, it would be interesting to note if boys and girls did indeed experience and perceive bullying differently. Results of this study also revealed that educators were "largely unaware of the extent of bullying behaviour in their schools" (Houndemadi and Pateraki, 2001, p24). Furthermore, learners felt that they could speak to parents rather than educators about the problem of bullying in the school.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed theoretical and empirical literature related to bullying. The next chapter deals with the research design and methodology of the project. It highlights aspects related to the site of the project, the research population, data collection methods used as well as the trustworthiness and reliability of the data collected.

## **Chapter Three - Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methodology that was utilized in this action research study. The chapter discusses the research design and process, research participants, data collection and data analysis.

When the RCL of school X was approached to create a list of areas that they felt needed intervention at the school, bullying was one of the first items mentioned. Many members of the RCL felt that bullying was often overlooked by all stakeholders as an area of concern. They felt that as the RCL of the school, it would be fitting for them to put in place a programme that would create an understanding of bullying and help to reduce the levels of bullying in the school, by empowering both the learners and the educators on the dynamics of bullying. Such a purpose presented the opportunity for action research.

### **3.2 The Research Design, Methodology and Process**

In describing the work of critical theorists, Cohen et al (2007) state that their purpose

is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour but to realise a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members. Its purpose is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them in particular, it seeks to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society (2007, p.26).

This is relevant to this study as incidents of bullying seen in this school, are often based on inequality. It also presupposes that those with power are the ones who would inevitably get what they want. Further to this is the implication that, by being bullied, the individual freedom of the other learners is being hampered by the actions of the bullies. Thus this action research project seeks to redress this inequality and help to create and promote a democratic schooling environment in which the individual freedom of all learners is respected and promoted.

In keeping with the above, I have aligned myself with the principles of action research as, according to McNiff & Whitehead (2002, p.1), it has a unique identity “with its own methodologies and epistemologies, its own criteria and standards of judgement” and thus cannot be “spoken about in terms of traditional forms of research”.

Action research initially began with Kurt Lewin who aimed at using it to “change the life chances of disadvantaged groups in terms of housing, employment, prejudice, socialisation and training” (Cohen et al, p.226). Action research is currently used in any sphere where change is required for a more desirable outcome. Hopkins in Cohen et al (2007, p.297), defines action research as being “the combination of action and research (that) renders that action a form of disciplined enquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practice”. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p.476) have defined action research as being “Research involving intervention in the functioning of the real world, and close examination of the effects of this action”. This is precisely what this project aims to do. It aims to intervene on bullying as seen at this particular school and then closely monitor the effects that this intervention has had on the schooling population and environment. Ferrance (2000, p.vi), states that action research is all about “searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools”.



In this study, the problem that is addressed is that of bullying. As stated by the RCL members of the school, bullying is a very real problem that learners experience on an ongoing basis. This is in keeping with media reports which have highlighted the increase in the cases of bullying as experienced in schools across the globe (E-TV, 26 October 2010).

Action researchers acknowledge the impact that they have on the lives of others and the impact that others have on them. Thus in the case of bullying, I feel that perhaps, the RCL would succeed where educators have encountered difficulties. A further belief by action researchers is that a brighter future can and does exist if they, as researchers, are able to successfully act upon the present. The ontology is that the one with the most power describes the reality and thus brings about change. In this project, the ones with the power would be the RCL as they are a recognised body within the schooling structure and are therefore able to make decisions as well as drive forward projects on behalf of the rest of the learner population. It is hoped that the RCL would use this power to work on the causes and features of bullying and help to develop a programme to bring about a change in the existing reality. The other group who hold power in this project would be the bullies who would derive their power from being physically bigger or older or stronger. Further to this is the fact that, as an educator at the school, I believe that any intervention targeting the problem of bullying is worthwhile and part of the responsibilities of social justice educators.

### Research Questions

The research project is framed by the following broad research questions:

1. How does the RCL understand the phenomenon of bullying in the school?
2. What is the prevalence and features of bullying in their school context?
3. What actions do learners recommend to reduce bullying in their school?

The study used a qualitative methodology to address the specified research questions. The questionnaire (see annexure 2) that was used contained simple questions and instructions which were clear and straight forward. They were neither leading nor presumptuous of any viewpoint. The instructions regarding the paragraphs and the posters were also clear and simple to understand. The research was aligned to the postulates of critical theorists.

### **3.2.1 Research Design**

Action research usually involves several cycles before the true benefit of the programme can be seen. This allows for constant interaction by the investigator and the research participants such that the programme can be refined for optimum benefit. However, for the purpose of this study, only one cycle of AR will be reported on. Different researchers have different models of Action Research that they prefer. For example, Ferrance (2000) favours a five-step model while Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) outline a seven-step model. I have decided to structure my research around the five step model outlined by Ferrance (2000) which entails the following: step 1 requires the identification of the problem; step 2 entails the gathering of data to ascertain the current baseline of the situation being studied; step 3 involves the interpretation of the data collected in step 2 and the drawing up of a programme of action; in step 4 the action research process is enacted; and in step 5 the refining and analysis of the AR process is analysed and ascertained. Thus in keeping with Ferrance's

model, my study took on the following shape. The identification of the problem (Ferrence's step one) was done outside of the MEd study where learners identified bullying as a problem which they wished to address. The next step of the project entailed the RCL answering a questionnaire that addressed the above research questions and reviewed the current practice of bullying at the school. This was the initial data gathering process of my research and was done via a questionnaire and aimed at establishing a baseline of the current situation of bullying in the school. The reason for the selection of the RCL as research participants for this project was that, as an educator, I am aware of the existence of bullying in the school. Even though various literature sources have acknowledged and discussed bullying in various forms and phases, this has been done primarily through the eyes of the educator or some informed individual or group. As stated above, I felt the need to start somewhere else in this fixed system of the school. Like Houndoumadi and Pateraki (2001) and Vandeyar and Esakov (2007), I felt it imperative to the success of my project, to hear the voice of the learners. Did the learners share the same view as educators that bullying was a problem in the school environment? Why did learners believe it occurred and how did they believe that they, as the learners of the school, could contribute to its decrease and thereby create a more positive, safe and happy learning environment? It was hoped that the above mentioned questionnaire would bring about the answers to the questions that I seek.

The next step of my study, step three involved the responses from the questionnaires being analysed and interpreted. This analysis was then used by the researcher and the RCL to draw up a programme of intervention aimed at decreasing bullying in the school. Step four of the study then took place and the action research programme was implemented. This involved various interventions such as a focus group interview with the TLO and a workshop with the SAPS. Some of the

discussions held at the workshop included a broader definition of bullying and mapping of the bullying hotspots around the school. The incidence of bullying in the school was then monitored by the RCL who then completed various other activities pertaining to bullying. Further interventions involved the RCL discussing bullying with their classes. All learners in the classes were involved in exercises and discussions dealing with bullying in their English and Life Orientation (LO) classes. Learners were then asked to complete paragraphs and posters highlighting bullying. The final step of the AR project involved the data gathered from the initial data collection process and the data gathered in the final data collection process being analysed to ascertain if the incidence of bullying in the school was impacted upon by the intervention process that were carried out. This AR process could lend a wealth of knowledge that will describe how learners, and the RCL in particular, see bullying in their schooling environment. A short second round of the project was supposed to be implemented to gain information from staff, RCL and learners on how they experienced the intervention programme but this was one of the shortcomings of the project in that there was no time in which to do so. The project will however be one that will be ongoing as it will be a part of the on-going RCL Anti-Bullying Campaign and I will be looking at both the short term and long term change and benefits of such a campaign.

The RCL of the school were engaged in providing data pertaining to bullying as well participating in the action research by helping to design and implement a programme that will help to reduce the incidence to bullying in the school.

### **3.2.2 Location of the study**

The action research project took place at a Secondary School in Pietermaritzburg. The reason for this was that the researcher is the Teacher Liaison Officer at the school and thus works closely with the RCL

who are the participants in the study. Being situated at the selected school lent itself to the efficacy of data collection and research as well as the ability to accommodate time constraints set out by the Master's programme.

As the school is an inner-city school, it serves learners from in and around the city, as well as disadvantaged learners from outlying rural townships. The school comprises of a male principal, two male deputy principals, one female head of department and four male heads of department. There are 38 staff members with 17 being male and 21 being female. The learner population is 1070 with 525 boys and 545 girls. The class sizes range from 35 to 44 with grades from 8 to 12.

### **3.2.3 Positionality**

As an educator at the selected school, it was important that I, as researcher, clarify my positions and roles in the project so that the RCL was aware of my positions in this regard. In response to my position as educator, I felt that learners did not respond as openly to the data collection processes as I would have liked. Learners seemed to be aware of my position of authority over them. They were perhaps afraid of the repercussions of being labelled as bullies.

My access to the RCL is direct as I am the Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO) to the RCL. This office of TLO necessitates me interacting with the RCL about all aspects pertaining to and directly involving the student body at the school. I am involved in helping the RCL set up and run various projects in the school. One such project is an initiative to try and create a more peaceful environment in which to operate. One aspect of the peace initiative that the RCL is exploring is that of trying to reduce bullying in the school.

I decided to look at an Action Research project with the RCL to reduce bullying in our school. The methodology of action research fits in with what I am trying to achieve. I believe that a better learning environment can exist with the co-operation and understanding of all those involved. Thus I felt that I needed to involve the learners in processes required to create a peaceful learning environment for them. Learners needed to be involved in this peace process. They need to take ownership of it and learn from it in order to take it seriously. As stated by McNiff and Whitehead (2002, p.13), "Working out ideas is the learning, working out how to live with one another is the peace process". Further to this is the notion that action research is strongly linked to dynamics pertaining to education as well as to growth (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

### **3.2.4 Research Participants**

Quota sampling was used for the selection of research participants. Data was gathered from the individuals who were part of the RCL who were the target population of the study. This involved the RCL members of the school. The first interaction with all 29 members of the RCL involved them identifying areas which needed intervention at school. The entire RCL body included 26 ordinary members plus 3 executive members. When the project commenced, all 29 members were handed consent and indemnity forms. Of this, 1 member declined to participate in the project. The remaining 28 members were handed questionnaires for them to complete. As the project unfolded, all nine grade 12 RCL members dropped out of the project as their trial examinations commenced. Thus the research participant group diminished from a start of 29 to a total of 19 research participants. The participants were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old. There was an equal number of boys and girls on the RCL but ten girls and nine boys remained in the final research participant group. The RLC executive comprised of a male chairperson, a male deputy chairperson and a female secretary. The reason for using the RCL

in the study was that they were the ones who identified the problem of bullying as one that required intervention. They were also the ones who represented the rest of the school population and who had the best access to the needs and activities of the learners. This gave the RLC a lot of power and influence over the learners who democratically elected them. As stated in 3.3 Methods of Data Collection, the problem of bullying was identified by members of the RCL. The RCL Executive motivated the RCL in terms of their dedication to the project. Members of the RCL, who felt strongly about the project, reinforced the need for an Anti-Bullying campaign at the school. They also reinforced discussions that were held and encouraged the rest of the members to be more dedicated and committed to the project.

### **3.3 Methods of Data Collection**

For the purpose of this study, various qualitative data collection methods were used. This afforded the researcher the opportunity of triangulation in terms of data collection and analysis.

The initial step of the AR project was initiated outside the official start of my MEd study wherein the RCL, in a focus group discussion with the TLO, identified a series of problematic areas in the school which needed intervention. Bullying was listed as one of these problem areas and I decided to make it the focus of my MEd study. I then initiated the AR project in a consultative process with the RCL.

Step two was the initial data collection process which involved the collection of data via a questionnaire that contained both open-ended and close-ended questions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit data on what the learners knew about bullying as experienced in their school. It required the learners to define bullying as well as to answer questions on

types of bullying which occurred, where it occurred and why it occurred, among others. Completed questionnaires were anonymously placed into a folder that the researcher had. This meant that the researcher had no way of knowing which learner completed which questionnaire.

Step three involved an analysis of the questionnaires completed in step two. The analysis revealed that most learners had a very personalised, but limited understanding of bullying. Consequently, the RCL was called to a focus group interview with the researcher and their understanding of bullying was discussed. They were also asked to draw up an intervention programme that would address their concerns regarding bullying. Step three of the AR process was the implementation of this intervention process. In keeping with the intervention programme drawn up by the RCL, the concerns that were raised and discussed were further explored in a workshop with the RCL and members of the South African Police Services (SAPS) who were asked to help to clarify and elaborate on the meaning of bullying and to explain what acts constituted bullying. During this process, the members of the SAPS engaged the RCL on a variety of points pertaining to bullying. This included a thorough revision of the definition of bullying. This discussion was documented by the researcher.

Further intervention processes involved discussions led by the RCL of bullying and the information gained from the workshop with the SAPS, with their classes. Various aspects relating to bullying were also discussed in conventional classroom activities. Unfortunately, due to various external factors, all the intervention strategies outlined by the RCL could not be carried out. The RCL was then, as the fourth step of the study, asked to complete three tasks. The first task required learners to write a paragraph on what is bullying. The second task involved learners drawing up a poster on why people bully. The last task was labelled “The Face of the Bully” and learners were asked to draw up posters which highlighted the



characteristics of a bully. This was done in part to ascertain if the learners had revised their views on bullying as well as to obtain further data. Step five of the study, which involved an analysis of data collected to ascertain if the AR process impacted on the learners understanding of bullying, will be discussed in chapter four of this thesis. Findings will be discussed with the research participants as soon as this dissertation has been finalised.

### **3.3.1 Reliability of Data**

Any data collected for a project needs to be double checked to ensure that it is valid and reliable. This is helped by triangulation of data. For this project, data was collected by various means to ensure that they could be cross checked. Methods used were a questionnaire, focussed group interviews, a workshop, researcher observations as well as poster and paragraph writing. Open and close ended questions were used to probe learners' experiences of bullying in their school.

### **3.3.2 Limitations**

My role in this project is three-fold. First I am the educator. Second, I am the Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO) and finally, I am the researcher. As such, I accept that my positionality could be compromised. There are several limitations and ethical dilemmas that I had to manage. Firstly, as stipulated by McLaren (2007, p.242), "Teachers often fall into the trap of defining success solely through the ideological correctness of what they teach". In other words, I had to be careful not to impose my beliefs, values and ideals on the research participants. I had to be careful to allow the learners to tell their own stories rather than to tell them mine. I also had to remember to separate my roles as teacher and researcher at relevant times as this could have affected the responses of the participants. Learners could have seen me as their teacher and therefore tried to please me by giving the response they thought I wanted to hear rather than their true responses.

Another limitation was that the project occurred during school time. This meant that it was limited by the school day and the occurrences that ensue within this highly structured day. This meant that the schedule had to be constantly revised. Further, it meant that meetings were restricted to the breaks and after school. Thus learners were engaged in the project during their break time, which meant that their attention was divided. Another limitation was that the success of the project was dependent on the research team remaining intact throughout the duration of the project as well as securing co-operation of educators and other stakeholders. The ability of the RCL to accurately relay information between the research team and the respective learners also impacted on the quality of the research. Another limitation was that the restrictions on time meant that all the interventions that were suggested by the RCL were not completed.

As a MEd student, I had to be guarded as to the power and control involved in the project. I remembered that while I was conducting this project for degree purposes, the true value of it lay in the potential impact it could have on the learners. Thus striving for the project to be a democratic process rather than striving to drive it for completion of my degree, was important. A further limitation tied in with this project was that as this study was for degree purposes, it had a strict time limit. This meant that the research was restricted to one cycle in the Action Research Project, and time permitting, a shorter second cycle. Unfortunately, this shorter second cycle did not materialise due to time constraints. The question that then arose was could the objectives of the project be achieved in this limited period? I believe that in order for this project to reach its proper conclusion, at least another two rounds of AR need to be completed. I do, have every intention of carrying on with the project with the RCL even after my degree has been completed as this aspect has been ear-marked as an ongoing RCL project. Thus, aspects that could not

be completed within the constraints of this study will be completed after the completion of my MEd.

### **3.3.3 Ethical Considerations**

Firstly, the anonymity of all participants was assured. Secondly, taking into consideration the age of most of the participants, clearance and permission was gained from the relevant stakeholders, namely, the Department of Education, the school, the parents and the learners. Confidentiality was strictly adhered to at all times. My competence as a researcher was also vital to the success of the project. I thus ensured that I was well versed in all aspects of action research and its principles before I embarked on the project. Results will also be reported to all subjects who participated in the project once this thesis has been completed.

### **3.3.4 Questionnaires**

I chose questionnaires as my initial data collection tool for various reasons. Firstly, learners were familiar with the answering of questionnaires as they have learnt about questionnaires in the course of their school curriculum. Further, information derived from a questionnaire is easy to tabulate and analyse. Importantly, questionnaires were selected as this meant that learners were able to take questionnaires home and fill them in at their leisure. There were no verbal prompts by the researcher to bias learner responses in any way thus responses reflected the true opinion of the learners (Hannan, 2007; Cohen et al, 2007). The aim of the questionnaire was to establish the viewpoint of the RCL on the occurrences of bullying in their school as well as to ascertain their view on bullying.

Questionnaires were handed to learners in the first step of the project. The questionnaires that were handed out to the RCL were semi-structured. This allowed for the researcher to obtain information pertaining to the

demographics of the study as well as to obtain the narratives of each participant regarding their views and experiences of bullying. The participants were guaranteed anonymity regarding their responses as the researcher did not want the participants' responses to be biased as the researcher was the educator and TLO of the participants.

This questionnaire was designed by the researcher (see annexure 2). Questionnaires were handed out at a meeting of the RCL. Each participant then returned their completed questionnaire to the researcher. 28 questionnaires were handed out at the meeting of the RCL as 28 members of the RCL indicated via the completed consent forms, that they would participate in the study. However only 19 questionnaires were completed and handed in as discussed above.

### **3.3.5 Focus group interviews**

According to Kvale, as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.267), a focus group interview is a process whereby there is “an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest”. For the purpose of this study, focus group interviews were used as part of the intervention strategies. According to Cohen et al (2000, p.288), focus group interviews involve the “interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher”. This means that the “participants interact with each other rather than the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge” (Cohen et al, p.288). This type of interview process is contrived as it involved a particular group of people to interact with each other following observations made by the interviewer as well as earlier discussion with the RCL held before the project began, which revealed that the RCL had some uncertainty about the dynamics of bullying. Thus the focus group interviews were held to consolidate information gathered from the questionnaires and from the workshop and to ascertain if the workshop had helped to improve the learners’

understanding of bullying. Thus the process used was threefold. It was used to: gather insights and data from the RCL; as a form of triangulation of data derived from the questionnaires and; as dictated by action research where the data elicited from one act determines the next, it was used as a form of intervention as a result of the data elicited from the questionnaire and observations made by the researcher which showed that participants had trouble fully understanding the concept of bullying. Furthermore, the reason that focus group interviews was chosen was that they produce a large amount of data in a short space of time.

The groups of people involved in the focus group interview were the learners and the researcher while the people involved in the workshop were: the RCL, members of the SAPS and the researcher. Once again, this workshop was held to address the gap that existed in the learners' understanding of bullying. It was one of the intervention strategies that the RCL identified as part of their campaign to eradicate bullying from the school. Learners were able to discuss bullying and its consequences with members of the SAPS.

### **3.3.6 Paragraphs detailing learners understanding of bullying**

As RCL members involved in a project aimed at reducing the levels of bullying at their school, it was incumbent on them to disseminate knowledge gained from their discussions, to their respective classes. After the workshop with the SAPS, during which clarities pertaining to bullying were addressed, RCL members held class discussions which the researcher was unable to be a part of due to time constraints. Aspects discussed at the focus group session and workshop, were disseminated to all learners in the class. Learners were also subjected to various aspects related to bullying in the English and Life Orientation (LO) lessons. These involved the educators of English and LO discussing aspects of bullying

that the researcher identified from the initial data collection process. After such discussions, all members of the class were asked to write a paragraph of about 10 lines highlighting their understanding of bullying. This understanding was one that was influenced by previous talks and discussions with the researcher, members of the SAPS, educators and fellow learners. Before learners could commence with this task, RCL members were reminded that their responses would form part of the data being collected for the study. They were asked not to indicate their names on their responses and to hand in their responses to the researcher so that they could be analysed as part of step 5 of this study.

### **3.3.7 Posters highlighting the characteristics of a bully and why people bully**

In addition to asking learners to complete the above mentioned paragraph, they were asked to complete two posters. One was to contain information dealing with why they thought people bullied other people and the other was to contain information pertaining to “The Face of the Bully” which highlighted the characteristics they felt a bully possessed. Both the paragraphs and the posters assured the anonymity of the participants as they were not required to furnish their names and were anonymously returned to the researcher (as was done with regards to the paragraphs discussed in 3.3.6. above). Like stories, both the paragraphs and the posters were “rich in authentic data” (Cohen et al. p.303).

### **3.3.8 Researcher observations**

As an educator at the school, I was able to observe the behaviour of the learners during the breaks and lessons. These observations were recorded and used to triangulate the data obtained from the other data collection methods used. As researcher, I was able to “enter and understand the situation” that was being described (Cohen et al, p.305).

Information sought was both “highly structured and semi-structured” (Cohen et al p.305).

Observations included things that were noticed on the grounds amongst pupils, learners’ responses and behaviour in the focus group interviews and the analysis of bullying on various documents such as the School Code of Conduct and the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA).

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The questionnaires, posters and paragraphs were analysed as natural meaning units. Similar sentiments expressed by participants were grouped together to form a basic summary. Themes were then formulated. An inductive analysis approach was used as the researcher had to try and find themes and categories as they emerged from the data.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaires**

The questionnaires were analysed to form a basis for demographical analysis of the data as well as to ascertain the baseline for bullying at the school. Information was analysed in a quantitative manner as well as in a qualitative manner. Themes were also derived from the data elicited. This formed the basis for the thematic interpretation of the data elicited from the focus group discussion, paragraphs and posters. Data from the questionnaire was also used to inform the discussions held in the focus group interviews and workshop with the SAPS.

#### **3.4.2 Paragraphs detailing learners’ understanding of bullying**

Paragraphs were analysed in a manner similar to that used to analyse data from the posters. Themes were derived and looked at in conjunction with data derived from the questionnaires and the posters. Similar themes were grouped together.

### **3.4.3 Posters highlighting the characteristics of a bully and why people bully**

Posters were analysed by deriving themes from the data. These were then analysed along with the data derived from the questionnaire to check if they were similar or different. Additional themes and data were also noted.

### **3.4.4 Researcher Observations**

Observations that were made by the researcher were documented and analysed in relation to the data elicited from the questionnaires, the posters and the paragraphs.

## **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the data that was derived from the various data collection methods that were used in the project. Research design, methodology, data collection and analysis were also discussed. The following chapter deals with the analysis and findings of the data that was generated from the above mentioned data collection methods.



## Chapter Four - Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings and analysis from the action research study on bullying. The findings generally indicate that bullying is rife in this school community and reveal the ways in which the RCL understands bullying. Firstly, I look at the generative themes that have emerged from the data. The concept of generative themes has been discussed in Chapter two. I have also discussed the action research methodology in chapter three. In the second section of this chapter, I discuss the impact of the action research process on the data that has been generated by the learners.

Even before my MEd study began, bullying was identified by the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) as a significant problem in the school community. It was a problem they wished to address with learners and in so doing hoped to eradicate. I thus decided to use this problem and interest for intervention as a topic for my MEd study. This initial discussion with the RCL was informal. It took place at a general meeting held with the RCL, before this MEd project was initiated. This initial discussion can however be seen as step one in Ferrance's (2006) five step model of action research. The RCL's, acknowledgment of the problem of bullying and their display of a willingness to act on this problem, echoes Freire's (2006) view that in order for change to occur, people had to recognise the causes of the problem that they experience. Only once this was done, could they then transform or address such problems, thereby creating a new reality. Since I was interested in bullying for my Masters in Education project, I decided to use this idea as presented by the RCL as my research topic. I approached the RCL and ascertained their willingness to participate in the project. I then explored these initial ideas generated by

the RCL on bullying, and with their help, as is required by the process of action research, a program of intervention was developed to address the gaps that emerged. These strategies included focus group interviews, workshops, class discussions and classroom based activities. Learners' initial knowledge of bullying was not as broad, as it became later, in that they did not have a comprehensive understanding of bullying and all that bullying entailed. When asked for examples of bullying, their lists did not include aspects of bullying that did not pertain to physical force or verbal taunts. Learners did not see bullying as being anything other than hitting, teasing or the use of force. Links to extortion, ostracism, denying others the right to participate in the feeding scheme, discrimination, oppression et cetera were only realized after intervention. This process of trying to engage with and address the learners' limited understanding of bullying was on-going for, as the project unfolded, more gaps in the learners' understanding and knowledge of bullying emerged from data which was gathered as well as from the observations made by the researcher/educator. This led to further intervention strategies being devised to address this lack of understanding and knowledge. Unfortunately, many of these strategies could not be completed due to time constraints but will form part of a second round of AR which will be conducted outside of this MEd study.

In order to ascertain how the RCL understood the phenomenon of bullying in their school, I engaged them on the topic of bullying at various stages in the project as is consistent with an action research project. The first engagement, within the parameters of the project, was in the form of a questionnaire. (This will be henceforth referred to as the initial data collection process). The next engagement was in the form of focus group discussions which took place between the RCL and the researcher. The RCL then engaged in a workshop with the SAPS. (These will be referred to as the first intervention processes). Learners were then exposed to

discussions and exercises on bullying which were integrated into their English and Life Orientation (LO) lessons. (These will be referred to as the second intervention processes). These processes are discussed at the end of this chapter. Various other informal sessions relating to bullying, involving both the RCL and other learners of the school, also took place. Throughout the project, learners' understandings on whom or what a bully was was sought. Initial data from the questionnaire showed that learners had a very basic understanding of the characteristics of a bully. They usually tended to describe a bully as an older boy who wanted to prove that he was in control, had more power and who was stronger than the victim.

The next formal step in the project was the final data collection process. It involved the learners writing a paragraph and drawing two posters. Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006, p.84) cite Butler as using the term "the face of the enemy" to describe the identities of the people who Americans consider to be its enemies. The identity of these "others" as Butler calls them, had helped to "render them inhuman and their lives ungrievable" (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p.84). (Refer to chapter two, 2.8.2.2 Judith Butler's "Face of the Other"). Drawing on Butler's notion of the face of the other, I was interested in exploring learners' conception of "the face of the bully" through this study. In the final data collection process, I asked the respondents to create two posters. One poster explored aspects relating to "Why people bully" and the second poster was on "The Face of the Bully" (the characteristics of a bully). Learners were also required to write a paragraph on "What is Bullying?" (These posters and paragraphs are referred to as the final data collection process.) Thus learners engaged with the concept "The Face of the Bully" on two levels. One involved them describing the characteristics of a bully in the initial data collection process and the other involved them creating a poster on the face of a bully.

A qualitative analysis of the data was then done. The difference in the data that was generated as the project unfolded is interesting. Many silences that were revealed in the initial data collection process (the questionnaire) were subsequently discussed in the final data collection process (the paragraphs and posters). This could be the result of the intervention strategies that were implemented as part of the action research process. For example, when involved in the focus group discussion and the workshop with the SAPS, many generative words were used to discuss bullying. Freire (Hudak & Kihn, 2001) used generative words to try and help him understand communities and members. Generative words emanated from Freire's work on literacy. He felt that in order for literacy to work, people needed to read the word and use this to read the world. Generative words were words that were used to generate discussion and stimulate a discourse about issues that oppressed and blinded people such that these issues become visible. People were blinded in that they were unable to clearly understand, comprehend and analyse the issue at hand. In this project words such as hunger, poverty and power, once introduced by the learners, seemed to generate more conversation on the topic of bullying.

The action research process appears to have helped learners to gain a better understanding of bullying. The better level of understanding that learners achieved, will be discussed in further detail below. In this chapter, I discuss the generative themes which emerge from the data and discuss them in relation to the literature on bullying. (The concept of generative themes has been discussed in Chapter two. See 2.8.1.2). All data, from the data collected in the initial data collection stage to the data collected in the final data collection stage where posters and paragraphs were drawn up, were sorted and analysed to identify common content. Such common content was then coded and grouped into themes. It must be noted that

many, many themes emerged once I started sifting through and sorting out the data collected. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, I will only discuss the most significant themes. The themes that are selected for discussion were the ones that appeared most frequently.

## 4.2 What is bullying

The following table reflects learner responses on what they thought bullying was.

DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF LEARNERS
When one uses aggression and physical abuse on another	10
Use of power over another	9
When one uses some form of physical or verbal abuse on another	8
When one teases another	2
When one takes something from someone by force	1
When an older learner takes advantage of a younger learner	1

Table 1 - What is bullying

Of the 19 respondents who handed in the questionnaire, 10 said that it involved some form of aggressive and physical abuse; 9 said that it involved the use of power; 8 felt it involved some form of abuse (either physical or verbal); 2 felt it involved teasing; 1 felt it involved taking something from somebody by force and 1 felt that it involved older people taking advantage of younger people. Respondents stated that bullying involved abuse of the victim that was both physical and emotional. This meant that when victims were emotionally bullied, they would be subject to things like teasing, name calling, ostracising and humiliation. As one

respondent put it, “bullying is the way a person treats another person by humiliating him/her in public for the fun of it.”

In the final learner data collection process, a learner stated that, “It is basically violence in school where others abuse ... and will cause unhappiness to others.” Another responded that, “Bullying is a form of abuse, it is whereby an inferior element is physically or emotionally abused by a superior specimen in strength or psychological warfare.” Yet another learner stated that bullying involved, “Discriminating one’s rights, going against their will – forcing one to do things.” These are all broader definitions and show deeper understanding of bullying.

The following pi-graph indicates the views of learners on what constitutes bullying.

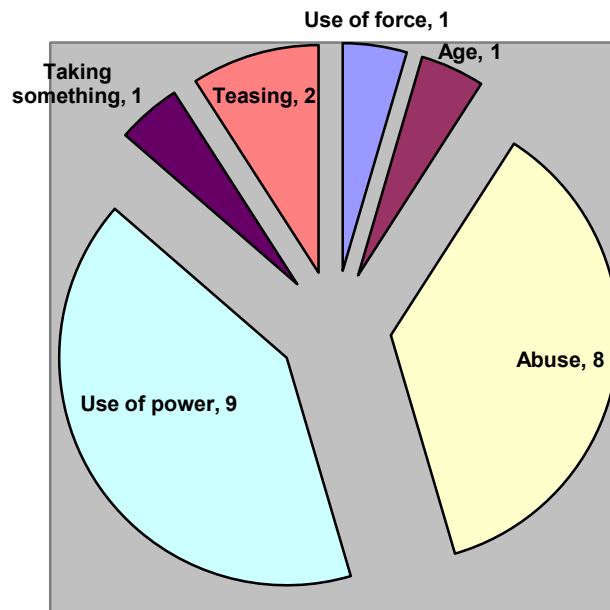


Figure 1 - What does bullying involve?

In the focus group interviews learners clarified that the physical bullying of a victim involved them being subjected to actions such as theft of money or food and beatings. Respondents seemed to understand this physical aspect of bullying right from the inception of the project. Many more learners mentioned this type of bullying rather than emotional bullying. Most learners indicated that bullying involved the use of aggression and force. Power and abuse were also among the concepts most mentioned as being part of bullying.

In their respective studies, de Wet (2006), Crozier (1997), Kassiem (2007) and Burton (2008) all found that physical and emotional abuse, aggressive behavior, the use of power, and teasing, were all aspects of bullying. de Wet (2006, p.62) defined bullying as being “intentional, repeated, hurtful acts, words or other behaviour, such as name-calling, threatening, or shunning, committed by an individual or individuals against another individual or individuals”.

Further studies in the literature reveal that bullying is also linked to the notion of power and aggression. Olweus (cited in Houndoumadi, 2001, p19) says that “in order to use the term bullying there should be an imbalance in strength, where the student who receives the negative actions is unable to defend him/herself and is helpless against the bully”. In this regard, it is interesting to note that 9 learners identified the use of aggression or force in their understanding of bullying.

I find it interesting that many girls have come to me, and other educators, complaining about being teased or ostracised by other girls. Reasons given for being teased or ostracised were that the bullies felt that the victim was too fat or thin or just looked terrible. While the above mentioned examples are cited by theorists (Crozier, 1997 and Kassiem, 2007) as forms of bullying, only two of the respondents reported this in the data

collection processes carried out. It thus seems that this is a feature that needs to be looked at in some depth in the next round of the action research which will happen outside of this MEd project.

### 4.3 Where bullying occurs

When asked where bullying took place, learners identified specific areas that they felt were conducive to bullying activities. These areas are, for the purpose of this study, referred to as 'bullying hotspots'. The reasons given for the existence of these hotspots were that, "teachers were not in the area", or "this area was not visible to educators." These would be the areas that are not easily visible to the staff members of the school. The following table shows the hotspots identified by male and female learners.

HOTSPOT	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
All over	1	1	2
Behind the prefab buildings	1	7	8
Classes	1	0	1
Corners of the buildings	0	3	3
Grounds	4	1	5
Outside school	1	1	2
Quiet areas	1	1	2
Toilets	5	5	10
Tuck-shop area	2	1	3

Table 2 - Bullying hotspots

The most common bullying hotspot identified by learners was the toilets. The next most common hotspot was the area behind the prefabricated buildings. Many learners also felt that bullying occurred on the grounds. A significant difference in the responses given was that more girls than boys felt that bullying occurred behind the prefabricated buildings and in the



corners, than boys. Another difference was that more boys than girls felt that bullying occurred on the grounds. This could be because of the usual groupings of learners in the school. Boys played soccer on the grounds during the breaks. Thus there would be a greater concentration of boys on the ground which would account for the boys being bullied on the grounds due to their proximity and thus noticing bullying that occurred here. The girls, who congregate under the trees during the break, could possibly notice the happenings behind the prefabricated buildings. What is interesting is that this area behind the prefabricated buildings is an area that is out of bounds to the learners. Thus the bullying and congregating of learners behind the prefabricated buildings seems to be planned as learners know that this area won't be monitored carefully as this area is far away from the administration block. Xaba (2006, p.566) in looking at the physical and security features of a school with reference to the safety of the school, found that acts of violence and school bullying "all seem to have occurred in and around school campuses and mostly during school hours". Xaba (2006) further stated that schools should ensure that they have proper surveillance which "entails monitoring the whole-school environment and includes demarcating 'out of bounds' areas, eliminating blind spots provided by doorways, fences, buildings and landscaping" (p.568) and that areas that were not clearly visible to educators could be seen as security threats. Areas such as the toilets and areas surrounding the school were also identified as security threats in this study.

Taking Xaba's (2006) findings into account, it seems conceivable that the reason that learners chose the toilets and the area behind the prefabs as bullying hotspots were that these were the areas that were not easily visible to the educators. Educators rarely entered the learners' toilets and the area behind the prefabricated buildings could be considered a blind spot as this area was not clearly visible to educators unless they went to the area. Further, it would take educators a while to get to this area as it is

on the further most end of the school grounds and all learners could clearly view the educator coming to the area and could easily vacate before the educator got there. While the school is monitored by CCTV, the toilets are not monitored for ethical reasons and the area behind the prefabricated buildings was no longer monitored by CCTV cameras as the cameras were broken and not repaired. This could explain why these two areas were bullying hotspots. The identification of these areas allows for intervention by the school management team (SMT) who will be briefed on the results of this study.

#### **4.4 Generative themes related to why people bullied**

As discussed in chapter two, Freire used generative themes to “stimulate dialogue within learning contexts, allowing learners to be able to name their world” (John, 2008, p.5). John also states that in order for these themes to be relevant and effective, they “must emerge from the lived reality of the learner group and relate to their local contexts” (John, 2008, p.5). Further to this was the notion that applying the method of locating generative themes to the “current globalised yet divided world would require a search for generative themes that would address local cultures of silence and absences of critical awareness with regard to different forms of oppression” (John, 2008, p.5). For the purpose of this project, I have looked at bullying as a form of oppression thus the notion of finding generative themes from the data obtained seemed relevant.

As mentioned, at the start of the project, learners were asked to complete a questionnaire on various aspects of bullying. This data was then analysed and it was determined that learners’ understanding of bullying in the initial data collection stage was not as comprehensive as the definition gained in the final data collection process. Many learners simply stated that it was “when a person picks on another for no reason” or that it was “a

person who hit or treat another people like he is the boss”. There seemed to be various features such as the extent of bullying and the nature of bullying behaviour that they did not understand. No mention was made of the recurrent examples of bullying, such as the stealing of lunch and the ostracizing of learners that were observed by me as observer and educator. Learners either did not see certain behaviours as bullying or they did not have the knowledge to interpret this behaviour as bullying behaviour. Their responses, when looked at in relation to the literature on bullying, seemed inadequate. The following is a summary of learner responses to this question. Data elicited from question 9 which asked why learners bullied, yielded the following responses.

WHY PEOPLE BULLIED	GIRLS	BOYS
1. Want to prove a point	1	0
2. Want to hide their emotions	4	1
3. Feel neglected/hungry	2	0
4. Want people to listen	3	0
5. Want to make others feel bad	1	0
6. Poor family background	2	3
7. Want to feel better/more powerful/superior	2	3
8. They were also bullied	2	1

Table 3 - Why people bully

As can be seen from table 3, overall, most responses by learners pertaining to bullying, as also discussed in the literature review, were mentioned by learners. However, it is also apparent that very few learners have a comprehensive understanding. The responses made by boys were only featured in four of the eight overall categories drawn from the data.

Further to this, only the girls were able to show understanding of aspects mentioned in items 1, 4, 5, and 8 of the table. As a result of this lack of a comprehensive understanding of why people bully, intervention strategies, as described in chapter three above, were devised which allowed learners to engage with the concept of bullying and the various dynamics which it involved. It was hoped that these intervention strategies would help to conscientize learners about bullying thereby helping them to gain a better understanding of bullying and help them to eradicate it from their schooling environment. These strategies were devised by the RCL as the participants in the project. One such measure involved a focus group discussion with the RCL and the researcher on bullying, such as what bullying was, why people bullied and what the RCL could do to help alleviate bullying in the school.

Another strategy involved the SAPS Community Youth Desk who came in to school and engaged the RCL in a workshop pertaining to bullying. Other intervention strategies involved the learners engaging in discussions on bullying in their classes during the English and the Life Orientation (LO) lessons. The following generative themes are discussed taking into account how learners would have responded to bullying before and after these strategies/interventions occurred. In some cases, responses remained static throughout the project but in other cases, responses changed due to discussions held in group and class sessions and due to information which was disseminated through the various intervention strategies which took place. These intervention processes will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

#### **4.4.1 Power**

When asked why people bully in the questionnaire, one of the most frequent themes that emerged was that of power. One respondent stated that, learners bullied because they could “use your powers on someone

because he or she is afraid of you.” Another stated that it would mean that the bully could “use strength or power to hurt or to frighten a weaker person.” As revealed in the pie chart above, (figure 1) 6 of the learners indicated that bullying involved the use of power. Even the drawings, presented below, describing the face of the bully, depicted a powerful looking person.

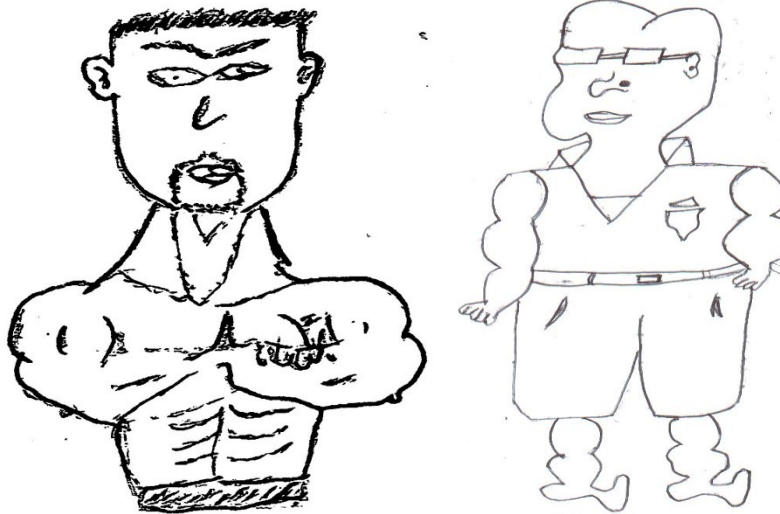


Figure 2 – Learner drawings showing powerful looking bullies

Walter (2008) states that bullying was a result of power plays in the school environment. Learners were seen as either those who had it or those who did not. The strong and empowered were favoured by educators and students alike, while the weak and disempowered were taken advantage of. Marano (1995) found that bullies felt that the best way to resolve any conflict was with the use of aggression, or with a display of power. Roberts (2006) endorses this view by stating that “Society often supports the creation and maintenance of the power bully particularly if the individual is one of the ‘sanctified’ in-groups ‘officially sanctioned by adults within the school setting” (Roberts, 2006, p.49).

Freire (2006, p.44) argues that people oppressed others “by virtue of their power” and that the concept of power was central to the issues of humanisation and dehumanisation. One would use the power that one had over another to affirm or deny a person their place in society. Thus in the case of bullying, the bully would be seen as the one with the power to either affirm or negate the position of another learner in the school society.

Butler (1990) believes that conferring or with-holding recognition was a source of power. Those that had the power had the means of qualifying who is recognisable and who is not. Butler also argues that “Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between subject and other” (Butler, 1990, p.xxviii).

Later in the study, when asked to write a paragraph on what bullying is, the same theme emerged, but with more clarity and detail. One respondent stated that bullying is “when somebody over-powers you. They take advantage of you”. Unlike data from the initial data collection process when learners acknowledged that bullying involved the use of power but were unable to explain the use of power fully, the data collected and analysed from the paragraphs showed that learners were now more aware of the power dynamics at play with incidents of bullying. They were better able to explain how power was used to bully. For example another learner felt that bullying occurred:

Because people sometimes think they are better than others. They want to show off so that people can look at he/she as a hero. They want to be scared/respected. Is to take control of everything so that no-one will mess around with them.

Participants felt that the reason people bullied was that they either wanted more power over the victims and others or that they were, in the eyes of

the victims or observers, stronger and more powerful. This is clearly seen in the descriptions that have been given by participants when asked to describe the characteristics of a bully. Bullies were described as being stronger and more powerful. Even the drawings depicted powerful strong looking persons with big muscles who were seen to be threatening people who were smaller than they were. (Refer to the drawing below)

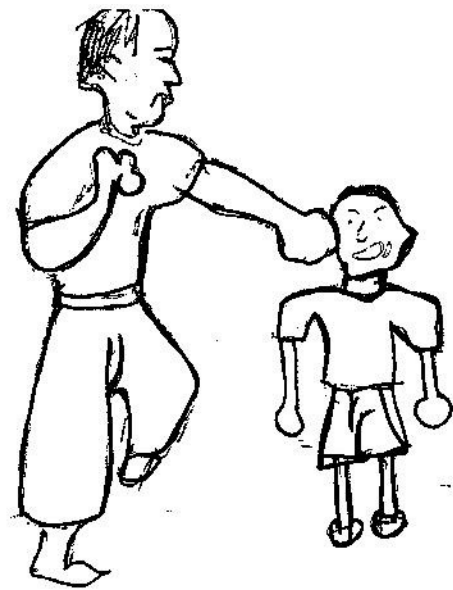


Figure 3 – Learner drawing showing a bigger bully and a smaller victim

Olweus, (cited in Houndoumadi, 2001) stated that “in order to use the term bullying there should be an imbalance in strength, where the student who receives the negative actions is unable to defend him/herself and is helpless against the bully” (Houndoumadi, 2001, p.19). This is clearly seen in the posters which learners drew to depict the face of the bully later on in the project (Refer to posters above). Houndoumadi (2001) also stated that the strong and empowered were favoured by both learners and educators while the weak and disempowered were taken advantage of. Learners tended to idolise and gravitate towards learners who they felt were stronger and more empowered. This was noted in my observations

which documented that while certain learners may not necessarily be the best candidates, in terms of behaviour, for various positions in the school, they were often the ones chosen for these positions. An example of this was the election of the RCL Chairperson. It was often noted that the person elected for this position was not the most suitable person for the job. Rather, it was often the person who was more outspoken, popular and empowered in terms of the ability to voice opinions and display behaviour which, at times, radiated a don't-care attitude. Thus the data gathered seem to corroborate Houndoumadi's (2001) findings that learners gravitated to those they viewed as more empowered and stronger.

#### **4.4.2 Dehumanisation**

Dehumanisation is another generative theme that emerged from the data and was explained by the learners in the following ways. One respondent stated that, "bullying is when they describe you in a way that will lower your self esteem and leave you feeling unconfident." Another stated that people bully because they want "to watch people suffer" and that they "feel good knowing that they have caused misery in a person's life."

Learners seem to understand that the victim of bullying is left feeling very negative about themselves. They felt isolated and excluded from others by the experience of being bullied. Sathipersad (2003, p.109) found that such exclusion which occurred as the result of or as a reaction to violence was "part of an intricate web of human rights violations" and this exclusion which leaves the victim feeling dehumanised could be expunged by a collaborative effort including relevant stakeholders such as educators, family members and other relevant professionals. As indicated, Freire (2006) stated that power is central to the issue of dehumanisation. Learners who were bullied, felt dehumanised and miserable, as is seen in the learner responses quoted above. According to Liang et al (2007), these learners were also more likely to become involved in risk-taking



behaviour and tended to be more suicidal as a result of being bullied. Liang et al (2007) go on to state that victims were, as a response to being victimised by a bully, more likely to resort to theft, violence, “‘comfort stealing’ or attention seeking as a response to the distress of victimisation” (p.169).

As discussed in 4.9.2 below, educators are also victims of bullying. de Wet (2006) states that educators also experience a sense of dehumanisation at being bullied by learners. Such educators experienced feelings of “frustration, stress and shame” (p.59). de Wet (2006) goes on to state that educator-targeted bullying had “a profoundly negative effect on the professional and private lives of educators” (p.69). Educators as victims of bullying are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

#### **4.4.3 Aggression and violence**

Most learners (as seen in Table 1 above) felt that bullying involved some form of aggression or force. One learner stated that,

Bullying is when someone is bullying someone else by forcing them to do something that they don't want to do. Bullying is when someone is hurting you physically or emotionally. For example, when a child at school is hitting you and forces you to give them your pocket money.

As discussed in chapter two, relevant literature reveals that bullying is also linked to the notion of aggression. Aggressive behaviours can be seen in physical bullying which involves physical contact between the victim and the perpetrator. For example, hitting, punching and kicking.



Figure 4 – Learner drawing showing a bully using violence on a victim

Kassiem (2007) found that boys were more likely to engage in this type of aggressive behaviour than girls. Data collected in this study revealed that 7 of the 10 girls and only 1 of the 9 boys felt that a bully was aggressive. This seems to indicate that boys did not link aggression to bullying behaviour as much as girls did. Further, it may be that boys were just not aware that such behaviour was aggressive and could be construed as bullying. This could be because as Freire states, boys are allowed greater leeway than girls with regards to disruptive behaviour (Freire, 1970). Thus it would seem that boys were nurtured into behaving in ways that were different to the ways that girls behaved. It would appear that, aggressive behaviour by boys was seen as acceptable rather than destructive. Thus, this aggressive behaviour, when manifested as bullying, was not seen as wrong or as bullying. Rather, it would seem that such aggressive behaviour was seen as “boys being boys”. The reasons for this aggressive behaviour could be as a result of boys feeling “anomic detachment, anger, resentment, and isolation of groups (Rossatto, 2006, p.107). The

implication that most learners view aggressive behaviour as bullying behaviour seems to comply with the societal belief that aggressive behaviour is seen as more unacceptable than passive acts such as ostracisms and teasing.

Carl and Swartz (1996) found that violence was the favoured tool when dealing with conflict resolution. According to Carl and Swartz (1996) the prime perpetrator for the use of violence as the favoured tool of conflict resolution was the way the media exposed and portrayed this culture of violence. The violence then overflowed into the surrounding schools as these were representations of the societies and communities within which they existed and operated. The acceptance of the media's positive portrayal of violence can then be seen in the violent, aggressive bullying behaviour that learners reported in this project.

While many learners have mentioned that bullying involves the use of power, aggression and physical abuse, none of the respondents made specific reference of bullying as involving violence in the initial data collection process. Many researchers have mentioned the use of violence in schools and as both educator and researcher, I have observed many incidents of violence at the school. In their study Mlisa et al, (2008) found that high levels of violence and aggression were experienced by South African scholars. The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention revealed that 15.3% of learners in primary and high school have been victims of violence at schools and outside schools; 41% of youth in South Africa have been victims of crime in the year prior to the survey and youth victims of violence were 3 – 4 times higher than that of adult victims (Leoschut, October 2006).

## 4.5 Gender influences in bullying

Gender was a lens that I brought to the project. I used the concept of gender to view and analyse the data and to ascertain if gender did indeed play a role in bullying. Gender differences were deliberately explored in the data collection processes. Each aspect related to gender will be discussed in this section. When analyzing the questionnaire it was found that 16 of the 19 participants felt that boys are more involved in bullying; 2 felt girls were more involved in bullying and 1 felt that both boys and girls were involved in bullying. This information is represented in the diagram below.

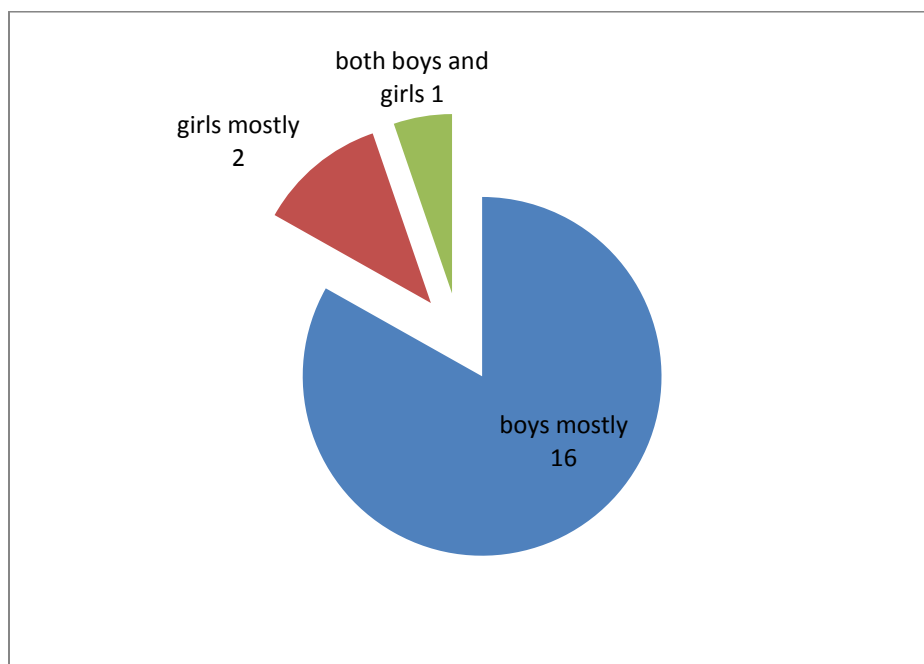


Figure 5 – Number of boys and girls involved in bullying

### 4.5.1 Gendered description of a bully

When analysing the data, another aspect that I looked at was whether boys and girls understood bullies differently or similarly. Did they view a bully in the same way or did they portray a gendered view of a bully? The

table which follows (Table 4) summarises the respective views that boys and girls have of the characteristics a bully (face of a bully).

	FEMALE	MALE
Stronger/more forceful/older/muscular	5	8
Uncaring	1	2
Does wrong things	3	3
Insulting	4	5
Aggressive/angry	8	5
Powerful/bossy/Dominating	2	3
Low self esteem/loners	3	2
Failures	2	0
Attention seeking	2	2
Egotistical	1	2

Table 4 - Table indicating different responses of boys and girls to the face of a bully

It has already been established, as has been discussed above, that boys and girls experience bullying in different ways. As seen in table 4 above, it seems that boys tended to focus on the physical and external factors of a bully while girls focused on the more emotional aspects of a bully. More boys focused on the bully's looks, muscles, age and strength than did girls (as seen in the drawings below). Both boys and girls focused on the assumption that bullies were the ones who did wrong things, while boys mainly felt that bullies were more powerful than others and were egotistical and insulting. The girls on the other hand seemed to focus on the emotional aspects of a bully. More girls than boys felt that bullies were aggressive and angry, had low self-esteem and were failures. As discussed above, boys and girls are socialised into gendered beings that react to situations by using this gendered socialisations as a terms of reference. Thus it seems that in much the same way that the different

genders reacted differently to the act of bullying, they also reacted differently to the bully as a person.

The table above shows that boys and girls have different views of the characteristics of a bully. Besides the view that they have of the bully, they also described them using different terms. The instruction given in the final data collection process was that they had to draw up a poster showing the face of the bully. More girls completed the poster describing the face of the bully using words or text while more boys used drawings or pictures to get their descriptions across. This shows that girls chose to elaborate more through text while boys chose to be more visually descriptive.

The pictures drawn by the boys depicted males who were more muscular. The following figures are examples of this depiction.

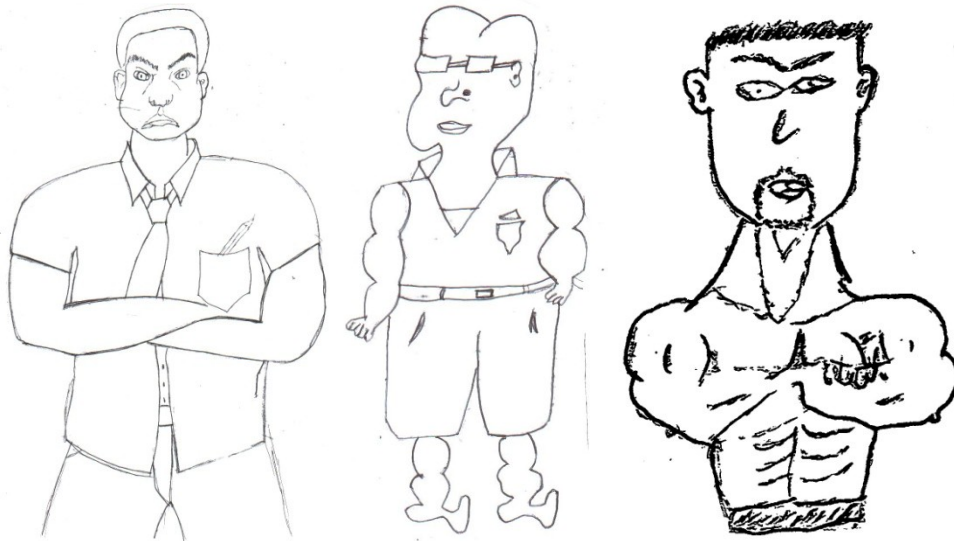


Figure 6 – Learner drawings depicting muscular bullies

The pictures drawn by girls depicted relationships or interactions between the bully and the victim rather than focusing of the physical features of the bully him/herself. One such poster depicted a bully who was hungry and therefore demanding lunch from a smaller victim. Another showed the

bully physically harming the victims. Yet another revealed the bullies as threatening, swearing at and fighting with victims. None of these pictures drawn by the girls showed the bully as having the muscles and dominant physical features that were depicted in the posters drawn by the boys. The following picture is an example of this.



Figure 7 – Female learner drawings of a bully

As seen in table 4 above, a larger number of boys viewed a bully as being stronger/more forceful/older/muscular. This is in keeping with Roberts (2006) who states that the physical stature, age and energy levels of a bully are, on average, greater than that of the victim. Thus since more boys admitted to being bullied than girls, it would seem reasonable that they would have a better understanding of these characteristics of a bully or tended to place more emphasis on physical power.

More boys than girls also viewed a bully as: doing the wrong things, uncaring, powerful/bossy/dominating, attention seeking and egotistical while a larger number of girls than boys saw the bully as being: insulting, aggressive, angry and having a lower self-esteem. Interestingly, no boys felt that a bully was a failure while 2 girls did. Girls also tended to focus on more subtle and emotional aspects such as insults, self-esteem and failure. This could be because, as mentioned in Chapter two (see 2.8.1.3 and 2.8.2) boys have been socialised into believing that they must behave “like men”. This role of being “the man” would not include failure. It could also be that boys, as stated above, focus more on the physical aspects of bullying and the bully and failure is not a physical aspect.

#### **4.5.2 Differences in bullying between boys and girls**

As depicted in figure 5 above, most learners seem to believe that boys are more involved in bullying than girls. This can be seen in the following responses. Boys bullied more because, “some girls are scared to bully other girls while boys feel free to do so.” Another respondent stated that boys bully because, “they feel that they are in charge of everything and want everything to go their way.” Yet another stated that, “Boys often play rough ... so bullying amongst the boys is more occasional as everybody turns a blind eye and mistakes it for mere play.” Also, when drawing the face of the bully only two learners depicted the bully as female. Further to this was the fact that both these respondents drew the female bully in addition to a male bully rather than a female bully only. The following table represents the learner responses in the initial data collection process question of why boys bully.



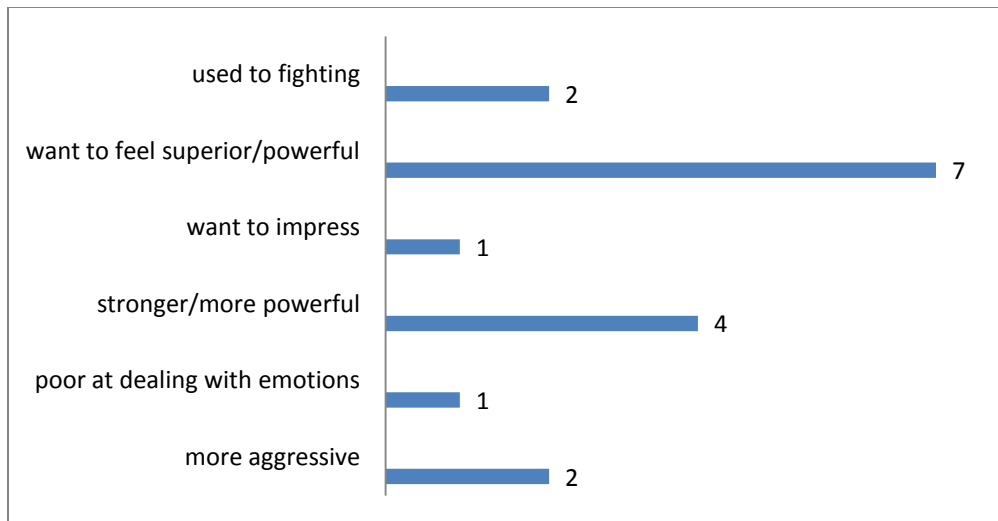


Figure 5 - Why boys bully

The literature seems to indicate that bullying is more prevalent amongst male learners than amongst female learners. Crozier (1997) went so far as to state that to some, bullying seems to be a show of manliness. Thus it is difficult to deal with bullying in boys as boys tend to bully in order to show that they are “men”. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter two and in 4.5 above, boys and girls seem to be nurtured into behaving in different ways. It seems that, for boys, the need to show that they are congruent with societies’ ideal of a man is important. Butler (2004, p.55) quotes Katherine Franke as stating that gender subordination “is part of a larger social practice that creates gendered bodies – feminine women and masculine men”. It thus seems that learners’ views on why boys bully more than girls, is reflective of socially projected norms of what is acceptable behaviour for the different genders.

The description of the bully seems to fit into societies’ perception of the perfect man as someone who is strong, muscular, has good looks and who is big in size. (See the posters of the bully above as well as the following one).



Figure 8 – Learner drawing depicting a strong, big-sized and muscular bully

McLaren (2007, p.232) found that “for girls, as well as boys, ‘being tough’ was a way to win respect and a coterie of followers” while boys would bully to display their masculinity. Boys and girls would bully others so that they would appear to be tough and thus win the admiration of other students.

When responding to the “face of the bully” as part of the final data collection process, participants’ descriptors included tall, big size, facial hair, broad shoulders, strong, muscular and popular. These descriptions seem to be in keeping with societies’ ideal of a man/boy. Freire found that the oppressed see the oppressor as encompassing their idea of “manhood”. This is seen in the above mentioned descriptions. Learners have stated in their responses in the initial data collection process as well as in the final data collection process that people bully to control, to oppress and be made to feel superior. Bullies oppress others in that they

do not allow the victim to do the things that the victim would want to do. One learner responded that, "Bullying is when someone makes you do things you don't want to do." Freire (2006) believed that the individual was responsible for shaping and changing reality and that "Those who do not acknowledge this, those who want to control and oppress are committing a kind of epistemic violence" (p.120) Thus it seems as if the bully was committing epistemic violence by refusing to allow their victims the ability and opportunity to change and shape their own personal realities. Bullies seem to control the realities of their victims by oppressing them and causing them to be afraid and to lose self-esteem. Freire (2006) stated that the reason that people became oppressors was because that was how they were shaped by the situations within which they existed. He felt that the ideal was "to be men" and this meant that if one was to be a man, one had to be an oppressor. This is in keeping with Butler's view that the systems that exist in a society "produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine" (Butler, 1999, p.xx). It seems as if the behaviours and the resultant punishments for disruptive behaviours of boys and girls are based on the perception that boys are different to girls. These behaviours and resultant punishments are also based on boys and girls being treated differently and boys being allowed greater leeway than girls with regard to disruptive behaviour (Freire, 1970).

Interestingly, by the end of the project, 15 of the 19 respondents stated that a bully could be either a girl or a boy as opposed to only 2 mentioning that girls were bullies in the initial questionnaire. This latter result is more in keeping with the observations made by me as both an educator and researcher. There were many occasions when while on ground duty, I witnessed girls bullying other girls. This difference in data could perhaps be as the result of the intervention strategies that were carried out during the course of the study as the intervention strategies addressed the

various different types of bullying that occurred. Learners were thus able to link existing behaviours with bullying.

#### **4.5.3 Gender discrimination (Cross-gender bullying)**

As mentioned above, in the initial data collection process, no respondent mentioned that boys bullied girls even though learners felt that “girls are weaker”. It was more girls who bullied girls rather than boys who bullied girls or girls who bullied boys. The problem of boys bullying girls was only brought up after several rounds of intervention. This was seen in the final data collection process where respondents had to write a paragraph regarding what they felt bullying was. As one respondent stated, “lots of children,” especially girls are being bullied by older boys, demanding lunch and pocket money every day. In most cases they even hit them just for fun or to be seen that they are brave or intelligent.”

I find it very surprising that so few respondents mentioned the bullying between boys and girls considering that in my day-to-day observations, first as an ordinary educator and later as researcher, I found there to be many incidents of boys bullying girls. One such incident involved an observation that I made regarding the feeding scheme that the school is a part of. At first all learners, boys and girls, participated in this scheme which provided learners with sandwiches. As time progressed, I noticed that only boys came to collect sandwiches during the break. Upon investigation, it was determined that the boys had intimidated and bullied the girls such that the girls no longer felt comfortable to go and take the sandwiches. A separate station had to be set up for the girls to ensure that they got sandwiches during the day. This incident was not mentioned by any participant during the course of the research project. I did not observe any incident of girls bullying boys and neither were any such incidents reported to me.

Another incident of boys bullying girls that I observed as educator and researcher, involved the seating arrangements in the classrooms. Boys wanted to sit in a particular spot in the classroom, especially at the back of the classroom. If the boys got to the classroom late and these particular seats were taken up by girls, they would force the girls to move, even if it meant them physically taking the girls' things and moving them to another place. Like the above incident in which the boys' behaviour caused the girls to stop partaking in the feeding scheme was not reported, this bullying behaviour by the boys of the girls to obtain particular seats in the classroom, was also not reported.

In trying to understand these incidents of girls not reporting being bullied by boys, I employ Freire's concept of the culture of silence. Freire found that "a culture of silence" (Freire, 1970, p.12) existed amongst the dispossessed. People tended to rationalise difficult situations that they found themselves in. Rather than seeing these as negative situations, people tend to normalise and rationalise them and see them as part of everyday life. This is perhaps the reason that the incidents of boys bullying girls were not mentioned. The girls perhaps felt that boys were justified in behaving towards them in the way that they did because they were boys and therefore behaved in the way that boys were supposed to behave as dictated by society. This is a further concept which will be picked up in the next round of AR.

Respondents seem to have accepted that boys will treat girls differently and in some cases, in a derogatory manner. Boys, it seems, are supposed to boss girls around by simple virtue of the fact that they are "men" and in order to be a man, according to Freire (1970, 2006), one had to be an oppressor, therefore the view that it was okay to oppress women. This corroborates Butler's view that gender subordination "is part of a larger social practice that creates gendered bodies – feminine women and

masculine men” (Butler, 2004, p.55). It seems that learners subscribe to the dominant hegemony of society and this could thus explain why no one mentioned girls bullying boys.

#### **4.5.4 Bullying methods used by boys and girls**

The project involved 10 girls aged between 13 and 18 years old and 9 boys, aged between 14 and 17 years old. I tried to establish if there was a difference in the way boys and girls responded to bullying. Both boys and girls displayed a similar understanding of the concept of bullying. Both gender groups also responded that it was verbal and physical and contained force, discrimination and abuse. All also agreed that bullying occurred at the school. A difference in the genders appeared in that 3 of the 9 boys felt that bullying occurred a lot while only 1 of the 10 girls felt that it occurred a lot. This could be as the result of a higher incidence of bullying amongst boys than amongst girls as has been discussed in 4.5.2 above.

Another difference occurred in that only 3 of the 10 girls (30%) reported being bullied as compared to 4 of the 9 of boys (44%) who reported being bullied. This could once again be explained in that boys seemed more exposed to bullying than girls. Furthermore, as mentioned above, perhaps girls accepted bullying and being bullied as part of life and not something wrong or extraordinary. If so, this points to the need for further conscientisation in future cycles of action, beyond this MEd project.

When asked if they had ever bullied someone, of the 10 female respondents, one left the question blank while all the others replied that they had not bullied anybody. In response to the same question, of the 9 boys who answered the questionnaire, 2 did not answer the question and 2 answered that they had bullied others. The rest stated that they had never bullied anyone. A further round of research could be carried out to

investigate whether the above mentioned differences in responses by boys and girls are significant. Do boys tend to avoid talking about bullying and their involvement in bullying?

#### **4.5.4.1 Bullying methods used by boys**

Most respondents felt that boys bullied others physically, by fighting. Learners felt that the reason for this was that boys were more aggressive and strong. Boys were also used to rough play and this rough play was seen as acceptable behaviour by other learners and educators alike. This is in keeping with my observations of the interactions with learners and conversations with other educators. More often than not, rough play involving boys would be overlooked or stopped by a reprimand from the educator. Boys were also quick to respond to any query regarding suspicious behaviour with a, “We were just playing mam.” One respondent stated that, “the boys usually have more involvement in bullying because they like fighting and are very stubborn.”

Another learner stated that, “boys want to feel strong and in charge and they think hurting or fighting with someone is the way to go about getting the respect they want.” These reports of bullying incidents by boys being aggressive and violent, is congruent with my observations of bullying. These observations were made both in my capacity as educator and as researcher and occurred both in the classroom and on the school grounds. Kassiem (2007) and Burton (2008) found that males displayed more aggressive, physical bullying behaviour. This is further reinforced by McDowell’s (1999) finding that it is more acceptable for boys to display aggressive behaviours than girls.

#### **4.5.4.2 Bullying methods used by girls**

While not many respondents mentioned girls as bullies, the three respondents who did, stated the following. The first felt that “Girls bully in

terms of verbal abuse. They hurt other people's feelings and laugh at them and mock them. The second stated that, "some of the girls in this school want everyone to be just like them. They don't want a girl who thinks she is unique". The third said that "girls think they know everything". Butler (1999) found that girls tended to use more verbal methods of bullying than physical methods of bullying. She found that if one did not conform to the representational claims of being a woman, then exclusion could be a resultant consequence. The representational claims of a woman would be ruled by the hegemony present. As such, the above mentioned data reveals that girls were perceived as bullying others who did not conform to their view of what a girl should be. In other words, girls bullied others if the victim's individual personhoods did not conform to their views of social norms.

McDowell (1999) found that certain behaviours were seen as acceptable in one gender and unacceptable in others. McDowell (1999) cites Okely as stating that genders were differentiated between in various ways. The example given was that it was acceptable, at schools, for boys to be engaged in more physical and aggressive sporting activities than girls, thus they would be more likely to engage in physical bullying. Roberts (2006, p.60) found that girls on the other hand were "encouraged to suppress their aggression and to express their frustrations in a more 'socially acceptable' way". Thus it would seem that, rather than physically bullying another learner, girls would use social skills and relationships, which are seen as the source of their power, to bully other females.

What is interesting is that of the three respondents who felt that girls were bullies, two were males. It seems as if males were more willing to admit to girls being bullies than girls were. This could also be because boys were more involved in bullying, (as mentioned above) and were therefore more aware of bullying and what it entailed. Alternatively, it could be argued that



this was just a culture of silence (Freire, 1970) among the learners that was perpetuated by the entire schooling population. In other words, the learners tended to rationalise the difficult situation (the bullying by girls) that they found themselves in and rather than seeing these as negative situations, they tended to normalise and rationalise them and see them as part of everyday life.

#### **4.5.5 How the different genders experience bullying**

##### **4.5.5.1 Female learners' experiences of being bullied**

At the commencement of the study, very few girl learners admitted to being bullied. In the final data collection stage, many more girls admitted to being bullied. A female respondent who admitted to being bullied stated that after the incident of bullying had occurred, she felt, "...like you are unworthy, you have no say and like you don't have any rights at all. You feel very controlled and ruled all the time. It feels sick."

Other girls who were bullied reported feeling sad, afraid and unsure. Their experiences and reaction to bullying seem to be on a more emotional level than that of the boys' experiences. Butler (2004, p.6) believed that one could not separate gender from the cultural and political ethos in which it existed because "gender intersects with racial class, ethnic sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities". According to Butler, (2004, p.1) "One does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary". Butler felt that social norms and the dominant hegemony, rather than individual personhood, determined our behaviours and reactions to life. It seems as if girls experience bullying on a very emotional level. Their feelings are hurt and their self esteem and self worth seems to be negatively affected by an act of bullying. They experience feelings of being controlled and powerless.

#### **4.5.5.2 Male learners' experiences of being bullied**

Male learners, who admitted to being bullied, stated that they also felt scared and alone. Male victims also stated that it made them angry and one respondent stated that he “felt angry and wanted to pay revenge,” while female victims, as stated above, reported feeling sad and angry. Thus it seems as if boys, while also experiencing some level of emotional disturbances when bullied, also felt the need to get even. This was something that the girls did not report. The boys also experienced feelings which included aggression and anger, something that the girls did not report as part of their experience.

The above mentioned differences between boys and girls in experiences of being a victim of bullying is in keeping with Houndoumadi and Pateraki (2001) who found that boys and girls experienced and perceived bullying differently. This could be as a result of the way that boys and girls experience different challenges in life. In my experience, a boy would be embarrassed to be seen sad, afraid or crying when something upsetting had happened to him. I have personally heard many people, parents, friends, colleagues and family members alike, reprimand their sons, nephews or friends for behaving like “sissies” when they reacted emotionally to any incident. Rather than offering comfort, they would ask why the boy did not hit the other person or why he did not fight back. They would retort that he should “be a man” and “act like a man”. This conforms to Freire’s notion that the ideal was “to be men”. Contrary to this is the reaction towards a girl involved in a similar incident. Girls who are involved in violent incidents are generally reprimanded by one and all for not behaving “like a girl”. Butler (2004) states that a person’s gender is socially dependent and constructed. It thus seems that boys and girls are socialised to experience life differently therefore it seems plausible that, when it comes to bullying, their experiences would also be different. Girls seem to be socialised into responding to life in a more emotional way

while boys seem to be socialised to more physical and aggressive responses.

## 4.6 Reasons for bullying

### 4.6.1 Family background

When asked why people bully, one of the most common answers that arose was that it was as a result of the bullies' family and social background. One respondent stated that, "We bully because we come from troubled homes, we feel miserable so we also decide to make another person's life miserable." Another learner responded that, "Some bullies bully because they have a very hard time at home. Their background is poor and they are always beaten or abused by maybe family members." The following drawing depicts this poor family relationship.



Figure 9 – Learner drawing depicting family relationships of a bully

The above mentioned quote is a response given by a learner in the final data collection process. Some of the 19 respondents stated that family

background was a catalyst in creating a bully. Another learner stated that “People bully because they don’t get attention at home”. Yet another stated that, “Bullies bully because of family problems. They take out their frustrations on other people.” Butler (2004) found that “for some, mourning can only be resolved through violence” (p.xix). This could mean that the only way that those children, who have family problems, feel they could overcome these problems, or feel that they are in some way dealing with the situation, would be for them to become bullies at school. It would seem that bullies choose to be the ones with the power and seek others whom they could target to get rid of the frustrations they experience as a result of their home environments. This could be because at home they would be the targets of negative experiences and other members of their family would be the ones with the power.

Sathiparsad (2003, p.58) found that “many children live in an atmosphere of ongoing violence are also affected by severe poverty, abandonment and abuse”. As a result, they may experience increased levels of aggression and become highly frustrated. This could mean that they would then look for a release for the aggression and frustration and that bullying could be that release. It seems that learners are empathetically aware of the implications of the background of the family circumstances on their peers. They seem to understand that in some cases, people bully, not because they are inherently bad, but rather because of life circumstances that cause them to behave in a particular way. McLaren (2007), Freire (1970), and Habermas (cited in Howard, 1991), all felt that people are seen as both the producers and products of society who further shape this society and themselves by their actions.

Freire believed that people operated in what he called “limit situations” (See 2.8.1.3). He argued that they tended to adopt a world view that becomes habitual. In other words, limit situations are situations within

which we exist wherein we are “victims of circumstance with limited options for survival” (Noguera, 2007, p. No page number). In this study, learners seem to have internalised the behaviours that they witness and experience in their homes. According to the learners, bullies bully others because they experience bullying behaviour and violence in their homes and social environments. They then begin to see these behaviours as being normal. Thus, when children experience violence or bullying at home, they internalise the behaviour and reproduce it at school. Leoschut (2006, p.2) found that “Children who are raised in antagonistic households come to perceive violence as an appropriate and effective means of conflict resolution”. She goes on to state that some of the effects that children who are exposed to violence suffer from are: “low self esteem; anxiety; depression; suicidal ideations; an increased likelihood of becoming involved with delinquent peers and activities; difficulties at school; and difficulties controlling their anger”. Thus, these children who have been exposed to violence at home, display the behaviours that they have witnessed at home as bullying behaviour at school. A common saying is that children learn by example. It thus seems logical that children will learn from the behaviours that they witness in the home environment. This is similar to Sathiparsad’s (2003, p.100) finding that “children are not born violent. They have systematically been socialised by society to perceive violence as being the only viable means of asserting themselves or resolving conflict”.

Freire (1970, 2006) believed that the reason that people became oppressors was because that was how they were shaped by the situations within which they existed. In other words, as stated by the learners, bullies would be shaped into becoming bullies by their home and social situations. Socialised behaviours would thus be replicated.

When considering the findings of this study in the light of the School Code of Conduct (School Policy 1, date unknown) and the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996), it would seem that learners are caught between two forms of behaviours (See 4.9 below for a discussion on bullying in school policies). The one being behaviour experienced outside of school, in their homes and communities, and the other being the behaviour expected in the schooling environment. McLaren (2007, p.22) also found that students were caught between behaving as students of the school are expected to behave and behaving in the way that they behave outside of the school in their communities, on the streets and with their friends/peers. He felt that students were “experiencing the material constraints of economic and racial stratification and were living the painful contradiction between street corner culture and student culture”. Thus, it seems that their in-school bullying behaviour is reflective of their out-of-school attitudes, values and behaviours or as stated by a respondent, they bully “because they see violence everyday from their homes” (McLaren, 2007, p.22).

Various researchers have corroborated the influence of the surrounding environment on the behaviour of learners and the resulting bullying behaviour that is displayed in the school. Varnava (2002), Orpinas and Horne (2003) and Walter (2008) all suggested that bullying was an extension of the community and the wider context of violence in the surrounding society. Thus Varnava (2002), Orpinas and Horne (2003) and Walter (2008), like others, felt that the role of the school and the community in reducing bullying was vital as “education does not occur in a vacuum, the violence encountered in schools must be seen against the backdrop of a violent society”. (Sathiparsad, 2003, p.94). Nesar et al (2004, no page reference) state that,

bullying is one of the hidden elements of the culture of violence that contributes to different manifestations of violence in our society, such as child abuse, domestic violence, workplace violence, hate crimes and road rage. Dominating male and female bullies bully others who are weaker and less powerful. Men bully their female partners, women (and men) bully children, older children bully younger children and younger children often bully their pets. Violence seems to travel from the strongest to the weakest or from the most powerful to the least powerful ... People who are the object of violence absorb it, modify it and pass it on.

Given that researchers have found that a person's social background is greatly responsible for their attitude towards violence and their subsequent use of violence to resolve conflict, it would seem that bullies become bullies because of their exposure to violent and bullying behaviour. This means that a child is conditioned and socialised into becoming a bully. This has far reaching implications for the future generation of our country as violent episodes in our country are reported to be on the increase. This could mean that, unless something is done, either to curb violence in our society or to help children deal with their experiences of and with violence, the number of bullies in our schools could be on the increase. Thus the need for schools to become involved in campaigns that are aimed at peace education, can be seen as vital to ensure a more peaceful future generation and society.

#### **4.6.2 Discrimination**

When looking at the data, what stood out was that learners were discriminated against for various reasons. Some learners felt that victims were treated badly/bullied because of their gender or age. Gender related bullying has already been discussed above.

#### **4.6.2.1 Race**

Literature indicates that race is also a prime motivator for bullying at several schools. Vandeyar and Esakov (cited in Bekerman and McGlynn, 2007) found that learners of a particular race who did not conform to societies' expectation of how people of that race should behave, are often questioned about their behaviour. Makhanya (cited in Bekermama et al, 2007) stated that learners knew that openly engaging in conversations about race was socially frowned upon. Vandeyar and Esakov (cited in Bekerman and McGlynn, 2007) found that learners tended to remain in their specific racial groups at school and that many learners ensured that interaction with learners from other race groups were minimal. The Human Rights Watch (2001) reported that of all the cases of violence and conflict reported to them in 2001, 62% were racially motivated. This observation was based on the population as a whole and not on data gathered about school children. Furthermore, this finding is not supported by the data gathered in this study.

The school, at which the research was conducted, is a multi-racial school (See chapter three, 3.2.2 Location of the study for the demographics of the school). The learner population consists of Black, Indian and Coloured learners. Not a single learner, either in the initial data collection stage or in the final data collection stages, mentioned race as a possible motive for the occurrence of bullying. While the lack of reports of racially motivated bullying is congruent with my observations, I suggest that this is possibly another silence that learners have adopted. This could be because, although we are sixteen years into democracy in South Africa, issues regarding race are still very tenuous and sensitive. There is a distinct lack of tolerance towards racially motivated conflicts whether it is in the community, the workplace or in school. I believe that, while racially motivated bullying may occur, my lack of observation can be attributed to learners being acutely aware of the lack of tolerance for racially-motivated



behaviour by management and educators of the school. Learners therefore do not risk being caught displaying such behaviour. Thus, it is possible that racially motivated bullying occurs in the bullying hotspots that have been discussed above in 4.3., which are out of sight of the educators.

#### **4.6.3 Abuse**

The concept of abuse as mentioned by the respondents was initially mentioned as a response to a question in the initial data collection process (see 4.2 What is Bullying). In this section, “abuse” is discussed as a reason why people bullied. It was only after the intervention strategies had been carried out that more learners referred to emotional abuse as a type of bullying. In the initial data collection process, 5 participants referred to emotional abuse. In the final data collection process, 12 of the 19 participants made reference to emotional-type bullying. While a limited awareness of this type of bullying was seen in the initial data collection process, when learners submitted the paragraphs at the end, many responses displayed such a deeper understanding of why the abuse occurred. One respondent went so far as to state that, “If you are physically and emotionally abused you tend to think that that is how people should treat other people.” As is mentioned in 4.6.1 above, one of the reasons that bullies become bullies is because of the violence that they are exposed to. Bullies tend to internalise the behaviour that they are exposed to and seem to think it is an acceptable form of behaviour. It could also be that the abuse that they suffer at home causes them emotional trauma that leads to them acting out in this bullying manner.

#### **4.6.4 Poverty**

In response to why people bullied, one respondent stated that, “Other children bully for other children’s lunchbox because they do not have their own lunchbox or they do not have money to buy things to eat.” It seems as

if learners are bullying because they come from poor families and they do not have food. Thus they took younger children's food as the younger children would be less likely to retaliate. One sad finding that emerged from this project is the impact of poverty on the lives of the learners and on bullying behaviour. As an educator and a mother, it is very difficult to reconcile the fact that there are some children in the school environment who have to steal food in order to have something to eat.

Interestingly, when initially asked about bullying at the inception of the project, very few learners mentioned poverty. Two learners did however mention that bullying took place in the tuck shop area. Neither of these two learners mentioned that the bullying occurred as a need to buy food because the bully did not have any. This did not accord with my observations as educator and researcher. During my observations, I noticed that lots of bullying occurred because learners, who did not have lunch or spending money, forced/bullied other learners for these things. Furthermore, many complaints made to educators were of money being extorted from learners. Some learners complained to friends, RCL members, as well as to educators, that their lunch was taken from them by other learners. I thus found it surprising that many learners did not mention these incidents in the initial data collection process. This could be because learners were socially aware of the plight of the bullies who took money for food. This social awareness could mean that learners found this form of bullying more acceptable than, or not as bad as, other forms of bullying as the reason for it was a need for food rather than a need to harm another learner. Perhaps learners also felt sorry for the bully because of his/her personal circumstances. It could also be that this type of behaviour where people did whatever they could to get food, was another form of a culture of silence, a taboo that nobody talked about but justified as acceptable as it involved a basic need. Such possible reasons require further investigation in order to verify and to plan appropriate

interventions. These could constitute possible future steps in an ongoing action research project.

It seemed to be that poverty was a concept that many learners did not speak about. Wangari Maathai (cited by John, 2008, p.4) revealed that it was important to note “the current state of a culture of silence and how poverty is manifested as psychological barriers”. Maathai found that, “When people are poor and when they are reduced to beggars, they feel weak, humiliated, disrespectful and undignified” (John, 2008, p4). This could explain why, rather than begging for food or money, the poor learner would rather bully others to get his/her meal. It could also relate back to both the bully and to the other learners who internalise these feelings, that the poor learner has of humiliation and a lack of respect and dignity, and they therefore did not mention it in the initial data collection process. If so, this is an area requiring attention in the school.

Another reason for learners not mentioning being bullied for their lunch in the initial data collection process, could be that learners were initially not aware that forcefully taking lunch or money to buy lunch was a form of bullying. In response to the limited insight displayed regarding different forms of bullying, it was decided to involve the South African Polices Services - Community Youth Desk in an intervention strategy to discuss bullying with the RCL. The following is part of the discussion which took place.

Learner 1: Sir, is it bullying when someone forces you to give them your lunch?

Sgt: (To all learners) What do you think?

Learners: Silence .... Murmuring

Sgt: Well absolutely. If they take your lunch by force, you know, you didn't want to give it, ja, then this is bullying. Understand.

Insp: Why do you think they would take your lunch?

Learner 2: Balambile (They are hungry.)

Insp: Does that give them the right to take your lunch?

Chorus of learners: No.

Sgt: How did it make you feel.

Learner 1: Upset. I ..... I didn't know what to do. I was hungry but I felt scared. Also I was sorry for him. Maybe he didn't have lunch and he was embarrassed to go to the feeding scheme. He was a big boy.

After this intervention, when learners were asked to write a paragraph on bullying, many mentioned that one of the reasons that people bullied was because they were either poor or had no food to eat. This seems to indicate a growing empathy and understanding about the reasons why bullying occurs. It also shows the impact of the intervention within an action research process.

While none of the literature reviewed for this project directly addresses poverty as a reason for bullying, it has been alluded to in discussions about family background. (See 4.6.1 Family Background)

#### **4.6.5 Jealousy**

Initially, when responding to the questionnaire, one respondent admitted to being bullied. When asked why he thought he was bullied, he replied that it was because, "They were jealous of me and they felt threatened by me because I was younger and had a brighter future than them". The reasons for the jealousy include the victims and others having things like: cell phones and accessories, more friends, better grades, or as the learner above stated, a brighter future. Thus, it seems as if the reason that the bully bullies is because he/she wants the things that the others have. This could reveal a desire for the bully to conform. In other words, they bully because they want to be just like the others who have these things. It

could also reveal a spiteful nature in a bully who feels that, if I don't have it then neither should they and if they do then I will take it away or be bad to them. The following drawing depicts a bully wanting a phone that another person has.



Figure 10 – Learner drawing depicting bullies who bully to get things that they don't have

When learners responded through the paragraphs and posters in the final data collection process (after intervention strategies had been carried out), many more learners mentioned jealousy as a reason for bullying. A possible explanation for learners only mentioning this during the final data collection process could be that this type of jealous behaviour was initially not seen as bullying. One respondent who admitted to being a bully stated that, "Most of the time when we bully, it's because we are JEALOUS!"

Literature on jealousy as an example of bullying behaviour seems to refer to jealousy as a bullying technique of girls. Most literature stated that types of bullying differed between the genders with males displaying more aggressive, physical bullying behaviour and females resorting to ostracism

and the spreading of rumours (Kassiem, 2007; Burton, 2008). Thus the above mentioned response by male learners, who stated that they were either bullied by others or bullied others because of jealousy, differs from the respective literature on bullying which states that boys are generally involved in aggressive, power-play bullying. The learner's response could however be seen as making sense if jealousy was looked at as a motive which is carried out through aggressive bullying. Then it would seem that jealousy was experienced by both boys and girls but that the two genders acted on these feelings differently.

#### **4.7 Impact of age on bullying**

There seemed to be no significant difference in the occurrence or in the experiences of bullying of learners of different ages. All learners, across the different age groups, displayed a similar understanding of bullying. They also expressed similar feelings about bullying. Learners, who were bullied, were also learners from across the age spectrum. While Mlisa (2008) also found that age had no impact on bullying, Kassiem (2007) found that age did influence bullying patterns.

When responding to the question of why people bully, many learners responded that it was because the bully was older than the victim. One respondent stated that, "a bully is a person who bullies smaller children or young children". The same respondent stated that the reason for this was that "bullies worry smaller children because they can't fight back". For this learner the link was that one would bully someone who could not retaliate in any way thereby guaranteeing the bully their response of being listened to. This is a response that remained constant throughout the duration of the project. The fact that a learner bullies another because they are older could also be looked at in terms of power. The older learner feels more

powerful than the younger learner and therefore uses this feeling of power to oppress the younger victim.

#### **4.7.1 How learners from different age groups see bullying**

Respondents who participated in this project ranged between the ages of 13 – 18 years old. For the purpose of analysing the data in relation to age, I divided this category into two. The first category represented the age group of 13 – 15 years old and the second group representing the age group of 16 to 18 years old. In the first category there were 10 candidates, 7 were girls and 3 were boys. In the second category, there were 9 candidates. Of these 3 were girls and 6 were boys. These two age categories also represented the average age groups of the learners in the junior and senior phases of high school respectively.

##### **4.7.1.1 Responses of learners aged 13 – 15 years old**

When asked to respond to what is bullying, both male and female respondents in this age category stated that it involved physical and emotional abuse as well as intimidation, teasing, aggressive behaviour and the use of power. When focusing on the same aspect later on in the project, after various interventions, they offered a similar outlook.

Only 2 of the 7 girls in this category admitted to being bullied while all the boys in this category admitted to being bullied. As discussed, this could be because boys are more inclined to rough play and aggressive behaviour, which is in keeping with findings by both Freire and McDowell (as stated above). It could also mean that while girls may be aware of bullying behaviour and what it entails theoretically, they do not accept that they are a part of such behaviour as they have internalised it and thereby accepted this type of behaviour as normal. This is in keeping with findings made by McDowell (as stated above).

Furthermore, while one male in this category admitted to bullying other learners “for the experience”, none of the females did. Both boys and girls in this category also expressed that people bullied because of family background, poverty and a need for respect.

#### **4.7.1.2 Responses of learners aged 16 – 18 years old**

In this category, there were 6 boys and 3 girls. Unlike the boys in the 13 – 15 year old category, the boys in this category mentioned the use of violence in bullying. Most respondents in this category mentioned many of the aspects raised by the younger boys (as mentioned above) but, in addition to this, they felt that one bullied out of a need to gain respect and recognition. Thus we can see that there is a difference in the way that boys of different age groups understand bullying.

Older boys thus seem to focus more on, and are more involved in the use of aggression and violence as a way to gain respect and recognition. This could be because, as they get older, the areas of importance in their lives change. They become focused on different things and different things matter.

Furthermore, while all the boys in the younger category responded to the question asking if they had ever bullied someone, 2 of the 6 boys in this category left the question blank. This could be because they did not want to admit to bullying other learners at the school for fear of being found out. These responses are different to the findings made by Kassiem (2007) and Crozier (1997) who found that age had an impact on bullying in that incidents of bullying decreased as age increased. Both the questionnaires and the poster and paragraphs revealed that bullying was rife amongst learners of all ages.



Girls in this category answered in a very similar vein to their counterparts in the younger category. When asked if they bullied someone in the initial data collection process, all the girls in the younger category answered the question, but, like the older boys, 1 of the 3 girls in this 16 – 18 year old category, left the question blank. Thus it would seem that the older learners are more reluctant to admit to bullying or being bullied than the younger learners.

Responses to questions relating to what is bullying, why people bully and the characteristics of a bully, were similar across both age groups and genders. All age groups revealed a similar definition of bullying, a similar description of a bully and a similar understanding of the reasons why people bully (as presented earlier). Mlisa et al (2008), Kassiem (2008) and Crozier (1997) all found that age factors did not contribute to incidents of bullying.

As mentioned above, there are many similarities in how learners from different age groups see bullying. However, the following differences which were mentioned need to be highlighted. Boys across the age spectrum were more involved in bullying than girls in both age groups. (The reasons for this have been discussed above in section 4.5 Gender influences on bullying). Aggression and the need for recognition and respect are mostly mentioned by boys in the 16 – 18 year category and not by boys in the 13 – 15 year category or girls in both categories. Furthermore, both boys and girls in the 16 – 18 year category did not respond to the question in the initial data collection process asking if they had ever bullied others as compared to boys and girls in the 13 – 15 year category, all of whom responded to the same question.

## 4.8 School Policies dealing with bullying

The school at which this study was conducted is, like all other schools in South Africa, governed by the South African Schools Act of 1996 and various other respective policies that the school drafts in order to ensure the smooth running of the school. Such documents dictate acceptable behaviour of learners while on the school premises as well as safety measures and disciplinary procedures to be implemented.

The school's Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy (School Policy 1, 2009) clearly outlines the following rights, among others, of the learners attending the school:

- the right to be listened to and to be taken seriously
- the right to be respected and protected from harm
- the right to have a safe and comfortable school
- the right to work and learn without being disturbed by others

The following responsibilities are also outlined:

- the responsibility to listen to others
- the responsibility to show others respect and caring
- the responsibility to respect the traditions of the school and of other people
- the responsibility to be considerate of others whilst at work (Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy, p.1).

This document also lists disciplinary offences as including behaviour which involves, "fighting, intimidation, bullying or ill treatment of others" (Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy, p.3). Other offences include immoral behaviour, use of vulgar language and disobedience.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, outlines the following Principles and Values: Rights of Learners, as guidelines for the healthy running of schools: “No person may unfairly discriminate against a learner”; “every learner has inherent dignity and has the right to have his/her dignity respected” (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, p.2B-24). Listed in this policy are offences that may lead to suspension such as,

Conduct which endangers the safety and violates the rights of others; fighting, assault or battery; immoral behaviour or profanity; disrespect, objectionable behaviour and verbal abuse directed at educators or other school employees or learners and victimisation, bullying and intimidation of other learners (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, p.2B-25).

The above mentioned policies suggest that the rights and responsibilities of learners are clearly outlined for learners to understand and adhere to. Bullying and other violent behaviours are mentioned as behaviours that will not be tolerated. However, as has been mentioned above in 4.6.1 (Family background) learners are caught between behaving in the way that they are conditioned to behave outside of school by society and family, and the way that they are expected to behave in school as dictated to by the various policies and statutes that govern the running of the school. There seem to be those who find the middle ground between the two environments and adhere to the school rules without getting into trouble but there are those, like the learners who admitted to bullying in the various data collection processes, who seem to find it difficult to adjust from one environment to the other. Thus behaviours overlap and problems arise. It therefore seems that the schooling environment is controlled by outside factors, such as the community in which the school is based, as well as the internal policies of the school. Sathiparsad (2003) stated that “education does not occur in a vacuum, the violence encountered in

schools must be seen against the backdrop of a violent society” (p.99). Consequently it seems that schools need to look at policies as more than just a legal requirement by the Department of Education (DOE). They need to look at the respective problems experienced in their particular contexts and draw up policies that address these problems. The DOE should help schools develop programmes which make these policies a lived reality rather than just a requirement to have in response to the various circulars that are sent to school.

## **4.9 Some notable silences in the data**

### **4.9.1 New-Age/Cyber-Bullying**

An interesting silence in this dataset relates to the emergence of new-age bullying or cyber-bullying. New-age bullying refers to bullying which takes place via technology. This could include cell phones and computers. People use the social networking sites such as Mxit and Facebook to engage in bullying practices (*Oprah*, 2009, Denny-Dimitrio, 2009; SAPA, 2005; Comins 2010; Gwala, 2010, E-TV, 26 October 2010). In 2009, Oprah Winfrey hosted a show dedicated to three teenagers who killed themselves because they were bullied by other learners at their school. Their bullying took place via their cell phones and the internet. Doctor Susan Lipkins, who was interviewed on the show, stated that cyber-bullying was actually more dangerous than one-on-one bullying. John Halligan, the father of one of the victims stated on the show, “I don’t think they would have done what they did if they knew that he would do what he did.” (Ryan killed himself after being a victim of cyber-bullying.) Chase, a 13 year old victim whom Oprah interviewed on the show stated, “Sometimes I just want to hit myself and ask me why? Is it all my fault?”

I find it interesting and surprising that cyber bullying/new-age bullying was not mentioned at all by learners in this study. As an educator, I am aware

of new-age bullying that occurred with the learners of the school. What follows is a case of new-age bullying involving a female learner at the school.

Early one morning, a few years ago, a few educators and I were sent for by a group of very anxious learners. They seemed very concerned about a friend who was highly distraught and who had stated to them that she wanted to kill herself. It took a while to calm the distraught learner down but eventually we did and the following story emerged. A derogatory list about this particular girl was sent around via mxit. This list was not only circulated to learners in this specific school, but also to learners at other schools. Upon investigation, it was found that the list was circulated by people who did not like the victim. The list was a way of embarrassing and slandering her in the hope of causing her great embarrassment as a way of getting the better of her. The repercussions were severe as the learner involved was extremely distraught. Her parents had to be called to school. The matter was discussed and she was taken home. She did not return to school for several days and we were told that she did not want to return to school as she felt that the gossip contained in the circulated list was believed by her fellow learners and they were laughing at her. She showed suicidal tendencies and had to undergo counseling before finally returning to school. This incident has since been followed by many other such incidents. Gwala (2010) and Comins (2010) state that such lists can be broadcast on a website called "toilet". Gwala (2010) reported that the derogatory information published in such lists and website often have a very negative impact on the victims and leave them feeling anxious, humiliated and suicidal. When discussed with learners, a pattern in their discussion seemed to emerge. None of the learners, her friends included, seemed to think that there was very much wrong with it. One learner responded, "She shouldn't take it so personally mam, this kind of thing happens all the time. If she doesn't like it, she should delete her mxit!"

The fact that this was not mentioned by the participants in this project could suggest two things. The first could be that the learners just did not realise that this was an incident of bullying. The second could be that such incidents were developed into a culture of silence. This could be because learners were afraid to speak about matters relating to their cell phones as they were afraid that the negative connotations related to the use of phones would be reinforced and the phones would be taken away. If learners did not view this as a form of bullying, how then did they view it? Learners seemed to normalise this form of anti-social behaviour on the social platform of mxit. They rationalised it as a form of communicating and saw it as a part of everyday life.

At the time of the final writing of this dissertation, E-TV (26 October 2010) aired a programme on the topic of bullying. This programme included a discussion on cyber-bullying. This programme was interesting for the following reasons. Firstly it stated that bullying was a problem that was usually associated with boys but was recently spilling over to include girls as perpetrators. Secondly, they stated that bullying usually occurred when the teachers were not around. This meant that the bullies could take over. The programme revealed that the physical make-up of the bully as being a boy who is huge, intimidating and macho was a misnomer as the demographics of the bully seems to be changing. Furthermore, non-physical forms of bullying, such as teasing is usually seen as harmless fun but can often escalate into violence.

The most significant part of this programme, for me, was the notion of cyber-bullying. Experts stated that as technology increased, incidents of cyber-bullying increased. It seems that this form of bullying involves the sending of derogatory messages to the victim. It could also take the form of digitally altered photographs of the victim. Girls seem to be more

involved in cyber-bullying than boys. The problem with cyber-bullying is that the bully can remain anonymous but the gossip and slander sent is visible to anyone. The victim is usually alone when they discover the abuse and feels that they are alone and have no place to turn to. This could then lead to “bullycide”. Bullycide is when a victim of bullying commits suicide because of the bullying that they have been subjected to. Given the serious and deadly consequences of cyber-bullying, it would be worthwhile to include further cycles of AR in the school which deal with this aspect of bullying. This culture of silence around cyber-bullying in this school context needs to be probed further, leading to appropriate interventions at the level of awareness raising and action.

#### **4.9.2 Educators as victims of bullying**

Another silence that emerged is that of educators as victims of bullying. de Wet (2006) reported that educators can also be the targets of bullying. This was referred to as Educator-targeted bullying (ETB). This can occur when the educator is subjected to constant teasing, in-discipline, and being undermined by the learners. This type of bullying is unconventional because Freire (2006, p.44) states that, people oppressed others “by virtue of their power”. One would assume that the educator would be that one with the power and authority over the learners therefore bullying is unlikely to exist with the educator as the target of bullying practices by learners. However, de Wet (2006) states that in ETB, “the educator, who is supposed to be the leader and mentor in the educator-learner relationship, is disempowered by the negative actions of his or her learner(s)” (p.55). This would mean that the educator is no longer the one with the power and control in the educator-learner relationship. Of further importance is the suggestion by de Wet (2006) that “learners who indulge in ETB aim to undermine the educator’s confidence” (p.55). This means that the act of bullying the educator is deliberate and calculated by the learner/learners involved in ETB.

The difference between disruptive behaviour and ETB must be noted. Disruptive behaviour includes,

a refusal to obey requests and commands, noisiness, showing off, teasing, irritating or disturbing other learners, learners leaving their seats without permission, talking out of turn, calling out when an educator is speaking, making improper noises, not paying attention, storming out of the class, as well as more serious offences such as verbal abuse, destructiveness and physical violence” (de Wet, 2006, p55).

ETB on the other hand, while encompassing some of the examples listed above under disruptive behaviour, is seen as encompassing the following,

Persistent, intentional and vigorous abuse of the educator, swearing and/or mocking the educator, knowingly ignoring the educator, making personal comments about the educator, and damaging the educator’s property (de Wet, 2006, p.55).

Learners do not talk about these behaviours. A silence has been developed by the learners in that it is a concept that they know is unacceptable. They are aware that such behaviour is regarded by the school management as intolerable. Furthermore, it could be that they do not regard such behaviour towards a teacher as wrong. Rather, they probably regard it as a change or relief from the other educators who express stricter control and discipline in their other classes.

The culture of silence also exists from the point of view of the educator. de Wet (2006) states that a “culture of silence surround(s) ETB because victims fear that the incident will reflect poorly on them and because of



definitional vagueness” (p.56). Thus ETB is reported by neither the learner nor the educator and thus continues unabated. Not much literature is available on ETB, thus further research is needed to provide conclusive answers to this type of bullying.

## **4.10 The impact of the intervention programme on the Action Research Process**

### **4.10.1 Actions/interventions**

As explained in Chapter 3 of this dissertation (3.2 Research Design, Methodology and Process) action research involves the “intervention in the functioning of the real world, and close examination of the effects of this action” (Terre Blanch and Durrheim, 1991, p.476). In this project, I aimed at intervening in the “real world” of the learners of the school by engaging with the RCL in an action research project aimed at reducing bullying at the school. This process was done according to Ferrence’s (2000) five step model of action research (see chapter 3).

Data was collected at two stages in the project. The first set of data was collected in the initial data collection process. Questionnaires were handed to all learners on the RCL. Data from the completed questionnaires was then plotted on a table that made the analysis of the data easier. Similarities and differences were noted and gaps in the data which represented gaps in the knowledge of the learners’ were then noted. The gaps presented in this data were then addressed through the construction and implementation of an intervention programme (Steps 3 and 4 of the project). The intervention programme was drawn up in a collaborative process with the RCL as they were the research participants of the action research project. The suggestions of the RCL were considered and refined over two sessions and a final intervention

programme addressing the concerns and gaps which emerged from data collected in the initial data collection process was developed.

One intervention process involved the SAPS Community Youth Desk Forum. The members of this forum were called in to address learners of the school on concerns relating to bullying. Members of the SAPS spoke to the learners highlighting aspects of bullying that was relevant to them as learners. Clarity was sought and learners seemed to leave the workshop with a much clearer understanding of bullying. Their broader knowledge was revealed in their responses in the final data collection process. The RCL members were then asked to disseminate the knowledge gained from this workshop to the learners in their respective classes.

Once this was done, RCL members reported on an ad hoc basis to the researcher on responses made by learners in their classes. The RCL then reconvened at a focus group discussion and it was decided that bullying would be discussed more formally in the classroom by educators. This intervention process was done in the English and Life Orientation lessons. Educators engaged learners on various aspects and matters related to bullying through the curriculum for the respective subjects. Learners had the opportunity to engage with each other, educators and their RCL on the topic of bullying. Clarity was sought and received. Following this intervention process, all learners were asked to complete posters and paragraphs on bullying (these have been discussed above). The RCL completed the paragraphs and posters which have been outlined and discussed above and, without revealing their names on the paragraphs and posters, handed them into the researcher as the final data collection process. The rest of the learners handed responses into their respective educators. The final step involved the analysis of the data which has been discussed in this chapter.

In order to ascertain if the intervention had a positive impact on the real situation of bullying in the school, I had to compare the data gathered in the initial data collection process with the data from the final data collection process. This comparison is discussed next.

#### **4.10.2 Researcher Reflections on the action research process**

The following changes in the data collected at different stages were noted. Learners developed a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of bullying. At first, a definition of bullying was limited to involving bigger boys who used their power over younger learners. After the intervention strategies, they realised that even the forceful taking of lunch by any learner constituted an incident of bullying. In the initial data collection stage, only 4 of the 19 respondents stated that a lot of bullying occurred in the school. At the end of the project, in the final data collection stage, all learners agreed that there was a lot of bullying on the school premises. This could mean that learners had acquired knowledge and insight via the intervention process that later helped them to better understand and accurately discuss dynamics related to bullying. This involved a basic identification of bullying incidents as well as an understanding of the causes of bullying.

In the initial data collection stage, 5 learners felt that the bullies' home/family background played a role in the creation of a bully. In the final data collection stage 11 of the 19 participants stated that home/family background was instrumental in creating a bully. It thus seems as if the intervention process has had a significant impact on the learners' understanding of bullying and the causes of bullying.

Personally, the intervention process, while helping learners acquire knowledge on bullying, helped me as an educator identify aspects of

bullying that needed to be addressed. Some of these have already been addressed. These included a more holistic definition of bullying, the causes of bullying as well as identification of bullying incidents and hotspots.

#### **4.10.3 Next Phase of Action Research**

While this project involved one cycle of the action research process, I have come to realise that one cycle was not enough to adequately address all the concerns relating to bullying at this school. While learners were better able to identify examples of bullying, the fact that they did not mention new-age/cyber bullying means that gaps still exist in this area of their understanding. Furthermore, while learners admitted, in the final data collection stage to girls also being a part of bullying, the silence of cross-gender bullying, or more specifically, girls bullying boys, still exists. This is another area that still needs to be explored. Learners had, as part of the initial data collection process, mentioned that RCL members needed to be workshopped on counseling skills needed to help learners cope with bullying. Because of the time constraints experienced, this was something that was not done. It could be included as part of the next phase of action research at the school. All of these aspects mentioned above, will form part of the next cycle of action research that will take place at the school, which will take place outside the ambit of this MEd project.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

What struck me as I worked with learners on this project, was their need to improve the conditions of learning and teaching at their school. They seemed dedicated to their task of representing the learners to the best of their ability. They were eager to obtain new knowledge that would help them be a more effective RCL. Many learners displayed a keenness to

continue the project and also added other ideas they felt would help to diminish bullying in the school.

Unfortunately, I feel that due to time constraints, the intervention strategies that were implemented were not optimally done. Furthermore, I was disappointed that the grade twelve learners discontinued their involvement in the project due to their examinations being written at the time of the project. I have noted that, when doing the next cycle of the action research, the timing has to be such that the grade twelve learners will be able to fully participate.

Responses to the research questions that guided this project will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study has revealed that bullying is a concern in this school environment and that a real need exists in this school for a more elaborate program on bullying. The study also reinforces the view that learner involvement in such interventions is absolutely crucial. Many gaps exist in the learners' understanding of bullying and learners have tended to accept many features pertaining to bullying as part of life. In some instances they appear to have created silences around bullying due to various reasons and have thus created their own limit situations. In so doing, they have become victims or targets of bullying and are unable to break free from this situation. While this project was aimed at the conscientization of learners about bullying, it has not worked to the extent that I would have liked. This and other findings are what I discuss in this chapter.

### **5.2 Limitations**

The study was limited in that it only involved one particular school and one cycle of action research. Findings can therefore only be seen as specific to this particular context.

It would also be more useful to conduct a few more cycles of the project and then ascertain the effects of the project. While most learners seem to have a general understanding of bullying, other examples of bullying such as new-age bullying and educator-targeted bullying did not emerge in data.

On reflection, I realise that one of the most salient limitations of this project was the inability to plan for unforeseen circumstances. The various time delays and the eventual discontinuation of the grade twelve learners in the study led to me not engaging in the project as comprehensively as I had initially envisaged. I also feel that I was unable to fully gain the trust of the learners which could also possibly explain some silences which arose in the initial data collection process regarding learners who were bullies. Learners were possibly reluctant to admit to bullying for fear of being punished as I was, for all intents and purposes in the eyes of the learners, still “the teacher” who had the power to punish. They are likely to have experienced conflict on whether to be totally honest or to safeguard themselves. These conflicts seem to have been grounded in their simultaneous excitement for the project and their need for self-preservation.

I also believe that I was unable to do justice to the generative themes in the course of this project. I had hoped to be able to take the themes that emerged back to the learners for further dialogue, reflection and analyses so that they would be able to achieve a better understanding of bullying, but by the end of the year, I realised that I did not have the time to do so.

Further to this was the inability to fully engage in the intervention programme as designed by the RCL. Time constraints and the inability to secure the relevant people to engage learners on aspects relating to bullying meant that some aspects that the learners listed on their programme had to be left out.

One of the unfortunate limitations that I experienced as researcher was that the time that I had to engage the RCL on bullying was very limited. Except for the time given to me by the school management team for the SAPS workshop, all other interactions with the RCL were limited to the

breaks. This meant that learners were engaging with the project in times when many wished to be free on the grounds with their friends. The time was also limited in that the break was only twenty five minutes. By the time learners gathered, the time was diminished to about fifteen minutes which meant that comprehensive discussions were impossible. These are the limitations of attempting action research within the constraints of a school schedule and the MEd study schedule.

### **5.3 Summary of key findings**

The data revealed that learners felt that bullying was an concern at their school that needed intervention. They identified many hotspots where bullying occurred. Data revealed that the reasons for the development of these hotspots were that these areas were not clearly visible to educators and that these areas were not properly supervised by educators.

Data revealed that bullying was seen as a form of oppression. Learners revealed that bullying mainly comprised of aspects such as aggression, force, power and physical and emotional abuse. People bullied because of various reasons including the following. Learners bullied because they wanted to feel powerful. They thus targeted learners who were seen as less powerful than they were such as younger learners or learners who were smaller in built than they were. They felt that in so doing they would be seen as having more power and thus be more favoured and popular than other less powerful learners.

The study also found that boys and girls experienced bullying differently. Boys were more inclined to be involved in bullying than girls. Boys were also more inclined to use physical methods of bullying than girls who were more inclined to engage in verbal and emotional bullying. The reasons for this possibly relate to the socially expected and accepted norms of



behaviour for boys and girls, which are different. It was more acceptable for boys to be more physical and aggressive than girls.

The most common form of bullying involved boys as bullies and targets. Bullying between girls also occurred but few learners acknowledged the bullying of girls by boys even though this type of bullying was observed by the researcher. Furthermore, no learner mentioned girls bullying boys. Female targets of bullying felt very emotional and sad while male targets also felt anger and the need for revenge. Males and females also viewed the bully differently with boys focusing on the more physical aspects of a bullying and girls focusing more on emotional aspects of a bully.

While learners were upset about bullying at their school, they held a very empathetic view of the reasons why people bullied. They acknowledged that a poor family background, poverty, abuse and jealousy all were reasons why learners bullied others. They did not feel that bullying was a character flaw but rather that bullies were victims of the above mentioned circumstances. Gaps were discovered in that learners did not acknowledge pertinent aspects such as race and discrimination as causes of bullying. Age was also found to be a motivating factor of bullying. While learners of all ages experienced bullying similarly, many learners were bullied because they were younger than the bully and therefore an easy target.

Some silences emerged. Learners did not speak about new-age bullying which the researcher found to be rife at the school. They also did not speak about learners targeting educators. Most learners did not draw the link between bullying and violence per se even though they admitted that bullying involved physical abuse and hitting the victim.

It was found that the action research process did have an impact on the learners understanding of bullying but that many areas still needed intervention in order for a more comprehensive understanding to be attained and for bullying to be adequately addressed.

## **5.4 Research questions**

This research project was framed by the following broad research questions.

1. How does the RCL understand the phenomenon of bullying in the school?
2. What is the prevalence and features of bullying in their school context?
3. What actions do learners recommend to reduce bullying in their school?

In order to ascertain how the RCL understood the phenomenon of bullying in their school, I engaged them on the topic of bullying at various stages in the project as this was an action research project. The first time was in the form of a questionnaire. The next time was in the form of a focus group discussion which took place between the RCL and the TLO. The learners then engaged the topic of bullying in workshop with the SAPS. Learners were then exposed to discussions and exercises on bullying which were integrated into their English and Life Orientation lessons. Various other informal sessions relating to bullying, involving both the RCL and other learners of the school, also took place. The next formal step involved the RCL writing a paragraph on “What is Bullying?” and drawing up two posters. One poster involved aspects relating to “Why people bully” and the other related to “The Face of the Bully” (the characteristics of a bully). The following responses were noted.

#### **5.4.1 Response to research question 1 (How does the RCL understand the phenomenon of bullying in the school?)**

Respondents initially felt that bullying involved teasing, physical and emotional intimidation, physical and emotional abuse, the use of power, force and discrimination. Age also had an impact on bullying. After intervention they still held on to these aspects but included additional examples such as taking lunch from a learner, extorting money, teasing and verbal abuse.

In their initial responses, learners indicated that bullying mainly involved boys because boys were more accustomed to rough and aggressive behaviours and this was seen as acceptable by other learners and educators alike. In their later responses, learners revealed that girls were also involved in bullying but in a different way. While boys were more physical, girls were more verbal and socially restrictive in their forms of bullying.

In responding to why people bullied, learners' responses remained static throughout the project. They felt that people bullied due to a variety of reasons including: poor family backgrounds; neglect; hunger; to gain power, respect and satisfaction; to enforce power; the need to feel superior and empowered; and jealousy.

#### **5.4.2 Responses to research question 2 (What is the prevalence and features of bullying in their school context?)**

Learners first responded to this question in the questionnaire. Of the 19 learners who returned the questionnaires, all 19 agreed that bullying existed at the school. The difference was that 15 felt it occurred a little and 4 stated that it existed a lot. This was a contradiction of my own observations as educator and researcher as I had found that there were many incidents of bullying that occurred in the school. Also interesting was

the fact that of the 4 who stated that bullying occurred a lot, only 1 was a girl.

#### **5.4.3 Responses to research question 3 (What actions do learners recommend to reduce bullying in their school?)**

Initial recommendations by learners were similar to recommendations which the learners made at the end of the project. Recommendations to reduce bullying at the school included: Monitoring of the bullying hotspots by both educators and the RCL members; an anti-bullying campaign which involved people talking about the different aspects of bullying and ensuring that learners are more knowledgeable about matters of bullying; counselling for both the bully and the victim and drawing up of stricter policies to deal with bullying.

It must be noted that this project arose out of a previous discussion held by the RCL. This discussion involved the RCL discussing things that they felt needed intervention at the school. One of the items listed was bullying. As a researcher, I felt that this was an important research topic and began my research on bullying with the RCL as research participants. Thus this project can be seen as part of the ongoing intervention strategies adopted by the RCL to address bullying at their school.

#### **5.5 Recommendations on what can be done to further alleviate bullying at the school through action research or school projects**

It seems as if the main reason that bullying occurs in the hotspots that learners identified, were that these areas were not adequately supervised by educators. Thus the first recommendation would be that these areas become priority areas to be supervised by educators. It seems that the

monitoring of these hotspots is vital in the quest to alleviate bullying at the school. This needs to be taken forward and fed into the schooling system. The monitoring of these hotspots needs to be addressed by the school management team (SMT) and the staff in order to find the best way to address it. The implementation of the effects of added educator supervision in these hotspots could then be ascertained via a further stage of action research at the school.

Another key finding was that learners did not seem to understand the concept of new-age or cyber-bullying. Given the current increase in press coverage related to new-age bullying, it would seem that the occurrence of this new technological form of bullying is on the increase. In an article written for the *Daily News* (2010, p.5) Comins reported that 62% of the learners, from two South African schools who were interviewed, stated that they knew other learners who had been victims of cyber-bullying. Comins went on to state that “49% of online bullying was done via smsing or instant chat” and what made cyber-bullying worse was that most of the victims did not realise that they had been bullied.

Given that the world is constantly evolving and advancing technologically, it is understandable that human behaviours would adapt accordingly to these technological changes. These technological advancements have profound effects on the lives of society as a whole and more specifically, on children as they become more immersed in the technology available. Thus the move from traditional ways of bullying, as has been discussed in this study, to the more technologically advanced cyber-bullying, is understandable. As has been stated by Comins (2010), the fact that learners are not aware of this newer type of bullying is problematic, as children cannot identify it since they are not aware that it exists as such. Hence, cyber-bullying cannot be dealt with in the ways that traditional, more easily identifiable ways of bullying are. An indication of this would be

the case of cyber-bullying cited in chapter four. A recommendation to the school management team would be that they source the episode on cyber-bullying that was aired on E-TV on the 26 October 2010 and show it to learners. This could be used in a further round of AR to generate dialogue on cyber-bullying to address this silence.

A further recommendation would be the development of programmes or another round of action research which would facilitate learners gaining a more comprehensive understanding of bullying and types of bullying so that learners are aware of what is bullying and their silences are challenged such that these are no longer seen as acceptable. These incidents could then be identified and reported to educators by the learners as bullying and be dealt with accordingly. Thus incidents such as cyber-bullying and educator bullying need to be collaboratively and comprehensively discussed such that learners are aware of them and able to draw attention to them. I believe that these recommended actions for a further round of action research need to be looked at as a series of interventions. These interventions need to incorporate learner centeredness. This next round of action research should facilitate discussion and dialogue as to why the above mentioned silences did not surface in this project. Learners should discuss how these unmentioned forms of behaviours manifest themselves as bullying. Learners also need to discuss interventions necessary to address cyber-bullying and educator-targeted bullying.

The notion of what is acceptable behaviour for boys and girls also needs attention and challenging such that rough play is no longer seen as acceptable behaviour for boys. A common understanding of acceptable behaviour for boys and girls needs to be collaboratively reached and deviances clearly highlighted. Features of bullying also need to be more clearly discussed in school policies. There is also a need for acceptable

behaviour of boys and girls to be clearly brought to the attention of all learners at the school. A stricter stance on bullying needs to be adopted by educators and the school management team. This would serve to discourage learners from engaging in incidents of bullying.

One cannot isolate and compartmentalise the lives of learners into school life and home/social and community life. All of these aspects are interlinked and influence each other. Theoretically, bullying is a reflection of society. This is a challenge as this project engaged learners in the isolation of the school only. Bullying of and by learners was looked at through the data as well as through a review of literature. It must be noted that bullying cannot be viewed in isolation in the school only, as this study has done. The next level of intervention needs to look at how to bring in the other role players, such as the community and all stakeholders of the school. This would help to address the outer school context of bullying. Thus, there needs to be a wider anti-bullying campaign which allows learners to address the outer school context of bullying since the findings clearly reveal a link between occurrences of violence and bullying in the community and occurrences of violence and bullying at school.

## **5.6 Recommendations for further research**

I believe that while an abundance of literature is available on bullying and much research has been done, the focus needs to be changed. A greater focus has been placed on how educators can reduce bullying at schools. I believe that the focus needs to be the learners and perhaps communities of which schools are a part. Further research needs to focus on a more comprehensive definition of bullying. It also needs to address new-age bullying and educators as targets of bullying by learners. While the concept of bullying remains constant, the dynamics revolving around it are

constantly changing and adapting to an ever-changing world. These dynamics and changes need to be given attention in interventions.

Paulo Freire, felt that “people were the subjects of (their) own lives and narratives, not objects in the stories of others” (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p.120) and that it was the individual who was responsible for shaping and changing their own reality. Thus, I feel that more research needs to be done on how the learners themselves can impact on bullying of which they are, either directly or indirectly, a part. Action research allows for such learner participation.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

During the course of this project, I came to realise that Freire’s need to eradicate suffering from the lives of children involved a very complex process. In the process of completing this project, I tried to employ Freire’s concept of problem posing education through dialogue. While using Freire’s key pedagogical instruments to elicit data and to inform my study, I tried to view and analyse the data that I obtained through the lens of Freire’s theory of oppression and Butler’s theory of gender. Using both of these, I embarked on a series of actions and reflections in order to conscientize learners on concerns pertaining to bullying at their school. In retrospect, I realise that reflection and acting on this reflection, which is the process of praxis, is a much more in-depth process and requires a lot more time and thought than was allowed for in this project. I realise now that the initial goals that I had set out for myself as researcher and as educator at the start of this project cannot be attained in a single cycle of action research. This has made me realise that being a researcher and project manager is not a simple undertaking.



A concept such as bullying, which is multi-pronged, needs a much more in-depth process in order to be successful. I learned that very often in life, we tend to take things for granted. We tend to presuppose outcomes before they even become a reality and we tend to base these outcomes on our own experiences of life. The data obtained from this research and the responses gleaned from learners, opened my eyes to the variety of situations that exist in their world.

A simple thing like reading Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), gave me a very different perspective on life. In all, I must admit that this project, besides allowing me to help empower learners, has empowered me and provided me with a different lens with which to view life. This project has given me the opportunity to view life through the lens of social justice – a notion that I once viewed from my sheltered, middle class upbringing. I am thankful that I can say that this project has successfully contributed to my own learning process as lifelong student, educator, researcher and human being.

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# Annexures

## Annexure 1 - Consent forms

### **INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

My name is Nishana Maharaj. I am currently completing my Masters in Education (Social Justice) at the University of Kwazulu-Natal. In order to do so, I have to complete a research project. As such, your child/ward's participation will be greatly appreciated. The participation in the project is not compulsory and will not in any way impact on your child/wards life at school. The right to withdraw from the project at any time is reserved by you. Please read through the following details about the project and then fill in the consent form on the last page.

Thank you.  
Nishana Maharaj

#### **PROJECT TITLE:**

A Representative Council of Learner's (RCL's) understanding and response to issues of bullying in their school: an Action Research Project.

#### **PROJECT AIMS:**

The project aims at empowering learners so that they can help reduce bullying in their school.

#### **NAME AND DETAILS OF INVESTIGATOR:**

Nishana Maharaj  
c/o ML Sultan (PMB) Secondary  
033-3420039

#### **NAME AND DETAILS OF SUPERVISOR:**

Vaughn John  
SAHE, UKZN (PMB)  
033 2605069

#### **SUBJECTS:**

RCL members of M.L. Sultan (PMB) Secondary School

#### **SUBJECT REQUIREMENTS:**

Subjects will be required to provide information regarding bullying in the school. They would also be involved in drawing up an anti-bullying campaign designed at reducing bullying in the school. They would also be required to report back to their colleagues on the process and progress of the project.

**PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT:**

The project is for the purpose of my Masters in Education Degree.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:**

The learners of M.L. Sultan (PMB) Secondary stand to benefit in that the RCL members gain empowerment and leadership skills while the rest of the learners could benefit from a reduction of bullying in their schooling environment.

**FINANCIAL ASPECTS:**

The learners/subjects of the project are in no way liable for any financial implications of the project. All costs will be borne by myself as the investigator.

**DATA:**

All information and data gathered will be dealt with utmost respect and confidentiality. It will be kept by the University of KwaZulu-Natal for five years and then disposed of by them.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONONYMITY:**

The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be maintained throughout. At no stage, before, during or after the project will this be compromised.

**CONSENT AND PARTICIPATION:**

Subjects can at any stage of the project decide to withdraw their participation. This will in no way what so ever disadvantage the learner in any way. Participation in this project is purely voluntary and the subject is free to withdraw at any time for any reason.



DECLARATION BY PARENT GUARDIAN

[An RCL's response to issues of bullying in their school.

An Action Research Project]

I.....(full names of participant)

hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my child/ward participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw my child/ward from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

DECLARATION BY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

[An RCL's response to issues of bullying in their school.

An Action Research Project]

I.....(full names of participant)

hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Annexure 2 – Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE ON BULLYING

My name is Mrs N. Maharaj. I am currently completing my Masters in Education at the University of KwaZulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg. My thesis topic is investigating bullying in high schools. As such, I have designed this questionnaire to collect data on the topic. It would be appreciated if you would agree to fill in the questionnaire. All information contained in this questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and respect. The time taken to participate in this process is greatly appreciated. Your name is not required on this questionnaire. If you are uncomfortable answering any questions, please feel free to leave that question blank.

QUESTIONS

1. What is bullying?

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2. Does bullying exist in your school?

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3. To what extent does bullying exist in your school? Select from:

A little                                  A lot                                  Very severely

4a. Who do you think is more involved in Bullying?

Boys                                                  or                                                  Girls

4b. Why do you think this is so?

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5a. Have you ever been bullied?

5b. If yes, how did you feel about being bullied?

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5c. What form did the bullying take?

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5d. Why do you think that you were bullied?

6a. Have you ever bullied somebody?

6b. If yes, why?

6c. How did you feel when you bullied someone?

7a. Where, on the school premises, do you think, most of the bullying occurs?

7b. Why do you think most of the bullying occurs in these areas?

8a. When do you think most incidents of bullying occur?

8b. Why do you think this is so?

9. Why do you think that people bully others?

10. What is your opinion of people who bully others?

11. What can the RCL do to help reduce bullying in this school?

Annexure 3 – Departmental consent form



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATALI

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO

Tel: 033 341 8610  
Fax: 033 341 8612  
Private Bag X9137  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

228 Pietermaritz Street  
PIETERMARITZBURG

**INHLOKHOVISI**

**PIETERMARITZBURG**

**HEAD OFFICE**

Imibuzo:  
Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Reference:  
Inkomba: 0043/2009

Date:  
Usuku: 03 July 2009

**MRS N MAHARAJ  
18 KISMET CRESCENT  
ALLANDALE  
PMBURG  
3201**

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: A REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS (RCL'S)  
UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSE TO ISSUES OF BULLYING IN THEIR SCHOOLS: N ACTION  
RESEARCH PROJECT**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the attached list has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educator programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The investigation is to be conducted from 03 July 2009 to 03 July 2010.
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s) please contact Mr Sibusiso Alwar at the contact numbers above.
7. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.
8. Your research will be limited to the schools submitted.
9. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Resource Planning.

10. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to

The Director: Resource Planning  
Private Bag X9137  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards



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R. Cassius Lubisi (PhD)  
Superintendent-General

Annexure 4 – Departmental Consent (Permission to Interview Learners and Educators)



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATALI

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO

Tel: 033 341 8610  
Fax: 033 341 8612  
Private Bag X9137  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

228 Pietermaritz Street  
PIETERMARITZBURG

INHLOKHOVISI	PIETERMARITZBURG	HEAD OFFICE
Imibuzo: - Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar	Reference: Inkomba: 0043/2009	Date: Usuku: 03 July 2009

**MRS N MAHARAJ**  
**18 KISMET CRESCENT**  
**ALLANDALE**  
**PMBURG**  
**3201**

**PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS**

The above matter refers.

Permission is hereby granted to interview Departmental Officials, learners and educators in selected schools of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal subject to the following conditions:

1. You make all the arrangements concerning your interviews.
2. Educators' programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, educators and schools are not identifiable in any way from the results of the interviews.
5. Your interviews are limited only to targeted schools.
6. A brief summary of the interview content, findings and recommendations is provided to my office.
7. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers and principals of schools where the intended interviews are to be conducted.

The KZN Department of education fully supports your commitment to research: **A Representative Council of Learner's (RCL'S) understanding and response to issues of bullying in their schools: An action research project**

It is hoped that you will find the above in order.

Best Wishes

R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)  
Superintendent-General

Annexure 5 – Ethical Clearance Form



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)  
WESTVILLE CAMPUS  
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587  
EMAIL : [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

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30 SEPTEMBER 2009

**MRS.N MAHARAJ (912307461)**  
**LANGUAGES, LITERACIES, DRAMA, & MEDIA EDUCATION**

Dear Mrs. Maharaj

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0657/09M**

I wish to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been granted full approval for the following project:

**“A Representative Council of Learner’s (RCL’S) understanding and response to issues of bullying in their school: An action research project”**

**PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

**PROFESSOR STEVEN COLLINGS (CHAIR)**  
**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE**

cc. Supervisor (Vaughn John)  
cc. Ms. R Govender