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Conditions for the implementation of anti-bullying programmes in Norway and Ireland: a comparison of contexts and strategies

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Drawing on experiences from anti-bullying programmes in Norway and Ireland, our primary objective in this paper is to present and discuss similarities and differences in national contexts, delivery strategies and strategies at school level for implementation of the ABC (Ireland) and Zero (Norway) anti-bullying programmes. Both programmes are whole-school anti-bullying programmes that share a common structure and marked similarities in methodology, emanating from a Norwegian nationwide anti-bullying programme developed at the Centre for Behavioural Research. Comparisons show considerable differences in the national contexts, with the Norwegian authorities taking more initiative towards anti-bullying work. There were both similarities and differences concerning delivery strategies. A conclusion to be drawn is that in order to stimulate implementation of anti-bullying programmes in schools, the national authorities can have a promoting role through their focus, legislation and resource allocation. However, conditions for implementation also include the delivery process and strategies for implementation at the school level.

Keywords: implementation; anti-bullying programmes; Norway; Ireland

Introduction

Bullying amongst school students has been identified as a problem across countries for many years (e.g. Smith et al. 1999; Smith 2003; Smith, Pepler, and Rigby 2004). As a result, anti-bullying programmes have been developed to combat school bullying: for example, the DFE project in Sheffield, England (Smith 1997), the Flemish anti-bullying project in Flanders, Belgium (Stevens, de Bourdeadhuij and Van Oost 2000), the SAVE project in Spain (Ortega and Lera 2000), a number of programmes in Norway (Roland and Munthe 1997; Roland 2000), and the Donegal Primary Schools Anti-Bullying Programme in Ireland (O'Moore and Minton 2005). Research has shown that the effects of the programmes differ, and that implementation is crucial (Smith, Pepler, and Rigby 2004).

This recognition of the importance and the challenge of implementation is also known from other social interventions (e.g. Kushman and Yap 1999; Lipsey and Cordray 2000; Elias et al. 2003; Kam, Greenberg, and Walls 2003). Implementation can be described as 'the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to people attempting or expected to change' (Fullan 2001, 69). This process is complex, because it requires change in behaviour and

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beliefs for the individuals (Fullan 1992). It is suggested that this implementation process is influenced by internal and external conditions, and that factors such as the quality of the programme, the delivery process and the external context are significant conditions (Greenberg et al. 2001). Drawing on experiences from two anti-bullying programmes in Norway and Ireland, our purpose in this paper is to present and discuss similarities and differences in the (1) national contexts, (2) delivery strategies and (3) strategies at school level for implementation of the ABC and Zero anti-bullying programmes.

The programmes

Both programmes, the Norwegian Zero programme and the Irish ABC programme, are whole-school anti-bullying programmes that share a common structure and marked similarities in methodology, ultimately emanating from a Norwegian nationwide anti-bullying programme developed at the Centre for Behavioural Research (CBR) at Stavanger University College that was launched in 1996 (Roland and Munthe 1997). Compared to the first Norwegian nationwide anti-bullying programme (1983), the 1996 programme was more preventative and comprehensive in focus, paying particular attention to organizational aspects of the school and general classroom management. Additionally, this second nationwide programme developed the model of training trainers to introduce the programme to schools (Roland and Munthe 1997). It utilized a support network of 350 professionals, including researchers, educational psychologists and principals (Roland 2000; Roland, Bjørnsen, and Mandt 2001).

Structurally, four key elements appeared in the 1996 Norwegian programme that were included in the Irish ABC and the Norwegian Zero programmes. These components are as follows: (1) the training of a network of professionals; (2) the development of a teachers' resource pack, which contained information about bullying behaviour, with an emphasis on classroom management, the development of a positive atmosphere in class and school, staff leadership and parent-teacher co-operation; (3) the development of a parents' resource pack, containing information on the prevalence, types, causes, effects and indicators of bullying behaviour; also, how to deal with alleged or actual incidents of bullying; and (4) the promotion of work with students – participating schools were assisted in creating a climate that does not accept bullying. As part of a general awareness-raising campaign, students were to have access to age-related handbooks, which included ideas for the prevention and countering of bullying in their class and school. Students were to be encouraged, through peer leadership, to support children whom they witnessed being bullied.

In Norway, the material from the 1996 nationwide programme was updated and extended in 2003, and the revitalized programme was called Zero, in the spirit of the zero-acceptance (Midthassel 2003; Roland and Vaaland 2003). Results from a study of the Zero programme showed a decrease in bullying behaviour (Roland et al., forthcoming). Furthermore, in order to study the sustainability of the decrease, an ongoing follow-up study of 72 schools was conducted. The results two years after the programme had ended showed that the reduction for victimization was maintained and there was a slight decrease in bullying others, whereas follow-up procedures carried out in some of these schools did not add further improvement (Midthassel, Bru, and Idsøe 2008). The maintenance of the effects two years after the programme

was carried out was positive news since long-lasting results have been difficult to find (Galloway and Roland 2004). A study of the implementation process in six schools suggests variety in the schools' readiness for the programme, as well as how it was carried out (Midthassel and Ertesvåg 2008) and a study of eight small rural schools in the northern part of Norway suggests that ownership of the programme, a shared understanding of bullying, and the need for adjustments, are important aspects as regards successful implementation (Knutson 2006).

In Ireland, although the 1996 Norwegian structure was followed, materials were specifically written by Professor Mona O'Moore and Stephen James Minton for the ABC programme, with the Irish school system and culture in mind. These materials were subsequently published in book form: *Dealing with Bullying in Schools: A Training Manual for Teachers, Parents and Other Professionals* (O'Moore and Minton 2004a). The ABC programme (the acronym of which stands for both the Anti-Bullying Centre and the programme's fundamental/guiding principles – Avoid aggression, Be tolerant and Care for others) was piloted in 42 schools in one county of the Irish Republic by O'Moore in 1998–2000. The implementation of the programme resulted in reductions of 50.0% in students being frequently victimized and 69.2% reduction in frequently bullying others within the last school term, and 51.8% in having taken part in bullying others within the last five school days. Moreover, after the programme, students were more likely to report that they would help the victim if they themselves saw a student of their own age being bullied. There was also an overall improvement, though of marginal statistical significance, of the students' estimations of their teachers' attempts to intervene when bullying occurred (O'Moore and Minton 2005). When the ABC programme was implemented on a nationwide basis during 2004–6 the same level of success was not experienced. While reductions were found in the level of being bullied and of bullying others, it was only the differences in relation to being bullied that reached statistical significance (Minton and O'Moore 2008).

The national contexts

Comparing implementation of anti-bullying programmes in the two countries calls for a brief description of the national contexts with their education sectors. Norway is a relatively egalitarian society with modest cultural diversity. Compulsory school in Norway lasts 10 years; the first seven years cover primary school while the last three years cover secondary school. After finishing compulsory school the students are entitled to a further three years in high school. The municipalities own and run the schools with few exceptions, and parents do not pay school fees. Over 90% of Norwegian students attend these public schools. All classes in both primary and secondary schools have a main teacher who is tightly linked to her/his class. Main teachers in both primary and secondary school have the main responsibility for the students in their class, including the contact with the student's homes.

Since 1975 the law for special education in Norway has been integrated into the ordinary school law and in 1994 Norway signed the Salamanca statement. 'A school for all' or 'The inclusive school' is the ideology. Consequently, teachers may have to deal with a great variation in their students' learning abilities as well as in their behaviour. For many teachers this policy of integration has made their work situation more demanding.

The New-liberal wave that became obvious during Thatcher's and Reagan's regimes in Britain and the USA also can be recognized in Norway (Apple 2003).

National standards, efficiency, publication of school results and the nomination of schools of high quality are all part of this trend which places higher pressure for evaluation and improvement on the teacher and the local school. Taken together, the challenges in the Norwegian context, not so different from other western societies, constitute a constant pressure on development.

Ireland gained her independence from the UK in 1921, and since that point, has traditionally been a largely homogenous culture. This has changed somewhat over the last decade, with Ireland becoming home to relatively small populations of economic migrants and refugees, largely from former Eastern and Baltic Europe. The Republic of Ireland is a predominantly Christian country; most Irish people (93%) are Roman Catholic by denomination with the majority of the others holding to the Protestant Faith (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist).

Education in Ireland is compulsory for children between 6 and 16 years of age (subject to the pupil having completed three years of post-primary education). However, nearly half of four-year-olds and almost all of five-year-olds attend primary school. These classes are referred to as Junior and Senior Infants. There are around 3300 primary schools and 780 second-level education establishments in Ireland.

Until recent years, members of the religious orders on behalf of the State were responsible for most of the educational provision, at both the primary and post-primary levels. Until 1960, no State provision existed for the education of the 'mentally handicapped' and the visually or hearing impaired in Ireland. Religious communities had, up until this point and since the early nineteenth century, provided assistance for these children (along with those who were orphaned or neglected, and juvenile offenders). This provision took the form of workhouses until the 1850s, and industrial and reformatory schools thereafter. The 1960s and 1970s saw a long overdue and significant expansion of educational services provision for pupils with special needs. However, it was not until 1980 that residential homes and special schools replaced all of the industrial schools. Today, educational provision for pupils with special needs in Ireland is provided in both special schools and in mainstream schools. Within the mainstream schools pupils are placed in either a special class or in the mainstream class where they receive supplementary teaching depending on their educational needs.

Although it might be difficult at first glance to see how the national context can promote or hinder implementation, there might be initiatives and events that indirectly can have influence on programme delivery and implementation. In the present study the national contexts turned out to represent quite different conditions.

In Norway, the Prime Minister launched the 'National Manifesto against Bullying in School' in September 2002. Representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, the Teachers' Union, the Municipalities Union, the Parental Union and the Ombudsman for Children signed the Manifesto, pledging to co-operate in acting against school bullying. The partner organizations were obliged to involve their own target groups in co-operating in a 'zero-acceptance' approach. This 'zero-acceptance' was based on an understanding that positive and caring communities, with firm and determined adults, could prevent, identify and stop bullying (Tikkanen and Junge 2004).

Anti-bullying work in Norwegian schools was also made relevant by a new paragraph in the school law on students' environment, in April 2003. Bullying was listed under the paragraph dealing with the psycho-social environment in school,

thus formally linking the school's role in instigating anti-bullying initiatives and following up any information about bullying to administrative law. The law stresses the importance of good procedures for identifying bullying, and solving bullying issues which are discovered or reported. Preventative work against bullying is also linked to both the consideration of the psycho-social environment and the paragraph covering systematic work to promote health, environment and safety among students.

The compulsory school was a major target for the National Manifesto. The CBR was invited to revitalize the 1996 programme, and to offer a new nationwide anti-bullying programme as one of two programmes supported by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education sent information concerning the two nationwide programmes to all schools, and encouraged them to apply for one of the programmes. There were 180 Norwegian schools from all over the country that applied for the Zero programme in the spring of 2003. The Ministry of Education continued their support in 2004; this time, 100 schools applied for the Zero programme and in 2005 there were 43 schools that applied for the programme. Although the Ministry of Education supported the programme the participating schools paid a fee for participation, the sum depending on the number of enrolled students.

In Ireland, although public awareness of the issue of school bullying has increased considerably over the last two decades (O'Moore and Minton 2003), no coherent, government-led, multi-partner strategy such as the 2002 Norwegian Manifesto against Bullying has been initiated. Some 16 years have now elapsed since the Irish government's Department of Education and Science last made a direct attempt to target the problem in this way at a national level. In 1993, management authorities and principal teachers of all Irish schools received *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science 1993), the aim of which was to assist schools in the generation and implementation of anti-bullying policy, although no centrally sourced systematic funding or support has been provided for schools to implement these. Some five to six years after the Guidelines were issued, surveys of the teacher unions indicated that there were 27% of primary schools (Irish National Teachers' Organization 1999) and among post-primary schools there were 26% of schools in one union (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland 1999) and 62% in another (O'Moore 1999) that according to their schools had no anti-bullying policy.

However, since 5 July 2000, schools in Ireland have been obliged by law under the Education (Welfare) Act to provide a code of behaviour clarifying the schools' duty of care and policy concerning discipline. Failure on the part of a school to act in cases of violent behaviour causing injury to a member of staff or student now constitutes a legal breach of the school's duty of care; this provision follows out-of-court settlements, made in recent years, in the cases of a post-primary student in 1998 and a primary student in 1994 (Glendenning 1999).

Essentially, then, Irish schools have been first advised since 1993 to form anti-bullying policies, and then legally required since 2000 to provide a code of behaviour concerning violence, indiscipline and bullying, and yet have not been centrally supported by the government's Department of Education and Science in doing so. The government has relied upon schools' own individual efforts to implement the 1993 Guidelines, and upon two curricular initiatives [Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE)], in tackling the

issue of school bullying behaviour. SPHE is focused around the promotion of self-esteem, general well-being, social skills, and physical, emotional and mental health (Coyle 2000); CSPE is aimed at preparing students for active participatory citizenship (Wylie 1999), and enabling them to develop their critical and moral faculties in agreement with a system of values based in human rights and social responsibilities (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1996). If one considers the complexities of bullying behaviour in school communities, it is doubtful whether curriculum-based measures alone can be as efficacious as whole-school programmes in reducing the incidence of such problems. Evidence for this viewpoint can be gained from the whole-school-based ABC pilot programme. When evaluated it was found to be very successful in reducing the level of students' involvement in bullying behaviour (O'Moore and Minton 2003, 2004b, 2005).

In contrast to the support given by the Norwegian Ministry of Education to the Zero programme, the ABC programme was disadvantaged by the decision of the Department of Education and Science not to allow the schools a special day off for the purpose of staff training. In addition, they were unable to fund the teachers who had to replace the trainers so they could provide training during school hours. Unfortunately, this led to the nationwide ambitions for the ABC programme being somewhat curtailed; nevertheless, the 2004–5 implementation of the ABC programme progressed as well as it could under the circumstances.

Strategies for programme delivery

A challenge in programme delivery is to ensure quality in the delivery process (e.g. Greenberg et al. 2001). Thus, the persons responsible for programme delivery to the schools need to be trained for delivery, be loyal to the programme, and be looked upon as skilful professionals by the schools. Indeed, research has shown that external support is often important for a successful implementation (Fullan 2001; Nelson et al. 2000; Reynolds, Teddlie, and Stringfield 2000). Both the ABC and the Zero programmes had professional networks that were responsible for programme delivery to the schools.

In Norway, the 42 professionals invited to take part in the network in 2003 were trained in anti-bullying work. They were employed in the School Psychology service, at National Competence Centres, at Teacher Colleges and as school leaders. There were no teachers amongst them. Most of them had also been part of the network in the 1996 nationwide programme. Based on experiences from the 1996 programme the instructors in 2003 were employed by the CBR. Contracts were signed regulating their work and payment. They were invited by the CBR to a two-day seminar, focusing on the Zero programme, and their role as instructors. At the seminar they received training material for use in programme delivery to the schools. Each instructor had delivery responsibility towards three to five schools. Funding from the Ministry of Education made it possible to invite the network to seminars at the CBR regularly – twice a year.

During the programme period of 14 months each instructor carried out five seminars with the project groups at their schools and a one-day course on bullying for the whole staff. Furthermore, they acted as consultants when the schools needed advice in their work and they were encouraged to contact the CBR if they needed advice in their consultancy role. Although the agendas for the course and the

seminars were fixed, the instructors were allowed to make minor adaptations in order to meet local needs.

In the ABC programme in Ireland, the original selection intention was for each of the 20 Directors of the Education Centres (regional centres with the role of the professional development of teachers) to nominate a primary and a post-primary representative to be seconded on a full-time basis to the professional network. The Education Centre Directors and representatives of the primary teachers' union were active in helping to source potential voluntary members for the network. After a full consideration of the applicants' skills and credentials, 38 members were appointed to the professional network in June 2004, all of whom agreed to undergo the training and implementation of the programme on an absolutely voluntary basis.

The most central part of the training of the professional network members was their attendance at a four-day intensive residential summer school in August 2004, the principal focus of which was to equip the professional network members with a full and applicable working knowledge of skills and strategies that have been shown to be effective in the prevention and countering of bullying behaviour in schools. A follow-up meeting for the network was held in October 2004, where professional network members received the final version of their own training materials for use in programme delivery to the schools. There was also a distance education component to the training of the professional network. Sets of specifically written materials were sent out on two occasions in order to develop professional network members' knowledge of two theoretical areas pertinent to the work being undertaken: (1) the psychology of aggressive behaviour; and (2) the psychology of child and adolescent development. Undergoing such training rendered professional network members eligible on the successful completion of additional assessed written coursework, for the award of a postgraduate diploma in Education Studies (Aggression Studies) from Trinity College Dublin. Thirty-two professional network members completed the basic training (four of these were awarded the postgraduate diploma), and were then each scheduled to implement the ABC programme in four target schools within their local areas.

Strategies at the school level

The phrase 'strategies at school level' refers to the planned intervention and implementation support. Although the planned intervention and implementation support cannot guarantee a successful implementation, it is suggested that it is of importance (Greenberg et al. 2001). Research has shown that school leadership has a core role if schools are supposed to change (e.g. Day et al. 2000; Midthassel, Bru, and Idsøe 2000; Reeves, McCall, and MacGilchrist 2001; Youngs and King 2002; Hargreaves and Fink 2003; Kam, Greenberg, and Walls 2003; Larsen 2005). A successful implementation of anti-bullying programmes presupposes that the teachers have united understandings of bullying and what they will do when it occurs. The school leadership is crucial for building this united commitment (Midthassel and Ertesvåg 2008; Midthassel and Roland 2008). There is also evidence to show that implementation is dependent upon teachers' active participation in the programme (Midthassel and Bru 2001; Midthassel and Ertesvåg 2008), and that programmes with a broad aim need involvement beyond the teaching staff (Fullan 1992, 2001).

In the Norwegian Zero programme, the principals were supposed to sign an application for the programme saying the programme was requested from the

principal and the majority of staff. A project group consisting of representatives from staff, the students and the parents were established in the participating schools. The principal was expected to be part of the project group and, preferably, the leader of the group. This means that the principal was present at the seminars and the one-day course, and led the meetings in the project group through the year. The role of the principal was both as an administrator organizing the work to be done, and to follow up activities agreed upon, and being an advocate for the anti-bullying work. For example, in order to be more visible, all teachers in the Zero programme wore reflective vests during their supervision of the playground. The principal had to ensure (1) that the teachers understood why they were using the vests; (2) that the teachers actually wore their reflective vests when on duty; and (3) the teachers' commitment to follow the zero-acceptance line when they were on supervision duty. As part of the Zero programme, the schools had to develop an action plan against bullying involving all staff and they were supposed to follow a relatively time-consuming procedure to ensure such involvement. The principal's role was central in steering this process and in organizing the active use of the plan.

In Norway, every school has a students' council. This council received age-related material focusing on fostering a positive climate, and promoting the attitude of standing up for students who were being bullied. This material was supposed to be used in the council and in the classes. Additionally, the participating schools received material to use on three parents' evenings throughout the year, and were expected to have bullying as a subject in the regular meetings that the teachers had with each student and his or her parents twice a year.

In the ABC programme in Ireland, the role of each member of the professional network members was centred upon their undertaking training activities in four schools each. Essentially, in each participating school, they facilitated (1) a half to full day's whole-staff in-service training, and (2) an information evening for parents, community members and members of the Board of Management. Each of these sessions had the aim of disseminating the skills necessary to prevent and counter bullying behaviour amongst young people in school communities. The professional network members also acted as 'consultants' to their programme schools for the duration of the school year 2004–5. If situations of bullying behaviour emerged upon which the programme school principal wished to consult, the principal could telephone or e-mail the professional network member for guidance. In the case that the professional network member felt that a consultancy request exceeded their own bounds of competence, the situation was referred to the Anti-Bullying Centre at Trinity College Dublin.

Surveys are often used to measure the effect of an intervention or programme (Hanewinkel 2004; Midthassel and Bru 2001; Miller, Brehm, and Whitehouse 1998; O'Moore and Minton 2004b; Snyder and Hamilton 2002). However, research has shown that it might be difficult to consider when is the correct time to know if the effect is sustainable (Galloway and Roland 2004; Larsen 2005). Surveys may also be used as feedback and guides in a continuing effort to improve (Reynolds, Teddlie, and Stringfield 2000). Used in this way, survey data may act as monitor. Both programmes conducted surveys to measure the amount of bullying going on in the schools, where bullying took place and who the students would tell about the bullying before programme start. In both countries the schools involved received reports of their bullying at the start of the programme. These reports became important for the schools when they started their local work.

Both programmes conducted a second survey one year after the programme started and the schools received reports which made it possible for them to compare these results with the results before the start of the programme. This would indicate the effect of their efforts and point out the challenges for further work. Although both programmes conducted pre- and post-programme surveys, the questionnaires in use were not identical for the two countries. For example, whilst both the ABC and the Zero programmes focused on reactions by bystanders to situations of bullying, only the Irish researchers examined this beyond to whom the bystanders would report bullying.

Discussion

There are a certain number of broad and specific similarities that exist between the ABC and the Zero programmes, and therefore their simultaneous consideration and comparison in this context is, we would argue, justified. Most fundamental is a shared philosophy – both are whole-school programmes that are designed to be implemented through increasing staff and school competence, and that have aspirations towards diffusion on a nationwide basis. A further shared understanding is the careful use of surveys in the evaluation of their respective programmes. In the following text the different conditions for implementation in the two countries will be compared and discussed. Challenges concerning programme delivery, strategies at school level and in the national contexts will be brought up.

Strategies for programme delivery

In terms of operational parameters, and as presented in this paper, the ABC and Zero programmes work on a ‘train-the-trainer’ model, effectively disseminating expertise and resources from the competence centres to as broad a range of schools as possible through the activities of a trained professional network. It should be acknowledged that the make-up of the respective professional networks differed between the ABC and the Zero programmes. The Zero’s professional network members were a mixture of psychologists, researchers and school leaders; the ABC professional network was largely composed of teachers and teaching principals. Perhaps more importantly, the Zero programme’s professional network was contracted and salaried; the ABC programme’s was purely voluntary. It is beyond doubt that the possibility to contract and pay the professional network and to regulate their work as instructors was a great advantage in Norway. This regulation legitimated expectation to the work of the instructors and it communicated the value of their work. For both programmes training material was produced to ensure equal delivery to the schools.

The professional networks in both countries received training from a competence centre and could turn to the competence centre in difficult situations. However, the depth of the training was different, the Irish network members receiving the more extensive training. In a training-the-trainers strategy, there are at least two challenges: firstly, to ensure that the trainers receive enough competence to give them the authority needed to deliver the programme; and secondly, to ensure the trainers obtain programme fidelity. Building the network on experienced professionals as in the Norwegian Zero programme will presumably provide instructors with high competence on bullying and who are skilled in running seminars and

consulting. However, their experience might be a threat to programme fidelity. Based on the same reasoning, programme fidelity could be higher among teachers receiving a thorough training, as in the Irish network. In a Norwegian case study of teachers' implementation of the 'Second Step' programme, Larsen (2005) reported that the least experienced teachers had the higher programme fidelity. Whether this also could be the case for instructors in anti-bullying programme delivery needs to be investigated.

Strategies at the school level

Operationally, Zero had an overall tighter methodology than did the ABC programme. What is chiefly meant by this is the implementation of the Zero programme in the schools themselves was more stringently regulated, with considerable direct influence from the Zero project management structure. In the ABC programme, considerable freedom was given to the professional network to arrange things for themselves in consultation with the school management authorities. The ABC programme team can see the justification for the more structured approach adopted by the Zero programme team in ensuring that no dilution of the programme's content occurs in what is a necessarily decentralized implementation process. However, when strategies are planned, economical resources and contextual conditions need to be considered alongside research-based knowledge. Furthermore, familiarity with the complexity of the implementation process in schools, and the discrepancy between the planned intervention and the programme as implemented, shows that this is not an elementary matter (e.g. Fullan 2001; Greenberg et al. 2001; Knutsen 2006; Larsen 2005; Midthassel and Ertesvåg 2008). Within a less steered process, such as existed in the Irish ABC programme, one could imagine both advantages and disadvantages. The instructor planning the work together with the school management could result in higher ownership among staff. Too regulated programmes have proved to be a challenge to ownership (e.g. Stoll et al. 2001; Larsen 2005). On the other hand, too much adjustment can be a threat to research-based programmes (Reynolds 1998). Hence, the balance between programme fidelity and reasonable adjustments to make a programme work and to achieve a local ownership to the programme require further research.

National contexts

The most radical difference observed in comparing the respective experiences of the ABC and the Zero programme teams is apparent when considering context. For example, the then Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik's opening address to the OECD Conference on Bullying in School held in Stavanger in September 2004 included the following positive statements:

It is our duty to bring these matters into the open – to talk about them in public and in private – to identify the various types and faces of bullying, and to act on cases of bullying in every kind of environment. It is our responsibility as adults to impress on the next generation the need to expose bullying and to fight against it in all its various forms and shapes. (Bondevik 2004)

On the surface, the attitudes expressed by the Irish government would appear to be similar, if we consider a recent statement (March 2005) by the former Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin T.D.:

My Department considers the issue of bullying in schools as a priority for action and is fully supportive of any measures which address this issue. (Dáil Debates 2005)

However, one must measure the weight of these laudable-sounding sentiments against inactions on the part of the Irish government's Department of Education and Science (DES). Firstly, the Department of Education and Science has not introduced a nationwide anti-bullying programme, despite the availability of a successfully piloted and 'home-grown' programme (the Donegal Anti-Bullying Programme) for some seven years. Secondly, the Department of Education and Science was not forthcoming in their support of the 2004–5 implementation of the ABC programme. Thirdly, the legislative changes of 2000 in Ireland may be seen as having increased the onus on schools to solve the issue of bullying for themselves, rather than (as in the 2003 Norwegian changes in legislature) supporting the schools in doing so. Finally, and most critically, no nationwide action against bullying that would include the co-ordinated efforts of school staff, parents and students has been innovated by the Department of Education and Science for some 16 years, i.e. since the launch of the 1993 *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools*.

There is no doubt that the Norwegian authorities placed the anti-bullying work on the map and followed it up through financial support, actions and systems to monitor the work (Tikkanen and Junge 2004). With all the attention in media, the new law and the follow up from the Department of Education it became difficult for schools not to follow up. However, although the national context is viewed as influential, research has shown the difficulties in mandating change across levels (e.g. McLaughlin 1990; Sarason 1996; Cuban 1999; Walker 2004). Whilst external initiative, pressure and support can stimulate an implementation process focused on learning and improved systems, too much external pressure can result in schools applying for the programme without having the intention of investing the effort needed. For such schools participation may become an alibi for the anti-bullying work requested and therefore while they seem to participate in the programme, this is only true on the surface and the change needed for implementation to succeed will not come. It is a challenge for a professional network to identify such schools and to know how to confront them with this.

On the other hand, if there is a lack of initiatives and support from the authorities, as is the case in Ireland, much more effort is needed from the competence centre to reach the schools and for the schools to see the relevance of anti-bullying work. For the competence centre this might be perceived as a devaluation of their work, and they may give up running the programme. However, when schools, despite the lack of central support and pressure, choose to participate in the programme, their motivation might be strong.

Closing note

The purpose of this paper was to compare conditions for implementation of the Irish ABC programme and the Norwegian Zero programme against bullying. We concentrated on three conditions for implementation: national contexts, delivery strategies and strategies at school level. As shown in this paper there were considerable differences in the national contexts, with the Norwegian authority taking more initiative towards anti-bullying work. Concerning delivery strategies, there were both similarities and differences. This has revealed new research questions

relevant for comparative studies – one example being concerning the instructors' competence and their consequent programme fidelity, and how support is carried out towards the schools. Moreover, this paper has exposed the need for more in-depth comparative studies of the strategies at the school level and their influence on implementation: for example, the role of motivation of the principal and staff in the implementation of the programmes, the degree to which the principal and staff have the autonomy to make adjustments to the programme and how trainers' individual characteristics and commitment to the programme influence programme delivery. A conclusion to be drawn from this comparative work is that in order to stimulate implementation of anti-bullying programmes in schools, the national authorities can have a promoting role through their focus, legislation and resource allocation. However, conditions for implementation also include the delivery process and strategies for implementation at the school level. These matters are complex, and more research is needed in order to illuminate their roles.

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