

# Preface

## *Rationale for Writing This Book*

**W**hen I first started to examine the idea of bullying in schools, I started by looking in schools. I was sitting in one of the monthly principal meetings, barely paying attention. Two of the board presenters were giving a full-day “death by PowerPoint” presentation, and all I was really thinking about was what type of muffins would be served at break. The presentation was not in itself memorable, nor was it what started me really looking at bullying. What was memorable was one of the statistics that was mentioned in passing.

The presenters talked about a study by Rona Atlas, from York University; Debra Craig, who was also working out of York University; and Wendy Pepler from Queen’s University conducted in the late 1990s. Atlas, Craig, and Pepler undertook a qualitative examination of bullying in schools. They used naturalist observations to examine peer intervention in schoolyard bullying episodes. Starting with student-completed questionnaires and following up with longitudinal observations of the subjects, their observations originally focused on peer interventions and the potential role of gender differences. What they discovered through their observations with regard to educator intervention is what really caught my attention. Their observations indicated that teachers only intervened in 14 percent of classroom bullying episodes and 4 percent of playground episodes. To me this was mind-blowing.

I wasn’t overly surprised by the data they collected about the playground. Bullying is very much an insidious thing that exists in hidden corners, and on most schoolyards there are many hidden corners. It was the data regarding classrooms that offended my sensibilities. My mind began to race back and go over my days in the classroom. Was it possible that I missed what was going on right in front of me? I immediately convinced myself that if they had been watching my classes, their data would

have been different. I began to make up the story of how horrible and incompetent the teacher being observed must have been. That was it: they must have picked a horrible teacher to observe. I couldn't reconcile the idea that bullying would take place in my classroom with my students, the students whom I knew inside and out. While one part of my brain tried to console my conscience, the other part was asking how I could be oblivious to bullying happening right in my own classroom. The figure 14 percent seemed ludicrously impossible. It was my shock at the statistics that jarred me into really thinking about bullying and, specifically, the role that I played as a teacher.

I started off still wanting to disprove the research and questioning how it could be right. I began thinking back over all the classes that I had taught and wondering what the researchers would have found if they had been observing me. I wondered if the researchers had overreacted to incidents that were not really bullying. My questions sprang from my doubts, but as I dug into the research, I soon found that the methodology was sound. Craig, Pepler, and Atlas (2000) had a good-size sample group: 616, 762, and 535, respectively, in each of the three years of the study in two different schools with students in a variety of ages ranging from 6 to 12. They had 125 hours of playground observation and audio/visual recordings of all of the interactions. They also had a three-stage system to identify bullying acts. Their research was sound, but the teacher in me desperately wanted it to be wrong. However, the more I probed, the more I found that it wasn't.

As I Googled my way through the Internet, I quickly found that I was not the only person to look at educator or teacher intervention in bullying episodes. Study after study kept taking me back to the same place. Studies of Toronto schools found that a bullying act occurs every seven seconds but teachers were only aware of 4 percent of the incidents (Craig et al., 2000). Each time I read a statistic, I put myself in the place of the teacher being observed and really struggled with the idea that I missed things. I knew that I would never intentionally let a student in my class be bullied. I knew that my friends and colleagues would not deliberately ignore a student being mistreated. The disconnect between knowing that educators genuinely care about the students in their classes and yet are so unaware of things that are occurring in their classrooms and the school at large became the starting point for my own foray into educational research. As I examined the idea of educational professionals as bystanders in bullying episodes, I worked in conjunction with Charles Sturt University in Australia and the Bluewater District School Board in Ontario, Canada.

My research brought me to the same end point all the other researchers had arrived at. I confirmed for myself that, as educators, we are still woefully unaware of the interactions among our students (see Resource A for my 2008 article presenting this research and Resource B for the survey instrument I used). What I didn't discover was an understanding of why, a real understanding of why the data said one thing while I could not imagine a teacher ignoring a student in need or a student being mistreated. I was left with this question: How can caring adults, dedicated to children and young people, not see what is right in front of them? This book is my attempt to unravel this question.

## **THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF THE BOOK**

This book is designed to provide administrators with an explanation and understanding of the bystander effect through the use of narrative and research data. I have gone beyond the field of education to draw ideas from the social sciences. The narratives are either personal anecdotes or recountings of social science research or studies that illustrate the larger context of bystanderism.

The content of the book is a balance between the “broad brush” of theory with applicable hands-on activities, the latter included at the end of each chapter. The activities are designed to help administrators introduce the action items during their staff meetings or divisional meetings and include warm-up, main, exit, extension, and follow-up activities. The activities are created with the purpose of removing the attitudinal and structural barriers that cause educational professionals to be bystanders rather than interveners. They are written to reflect good pedagogical practice and incorporate a variety of teaching styles and group activities.

The warm-up section of each activity is designed to start conversations among staff members by having them either complete part of a survey or engage in a focused discussion. The main activities are generally more interactive and use different group work techniques. The exit activities are reflective and allow individuals to think deeply about what they have learned and how they will change their practice. The follow-up activities are designed to be used by a small group of educational professionals who would be responsible for reviewing the exit activity information. Ideally, each school would create a “safe schools team” with representatives from all stakeholders in the school to use the follow-up activities effectively. A Safe Schools Team, along the lines of those used in Ontario, is the ideal, as it helps to diffuse responsibility for bullying

prevention from being exclusively that of the school administrators to a shared responsibility of all staff members.

## **THE APPROACH OF THE BOOK**

The book is designed to be used in one of two ways, depending on the needs of the reader.

1. It can be read sequentially in the traditional cover-to-cover manner.
2. Since no two schools or readers are at the same point, readers can also use the “pulse check” at the end of the introduction to allow them to differentiate their reading based on their own needs. The questions in the pulse check will allow the reader to jump to the section that targets the weaknesses on which they want to focus.

While the book is a cohesive unit and each idea and activity links to the whole in a sequential manner, it is also written in a way to allow each chapter to stand alone or to be used in a nonsequential manner if doing so better suits the needs of the reader.

As you read this book, you will be guided by a Continuum to Action. This Continuum to Action will guide your learning through three phases:

1. Pre-bystanderism
2. Decision making
3. Post-bystanderism

The three phases of the Continuum to Action, which are subdivided into seven key elements, provide the framework for this book.

## **SPECIAL FEATURES**

This book contains many different special features, which are woven into each chapter. The special features are designed to be catalysts for thinking, discussion, and—most importantly—action.

### **Pulse Check in the Introduction**

The purpose of the “pulse check” is to allow readers to differentiate the text to meet their particular needs. The book is designed to follow the

continuum sequentially; however, each section can be used in a stand-alone manner to target the immediate learning need of the reader.

### **Action Items**

The purpose of the action items is to allow readers to engage their learning in action through a preplanned and scripted activity. The action items are designed to model good teaching pedagogy to allow school administrators to use them, as is, during a staff meeting as a learning activity for the entire staff. Each action section includes a warm-up activity, the main activity with extensions and variations, an exit activity, and follow-up actions. They incorporate good teaching strategies with different elements of group work to help facilitate peer-to-peer learning and ownership of the understandings. While the activities need to be coordinated, presumably by the school administrator, they are not “lessons” to be delivered. Rather, they are opportunities to facilitate discussions to improve the understanding of everyone. Again each part of the action item can stand alone to accommodate the time constraints of busy school life. Following are the action items:

- Fact or Myth?
- Identify Hot Spots
- Dotmocracy
- Math, Math, and Even More Math
- Super Supervision
- A Common Language
- Character Counts
- Communication 101

### **Reflection Points and Guiding Questions in Each Chapter**

The reflection points and guiding questions throughout the chapters are designed to provoke the readers’ thinking and personal reflections as to their own roles in the bystander cycle. These points can also be used as guiding questions and discussion points for small groups or a book study group.

### **Case Studies**

Case studies at the end of every chapter are designed to provoke self-reflection and discussion. They vary in length and depth of detail and at times purposely use stereotypical description of people or scenarios. The students/adults/situations in the case studies are composites of

several different students/adults/situations, and all of the names have been changed. The purpose of the case studies is to help educational professionals think through scenarios so that when they encounter them in reality, they have prethought their actions.

This book is unlike the myriad of other books on bullying because it focuses on an important paradigm shift. Through reading the theories and research, the case studies and narratives, you will begin to shift your thinking about how to address bullying from focusing exclusively on the students in your school to include an intentional, purposeful, and transparent focus on educational professionals. This book will help you

- develop a deeper understanding of the elements of bystanderism in educational professionals through framing the ideas in the larger realm of social sciences.
- provide you with tangible actions that are designed to address the seven stages of the bystander decision-making cycle for schools. Each chapter focuses on different aspects of bystanderism and ends with an action activity.
- broaden your thinking through case studies and self-reflection prompts included in every chapter.

It is important to note that this book is not a panacea and that there is no “one size fits all” answer when it comes to bullying and bystanderism. The self-reflections, the case studies, and the activities do not come with an answer key because there is no “correct” answer. More important than the answer is the thinking. The self-reflections are designed to provoke some self-analysis and conversations among the educational professionals in each school.