Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment: Evidence & Impact

Edited By

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Chapter Four

Student Peer Bullying in Christian Schools

Is There a Difference?

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Abstract

Student peer bullying is acknowledged as a significant issue in schools, with data indicating both its prevalence and its negative impact on student outcomes. However, less is known about the prevalence of bullying in Christian schools and how this compares to the level in the general school population. In this study, data was collected from seven schools, one of which was an independent Christian school, in an urban region of Australia. The results indicate that self-reported victimisation in the Christian school (in the moderate and severe range) was higher than the average across the seven schools (22.03% vs 18.3%). Likewise, rates of self-reported bullying perpetration were higher in the Christian school compared with the overall average (10.2% vs 3.1%). Possible factors for Christian schools to consider are discussed, including faith engagement, student voice, school climate, and opportunities for service. It is acknowledged that the sample size is small and that further research needs to be undertaken to better understand the phenomenon of student peer bullying in Christian schools.

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Introduction

When considering the attention that bullying now attracts, it may be tempting to consider it a relatively new phenomenon. Yet, despite the public stage it now occupies, its existence dates back as far as the record of human history. Archilochus, a Greek poet from the seventh century BC, reacted very poorly when Lycambes refused him marriage to his daughter Neobule, launching a barrage of strident poetic attacks against the morality and reputation of the family. His vitriol resulted in the suicides of Lycambes and both his daughters, who preferred death rather than enduring the ignominy of his continued scorn (Clack, 2001).

In more recent times, the issue of bullying within the school context gained a certain notoriety as a result of the nineteenth-century classic, Tom Brown's School Days, in which the bully Flashman makes life miserable for young Tom and his friend Harry East (Hughes, 1857). In general, however, the term "bullying" was rarely mentioned in the nineteenth century, despite many aspects of its nature being described in a variety of ways within the literature. At this time, bullying behaviour was seen as a private matter, in that it was primarily viewed as something that happened between two individuals (Koo, 2007).

Despite its negative portrayal in various forms of media since this time, bullying for many years was widely considered to fall within the range of typical childhood experiences, viewed (in some respects) as a rite of passage that all children must survive as they progress toward adulthood (Carter & Spencer, 2006). Formal research into the phenomenon of student peer bullying did not begin until the early 1970s, when the Norwegian Dan Olweus began his landmark series of studies (Olweus, 1993). Initially, Olweus used the term "mobbing" (borrowed from animal behaviour) to describe what was observed in the playground. At that point in time, this was predominately seen as an action taken by a group when an individual disturbed its activities and was perceived as being largely random. As time passed, researchers came to realise that bullying could take a variety of forms be perpetrated by either an individual or a group and sustained against those who were usually powerless to defend themselves (Kumpulainen et al., 1999).

Olweus' work gained momentum following a 1982 newspaper report revealing that three young boys (aged between 10 and 14 years) from Norway had taken their own lives due to severe and ongoing bullying (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). The national interest thus engendered led to a study involving 140,000 students from 715 Norwegian schools, and from this was launched the first major intervention project (Olweus, 1993).

Several years would pass, however, before educators in other countries began to investigate the prevalence of bullying within their schools (Rigby, 2003). Not until the 1990s were research projects into student peer bullying widely replicated, including a number of significant studies within Australia (Rigby & Slee, 1993). It became widely accepted that bullying was prevalent in all schools, that it was injurious to health and to academic progress and that actions taken by schools and parents could significantly reduce its prevalence (Rigby, 2000).

Defining Bullying

While bullying has no universally accepted definition (Slattery et al., 2019), at its core is a systematic abuse of power (Flynt & Morton, 2008; Rigby, 2019) that manifests itself through acts repeatedly carried out to harm another individual (Horton, 2019; Sullivan, 2000). Traditionally, this power was perceived as being obtained through physical means, but it is now widely recognised that personal power may stem from a variety of sources, including psychological or social influence (Horton, 2019; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003).

Important in defining bullying is evidence of a power imbalance (Nansel et al., 2001; Rigby, 2019) that results in the victim being less able than others within their peer group to defend or protect themselves. Conflict involving people of similar levels of power is not generally considered to fit within the definition of bullying behaviour, even when aggression and violence are used (Rigby, 2019; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Thus, bullying can be viewed as a subset of aggressive behaviour in which repetition and an imbalance of power are key facets (Burger et al., 2015; Olweus, 1999).

The majority of researchers hold that negative actions must be performed repeatedly to be considered bullying (for example:

Bradshaw et al., 2017; Burger et al., 2015; Rigby, 2019). Others, however, argue that there are times when critical one-off incidents should be considered bullying, particularly when the effects are sufficiently serious to have a long-term impact on the victim (Arora, 1996; Hellström et al., 2015; Langevin, 2010). Even in situations in which it is considered that actions do not constitute bullying, it remains important to acknowledge the potential devastation of individual events. Teens and adults have described one-time instances of humiliation that have altered the ways they felt, thought, and acted thereafter (Langevin, 2010).

Despite the variety of views and variations within definitions, most researchers would agree that, in order to be categorised as bullying, actions will be characterised by the following (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 2001; Rigby, 2019):

1. They are harmful or done with intent to harm;
2. They are typically repeated or occur over time; and
3. They are characterised by an imbalance of power, such that the victim does not feel they can stop the interaction.

This was the definition employed for the current project.

The Impact of Bullying

Over the past 20 years, substantial evidence has accumulated to confirm that children who are bullied suffer significant increases in a wide range of physical and psychosocial health problems. With regard to physical symptoms, the literature indicates that victimised children are much more likely to suffer sleeping problems, bed wetting, headaches, stomach aches, irritability, nervousness, and dizziness (Arslan et al., 2012; Due et al., 2005; Forero et al., 1999; Lien et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2006). Evidence of the effects of bullying on mental health is equally compelling, with victimisation being associated with a significant increase in reported depression, suicide ideation, and self-harming actions (Arslan et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2005; Zaborskis et al., 2019).

Of additional concern is evidence within the literature of the impact of bullying on children who experience it often and over a substantial period of time. Evidence suggests that between 5% and

10% of children are bullied frequently and on an ongoing basis (Cross et al., 2009; Perry et al., 1988; Petrie, 2014; Rigby, 2020) and, thus, are at most risk (Alink et al., 2012; Eyuboglu et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2000). It is important to note that this negative impact is consistent for both traditional and electronic forms of bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Waasdorp et al., 2019; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

A finding common to many studies is that the negative effects of bullying, including higher rates of depression (Lund et al., 2009; Sigurdson et al., 2015) and increased difficulty in forming and maintaining intimate relationships (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; deLara, 2019; Duncan, 1999; Olweus, 1993; Schäfer et al., 2004), continue well into adulthood (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016; Ttofi et al., 2016).

The Prevalence of Student Peer Bullying in Schools

Bullying rates vary widely across studies, "partially due to differences in measurement and/or operationalisation of the bullying context" (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017, p. 242). It has been demonstrated, however, that even when the instruments and methodology used are identical, prevalence can vary greatly between communities. An international comparative study, for example, surveyed 40 countries of Europe and North America (Craig et al., 2009) and found wide variation in reported involvement (as bully, victim, or both, in the previous two months): from a low of 6.7% in Sweden to a high of 40.5% in Lithuania. The overall averages across the 40 countries were 23.4% for boys and 15.8% for girls. Countries that reported bullying involvement within this range included the USA, Canada, France, Israel, and Switzerland. A recent meta-analysis by Biswas et al. (2020) found a similarly wide range, with bullying victimisation ranging from a low of 8.4% in Scandinavian countries to a high of 43.5% in Eastern Mediterranean countries.

Even when comparing prevalence rates within a single country, reported rates of bullying and victimisation can vary greatly. Victimisation rates within Australian studies, for example, vary from one third for all forms of bullying(for example: Cross et al., 2009; Petrie, 2014) to two-thirds purely within the area of relational bullying (Hemphill et al., 2012). A systematic review and analysis of studies conducted in Australia (Jadambaa et al., 2019) asking children to

recall any period of bullying during their schooling to date, reported average victimisation rates across all studies of 25.1% for traditional bullying and 7% for cyberbullying. Perpetration rates were 11.6% and 3.45% for traditional bullying and cyberbullying, respectively. It is important to acknowledge the strong overlap between those bullied at school in the traditional manner and those who are cyberbullied (Zaborskis et al., 2019).

Student Peer Bullying in Christian Schools

Christian education is viewed as a Christ-centred approach to learning, teaching, and scholarship (Cosgrove, 2015). By definition, it is intended to provide an opportunity for the holistic development of physical, mental, and spiritual strengths in preparation for both this life and the life to come (White, 1952). Students should be able to see a link between Christ and their school work and a practical and tangible connection between Christ and their daily lives (Roso, 2018).

Christian schools have thus typically demonstrated a strong commitment to values education, the development of personal character, and the fostering of caring communities (Hazeltine & Hernandez, 2015). This leads to a tacit assumption that such education will provide a protective barrier against the development of bullying in Christian schools and that evidence would be found for less student peer bullying within this context (Hazeltine & Hernandez, 2015). Christian schools would view this as important evidence that Jesus was successfully being revealed within their learning environment.

A US study by Hazeltine and Hernandez (2015) found that there was no significant relationship between the number of years in a Christian school and the prevalence of "being bullied." Overall, 61% of elementary students, 55% of middle school students, and 44% of high school students reported having been bullied in the previous two months. An earlier study of public schools from the same urban area and using the same instrument found that 38% of students (averaged across all levels) reported having been bullied in the previous two months (Cardoso, 2007). Thus, self-reported bullying rates were found to be higher at the Christian school than at public schools in the same urban district.

The unique finding from the study by Hazeltine and Hernandez was that bullying in the Christian school was more likely than bullying in other schools in the area to take less physically aggressive forms (Hazeltine & Hernandez, 2015, p. 84). There is, however, a dearth of studies investigating bullying within Christian schools; the current research seeks to add to understanding in this area.

The Current Project

The current project collected data relating to bullying prevalence from seven schools within a large Australian urban area; one of the schools was a Christian school comparable in size to the others surveyed.

The student self-report survey for the current study was designed for completion by students of grades five and six in a regular classroom setting as part of the normal school day. The first six survey questions related to bullying experiences, gathering information on involvement (as both victim and perpetrator) in various types of bullying. Prevalence data were collected within five key victimisation categories: physical victimisation, verbal victimisation, social manipulation, attacks on property, and electronic victimisation (cyberbullying). The remaining questions covered aspects such as the places where bullying occurred and the strategies that victims employed.

The survey asked respondents to recall experiences related to bullying from the previous two months and to rate its occurrence on a scale, as follows: “hasn’t happened,” “once or twice,” “2–3 times a month,” “most weeks,” or “most days.”

Sample Selection and Sample Size

Following ethics approval, all public schools and a Christian school within a particular district were invited to participate. Seven schools were included in the study: six public schools and one Christian school. Active consent was sought, and the researcher personally conducted the data collection at each school using paper and pencil.

Surveys were collected from 410 students. Of these, 11 were discarded due to issues with completion validity, leaving 399 valid results. Prior to analysis, the data were checked, screened, and coded for analysis within SPSS. Of the 399 valid responses, 194 (48.3%)

were from male students, 196 (48.8%) were from female students, and 9 (2.2%) lacked information related to gender. With regard to the level of schooling, 168 respondents (41.8%) were in grade five, and 212 (52.7%) were in grade six; 19 surveys (4.7%) lacked this information.

Determining Bullying Intensity

Researchers employing bullying and victimisation self-report scales have utilised a variety of methods to determine the number of students within different categories. For example, Olweus & Solberg (2003) regarded as victims or bullies those students who endorsed the response "2–3 times per month" on more than two global items; other researchers included as bullies or victims those who answered "2–3 times a month" on at least one global item (Chen et al., 2012); and some simply aggregated the scores from each scale, with higher totals indicating more frequent or serious bullying (Chen et al., 2012).

The current study adopted the following method to establish cumulative cut-off points at which to classify self-reported victimisation as low level, moderate or severe. The response categories were assigned numerical values: "once or twice" = 1, "2–3 times a month" = 2, "most weeks" = 3 and "most days" = 4. Students selected responses within five bullying categories: verbal, social, physical, property damage, and cyberbullying. The scores for each section were added together to form a cumulative total for each student. (In addition to these five categories, the survey included an introductory question asking students to rate the amount of bullying overall.) A cumulative score of 4 to 6 was considered to indicate low-level victimisation. A score of between 7 and 9, i.e. students reported having been bullied in most weeks and in more than one context, was considered to signify moderate victimisation. A score of 10 or above, i.e. students reported being bullied on most days and within more than one context, was classed as representing severe bullying. This is in accord with the practice of a number of previous studies (for example: Chen et al., 2012; Petrie, 2014) in which students had to endorse at least one global item representing personal involvement of at least 2 to 3 times per month for actions to be considered bullying.

Results: General

Analysis of student self-report data revealed that 38.4% of the participating children (n = 399) reported having been bullied in the previous two months (cumulative score >3). Boys were slightly over-represented: 39.7% of boys reported being victimised, compared with 36.7% of girls. Analysis by grade shows that 41.1% of grade 5 children and 35.4% of grade 6 children reported having been bullied.

Analysis of the severity of the reported victimisation (Table 4.1) demonstrates that 20% of the participants reported low-level victimisation in the previous two months (cumulative score: 4–6), 10.5% reported moderate victimisation (cumulative score: 7–9), and 7.8% reported severe victimisation (cumulative score: 10 or above).

Table 4.1 Being Bullied: Data Across Seven Schools

School Number	Sample Size	Low-Level Bullying	Moderate Bullying	Severe Bullying	Total
1	42	19.05%	9.52%	14.29%	**42.86%**
2	55	14.55%	7.27%	7.27%	**29.09%**
3	41	14.63%	4.88%	7.32%	**26.83%**
4	49	36.73%	10.20%	8.16%	**55.10%**
5	44	20.45%	11.36%	9.09%	**40.91%**
6	109	16.51%	11.93%	9.09%	**40.91%**
7	59	22.03%	15.25%	6.78%	**44.07%**
Overall % across seven schools		**20.05%**	**10.53%**	**7.7%**	**38.35%**

Bullying Others

The data indicates that 10.3% of the participating children (n = 399) self-reported having bullied others during the previous two months. Boys were again over-represented, with 12.4% of boys reporting victimising others, compared with 8.7% of girls. By grade level, 11.9% of grade 5 children and 9.4% of grade 6 children reported bullying others.

Analysis of how the participants reported the severity of their bullying of others (Table 4.2) shows that 7.3% reported carrying out low-level bullying of others in the previous two months (cumulative score: 4–6), 2.3% reported committing bullying of moderate levels (cumulative score: 7–9) and 0.8% reported being involved in severe bullying (cumulative score: 10 or above).

Table 4.2 Bullying Others: Data Across Seven Schools

School Number	Sample Size	Low-Level Bullying	Moderate Bullying	Severe Bullying	Total
1	42	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	**4.8%**
2	55	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	**0.0%**
3	41	7.3%	0.0%	0.0%	**7.3%**
4	49	10.2%	2.0%	0.0%	**12.2%**
5	44	6.8%	0.0%	2.3%	**9.1%**
6	109	7.3%	3.7%	0.0%	**11.0%**
7	59	13.6%	6.8%	3.4%	**23.7%**
Overall % across seven schools		**7.3%**	**2.3%**	**0.8%**	**10.3%**

Types of Bullying

Students who were bullied usually reported experiencing more than one form of bullying behaviour. The mode reported most frequently in the current study was verbal bullying, followed by social bullying, physical bullying, damage to property and, lastly, cyberbullying (Table 4.3). Despite a focus in the media on cyberbullying, multiple studies have indicated that it is less frequent than traditional school bullying (for example: Jadambaa et al., 2019; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Rigby, 2020). In addition, there is strong evidence that most of those involved in cyberbullying are also involved in traditional school bullying (for example: Ybarra et al., 2007; Zaborskis et al., 2019).

Table 4.3 Comparative Frequency of Types of Bullying as a Percentage of School Population

School Number	Sample Size	Verbal	Physical	Social	Property	Cyber-bullying
1	42	64.3%	38.1%	47.6%	26.2%	14.3%
2	55	47.3%	30.9%	29.1%	14.5%	18.2%
3	41	43.9%	26.8%	36.6%	31.7%	14.6%
4	49	79.6%	32.7%	59.2%	26.5%	24.5%
5	44	45.5%	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	29.5%
6	109	58.7%	32.1%	35.8%	28.4%	20.2%
7	59	61.0%	25.4%	37.3%	18.6%	10.2%
Average		**57.6%**	**31.6%**	**39.3%**	**24.8%**	18.8%

Location of and Response to Bullying Behaviour

Students were able to give multiple responses to report where bullying most commonly occurred at their schools. The place reported as the most common location for bullying was the playground (67.4%), followed by the classroom (36.6%), the lunch area (27.3%), and the toilets (18.5%).

The most common responses to being bullied reported by students were: telling parents (32.8%), telling a teacher (30.1%), standing up for themselves (30.1%), walking away (26.3%), ignoring it (26.6%), telling a friend (25.1%), and getting back at the bully (8.8%).

Bullying Frequency: Faith-Based School

Within the data reported above, the Christian school is School 7. The data indicates that the percentage of students bullied in the previous two months was higher in this school than the average across the seven schools (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Self-reported Peer Bullying Experienced: Christian School

School Number	Sample Size	Low-Level Bullying	Moderate Bullying	Severe Bullying	Total
School 7	59	22.03%	15.25%	6.78%	**44.07%**
Average % across seven schools		**20.05%**	**10.53%**	**7.77%**	**38.35%**

Likewise, data on the bullying of others demonstrated self-reported rates of bullying perpetration higher than the average across all seven schools (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Self-reported Peer Bullying Perpetration: Christian School

School Number	Sample Size	Low-Level Bullying	Moderate Bullying	Severe Bullying	Total
School 7	59	13.6%	6.8%	3.4%	**23.7%**
Overall % across seven schools		**7.3%**	**2.3%**	**0.8%**	**10.3%**

While the percentages of students at the Christian school reporting low-level and severe bullying were similar to the averages across the seven schools (Table 4.4), the percentage of students at that school reporting moderate bullying was significantly higher than the average (15.25% vs 10.53%). The difference was even more marked with regards to bullying perpetration (Table 4.5), with students in the faith-based school reporting significantly higher levels in every category.

Discussion

Within the current study, participants reported victimisation rates of 38.4%; this being on the higher end of the scale of reported victimisation in Australia (for example: Jadambaa et al., 2019; Petrie, 2014; Rigby, 2020; Shaw & Cross, 2012). In terms of the proportion of children reporting victimisation in the moderate-to-severe range, the 18.3% found in the current study compares quite closely to the

findings of Shaw and Cross (2012) and (Petrie, 2014), but is higher than those of (Jadambaa et al., 2019) and (Rigby & Johnson, 2016). It is important to note that students who are victimised on a regular basis are at particular risk of negative psychosocial and physical health effects. In addition, there is evidence that the damage caused to those who experience long-term bullying (i.e. over many years) may last into adulthood (deLara, 2019; Sigurdson et al., 2015; Ttofi et al., 2016). Effective identification of, intervention with, and monitoring of students who are frequently victimised is thus of particular importance.

Perpetrator rates of around 8%–10% have been reported across a number of studies and fall within the average range of self-reported perpetration (for example: Chen et al., 2012; Langevin, 2010; Parada et al., 2003; Petrie, 2014). It is important for schools to be aware of the heterogeneity of the perpetrators of student peer bullying. There are significant differences, for example, in their social status at school: they range from the most unpopular to the most popular (Lansu & Cillessen, 2012; Malamut et al., 2020). It is thus important for schools to recognise that no single "bully" profile exists and that it is easy to misidentify the potential source (and extent) of bullying.

In the current research, as in a number of other studies (for example: Cross et al., 2011; Eyuboglu et al., 2021; Jadambaa et al., 2019; Pepler et al., 2008), boys reported greater regular involvement in bullying as both victims and perpetrators. In general, boys display lower empathy levels than girls (Spataro et al., 2020; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006) and thus may not view their aggressive actions as negatively as girls view their own. This perhaps may result in boys being more willing to participate honestly in a survey of this nature, even with regard to their own aggressive behaviour.

Bullying in a Faith-Based School

It is acknowledged that a single school and 59 participants do not provide an adequate sample size from which to generalise the findings of this study beyond the immediate context. It is interesting to note, however, the similarities with the findings of Hazeltine and Hernandez (2015), reported earlier in the chapter. In line with that research, this study indicates that self-reported student bullying in the faith-based school is higher than such bullying in public schools within the same

urban area. The current study also found that the level of physical bullying was lower in the Christian school than in the other schools (25.4%, compared to an average of 32.8% for the other six schools). A similar finding was identified for cyberbullying: 10.2% of students in the Christian school reported online bullying, compared with 20.2% in the other six schools. Perhaps students in faith-based schools are conscious of the negative implications of physical bullying and resort to other approaches.

While an obvious reason for the relatively high levels of bullying at the Christian school did not emerge from this study, the findings suggest that being a Christian school, promoting religious practice, and espousing values education may not implicitly provide a protective barrier against student peer bullying. A number of questions that may be worth exploring arise as we consider the need for further research in this area:

1. Do students in Christian schools have increased sensitivity towards behaviour perceived as aggressive and thus report as "bullying" behaviour that students in other schools may not?
2. Do Christian schools make incorrect assumptions about the impact of their faith basis, leading to less intentionality in how values are reinforced and intervention programs viewed?
3. What approach do Christian schools take to regularly measuring and monitoring the prevalence of student peer bullying and responding in intentional ways?
4. Are there bullying correlates specific to faith-based schools that have yet to be identified?
5. To what extent do Christian schools measure the engagement of students in faith activities and intentionally design strategies to provide greater and more meaningful engagement?
6. Is there evidence that increased engagement in faith activities results in practical changes to student behaviour?

It is important for Christian schools to avoid incorrect assumptions about the extent and nature of student peer bullying within their context. There is a need for intentionality in measuring the prevalence of this phenomenon, developing an awareness of its impact, and

identifying research-based approaches to dealing with it. While an emphasis on Christian values and practices may have a perceived positive effect, this should not prevent the use of targeted strategies that have been demonstrated to positively impact both the prevalence and the intensity of bullying behaviour. A comprehensive review of these approaches and strategies is beyond the scope of this chapter; however, the following paragraphs provide a useful starting point for schools to consider.

Engagement in a Personal Faith Journey

In recent decades, there has been growing interest in a body of work examining the impact of faith-based connections within various contexts. This impact is referred to by some as "religious affect" (Village et al., 2011) and is found to be positively correlated with variables such as altruism, empathy, psychological health (Michaelson et al., 2019; Village et al., 2011), and academic achievement (Yeshanew et al., 2008). To what extent, then, do the religious practices within a Christian school have a discernible impact on student behaviour? What is the religious effect of a Christian school on the students who attend? What is most likely to contribute to a student choosing to engage with a personal faith journey?

A recent study by Petrie et al. (2019a) examined qualitative data from 388 students in years 5 to 12 at a rural Christian school in Australia. The aim was to examine factors identified by students as contributing to the positive development of their faith. Two significant considerations emerged: the importance of positive student–teacher relationships (including the personal interest that teachers took in their students) and "student voice."

The impact of positive student–teacher relationships in facilitating faith development has received substantial attention in the literature. Horan (2017), for example, reported on a mixed-methods study involving 504 secondary educators and their perceptions of spiritual formation. One of the key findings concerned the importance of relationships, with the author concluding that "educators must develop personal, one-on-one relationships with millennials as role models and mentors" and that "one-on-one rapport, mutual respect, and relationship building between educators and teenagers is essential to spiritual growth and will have 'immeasurable effects'" (Horan,

2017, p. 66). Other authors concur. "Meaningful teacher–student relationships play a significant role in student engagement" (Coria-Navia et al., 2017) and add legitimacy when sharing spiritual truths (Hoekstra, 2012).

In considering this important connection, we must note the close association between students' perceptions of fair discipline practices and positive student–teacher relationships (Boogren, 2015; Marzano, 2003; Wang et al., 2010; Wang & Kuo, 2019). For example, it has been shown that, where the structure for rules and rewards is unclear and the consequences for misbehaviour are ambiguous, students' views of their relationships with teachers are more negative, and higher levels of disorder are reported (Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Wang & Kuo, 2019).

School Climate

It is useful to note that the impact of positive student–teacher relationships reaches well beyond faith development. It is, in fact, one of the key dimensions identified within school climate research (Petrie et al., 2019b; Zullig et al., 2015). Differences exist in the ways school climate is defined – it is usually viewed as the combined subjective experiences reported by students and includes aspects such as relationships, sense of safety, connectedness to school, and academic support (Zullig et al., 2015). This distinctive school character will exhibit itself as a set of shared values and attitudes that determine what is considered acceptable in a particular context (Thapa et al., 2013).

Importantly, links have been found between school climate and a wide range of significant outcomes for students, including academic achievement (Berkowitz et al., 2016; Daily et al., 2019), learning motivation (Marsh et al., 2008), school attendance, and avoidance (Brand et al., 2003; Sakız, 2017), self-esteem and depressive symptoms (Way et al., 2007), school satisfaction (Zullig et al., 2018), and behavioural problems (Petrie, 2014; Tomczyk et al., 2015). Multiple studies have indicated a significant relationship between school climate and the prevalence of student peer bullying (for example: Chiaki et al., 2017; Espelage et al., 2019; Klein et al., 2012; Petrie, 2014; Teng et al., 2020).

Thus, the development and maintenance of a positive school climate is an important factor to consider when addressing student peer bullying. It has the potential to impact all areas of a school's operation, with student behaviour one of many important outcomes.

Student Voice

When considering the topic of school climate, it is useful to note the importance of student voice and the significant impact that initiatives in this area play in developing a positive climate (Fleming, 2017; Lewis & Burman, 2008; Quinn & Owen, 2016). Such initiatives include an openness by school staff to listen to alternative points of view and the opportunity for students to contribute in a meaningful way to decisions and discussions.

The importance of student voice with regard to faith development is also clearly identified within the literature. Wolfe (2018a), for example, reported on data collected from 10 faith-based schools via student focus groups. He concluded that the Christian ethos of a school is created through the interaction of all participants within the school community and that students need an effective voice within this process:

> These young people are active agents, they make an essential contribution to the nature of the ethos. This shows that the Christian ethos of a school cannot be imposed: it is dependent on the contribution of all members of the school community. (Wolfe, 2018a, p. 176)

For students, having a voice helps to provide relevancy to the learning process (Ateh & Charpentier, 2014); in fact, Trott (2013, p. 489) goes so far as to claim that "learning cannot occur if learners are not assured a significant voice in their learning." It is evident that students in the current generation expect ongoing dialogue and will be unlikely to develop a Christian identity without this opportunity (Skinner, 2018).

Opportunities for Service

A further aspect to consider, which is not typically included in books addressing school bullying, is that of opportunities for service. There is evidence in the literature of the importance of service-related activities and opportunities for individuals and groups to "develop

the spiritual qualities necessary for the fulfilment of this individual and collective purpose" (Margaret Podger et al., 2010, p. 346). It has been suggested that education that actively develops discipleship and service – as opposed to personal status and self-importance – will lead to transformation in purpose and outcomes (Wolfe, 2018b).

Barrie (2010, as cited in Trott, 2013), suggests that the designing of spiritual places calls each person to lose themselves in service to others: "To help in our own small way our fellow travellers along the incredible journey of this audacious and mysterious condition of being human" (Trott, 2013, pp. 472-473).

The opportunity to design places that encourage discipleship and service as opposed to personal status and self-achievement, should be compelling for Christian schools. Arguably, our ability to reveal Jesus in the learning environment is intrinsically linked to how effectively we can embed these attributes within our schools.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest the need to explore student peer bullying in faith-based schools in further detail. In particular, it will be important to compare and analyse approaches and initiatives taken in schools where bullying is less prevalent. These may include approaches towards areas such as school climate, behaviour management, faith engagement, and the utilisation of student voice. No individual who has spent extensive time working within the school environment doubts the challenges and pressures already facing classroom teachers and school administrators. Suggestions of additional areas for endeavour can – understandably – meet with resistance. Crucial to our understanding, however, is a cognisance that issues related to bullying do not reside within a vacuum but are related to all aspects of a school's health and wellbeing and are, arguably, intrinsic to the success of faith-based education. One measure of our ability to reveal Jesus in the learning environment is found in the way in which people treat each other, particularly those who are less popular or not so well socially connected. The process of addressing student peer bullying cannot be separated from that of building better schools, improving interpersonal relationships, engaging students in a faith journey, and improving long-term (and life-long) outcomes for

students. All children who come to our schools have the right to feel accepted and valued and to participate in an education free from fear of intimidation and harm.

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