

Blackboard Bullies: Workplace Bullying in Primary Schools

This paper offers a comprehensive examination of the “lived experience” of workplace bullying in primary schools in Ireland. Underpinned by the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with a class teacher, a Chairperson of a Board of Management and a school principal - all of whom who believe themselves to have been targets of workplace bullying in their schools - the paper presents their personal narratives as representative, inductive exemplars. Each of these case studies highlight the far-reaching impact of negative workplace interaction for both individuals and the wider school community and, in so doing, provide a voice for a hitherto silent minority. Through a Foucauldian analysis of the complex exercise of power which is at the heart of all bullying relationships, this study reveals the key role of management and organisational cultures to both the experience and incidence of adult bullying in primary schools, as well as the critical importance of leadership in framing the nature of professional relationships in school organisations.

Keywords: Workplace bullying; school leadership; organisational cultures; Foucault; power

Bullying at Work

While Brodsky (1976), Adams (1992) and Randall (1997) were all early contributors to the field of workplace bullying research, it was psychologists and academics from Scandinavia who pioneered the systematic, academic study of adult bullying (Vartia 1993 and Leymann 1996, for example). In recent years this field of inquiry has become increasingly diverse, as scholars challenge the traditional discourses which had informed our understanding of the phenomenon for so long. While a critical awareness of the prevalence of workplace bullying (Zapf et al. 2011; Berry et al. 2012), as well as the causes of bullying behaviours (Salin and Hoel 2011), remain central to these debates, other studies offer an increasingly nuanced and wide-ranging examination of the negative effects of workplace incivility on individuals (Duffy and Sperry 2012; Author and Other 2012) and on the organisation (Hoel et al. 2011) focussing particularly on prevention strategies (Caponecchia and Wyatt 2011; Jenkins 2013), and suggested solutions (Duffy and Sperry 2012). In addition, racist bullying (Misawa 2010),

gender-based bullying (Stainback, Ratliff and Roscigno 2011) and homophobic bullying (Rivers 2011), as well as studies of workplace incivility amongst specific workplace sectors like nursing (Hutchinson et al. 2010), police (Miller and Rayner 2012), academia (Twale and De Luca 2008; Faria, Mixon and Salter 2012), teaching (Sairanen and Pfeffer 2011; Cemaloglu 2011; Fahie 2013) and medicine (Niedhammer et al. 2007; Gadit and Mugford 2008), have also been considered.

Workplace Bullying Research in Ireland

Ireland has a relatively recent history of research into workplace bullying and, in common with research internationally (for example, Shariff 2009); more attention has been given to the phenomenon of bullying among children and teenagers (Minton et al. 2008; O'Moore 2013; McGuckin 2013). The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) published the *Report of the Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying* (2001) which indicated that 7.0% of the workforce claimed to have been bullied in the six months preceding the survey. Notably, "Education" was cited as the second highest "risk" profession behind Public Administration. Later research by O'Moore, Lynch, and NicDaeid (2003) also examined the prevalence of workplace bullying in Ireland. This study of 1,057 workers found that 6.2% of those surveyed had been exposed to bullying in the workplace in the twelve months previous.

In 2007, research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) indicated that 7.9% of the nationally representative sample of 1,260 individuals had experience workplace bullying in the previous 6 months. From this, they extrapolated a figure of 159,000 workers who experienced negative behaviour in the course of their employment. Once again, education was cited as the highest risk profession (13.8%) compared with Public Administration (13.2%), Health and Social Work (12.4%) and Construction (3.3%). At the

end of the same year, The Samaritans (2007) published the results of an online survey of 500 adults in Ireland and 2,100 in the United Kingdom. 86% of the Irish participants reported that they had been bullied at some time in their careers (compared with 81% of UK respondents). 27% of the Irish respondents said that bullying was a weekly source of stress for them (22% in the UK).

Adult Bullying in Schools

Schools are, like most other organisations, susceptible to the effects of micro- and macro-political influences on their cultures (Other 2013; Fahie 2013). A healthy, effective school is the embodiment of a supportive, nurturing culture - one which encourages innovation and creativity, celebrates difference and vigorously pursues excellence (Rhodes, Stevens and Hemmings 2011; Other, Fahie and McGillicuddy 2013). However, a school, in which discord and enmity have festered over a number of years, nurtures a pernicious culture, one in which human dignity and worth are currency to be manipulated and abused (Korkmaz and Cemaloglu 2010). On balance, however, there is a paucity of research into adult bullying in schools. Studies by Blase and Blase (2006) and Blase, Blase and Du (2008), for example, focus on the experiences of teachers as targets¹ of bullying at the hands of school Principals, resulting in feelings of humiliation, self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, fear, anger, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and a range of physiological responses. They also reported a deterioration in relationships with fellow teachers, a compromised collective decision-making process in the school and negative consequences for the teachers instructional work in classrooms.

Research consistently underlines the need for positive, effective school leadership as a means of counteracting this behaviour (Riley, Duncan and Edwards 2011; Cemaloglu 2011, for

¹ For the purpose of clarity, the term “target” rather than “victim” will be used throughout this paper.

example) and poor/ineffective leadership has been cited regularly as a significant contributory factor towards the fostering/facilitating of unhealthy and destructive behaviour within the workplace (Harvey et al. 2007; Yamada,2008). In fact, the bully is often identified as holding a position of authority themselves and misusing or abusing this dominance in an injurious manner (Lawrence and Robinson 2007). Even when this was not the case, ineffective leadership can be seen as a catalyst which allows a culture of bullying to fester and the leader is often seen to tacitly condone such behaviour through indifference. Indeed, so called *laissez-faire* leadership, or passive leadership, where management avoids confronting the problem is considered a factor in the development and maintenance of a bullying dynamic (Salin and Hoel 2011) and may be considered more pernicious than “zero leadership” because it implies that more could have been done to resolve the conflict (Skogstad et al. 2007).

The Irish Context

Notwithstanding considerable anecdotal evidence of unhealthy staff relationships in a minority of schools around Ireland, the trade union for primary teachers in Ireland, the *Irish National Teachers' Organisation* (INTO), was the first to publish tangible evidence regarding workplace bullying in primary schools. Their random survey of over 400 teachers indicated that 41% of respondents claimed to have been publicly humiliated, 48% undermined at work, 48% shouted at and 56% verbally abused (INTO 2000). In a follow-up study by the same union in 2006, which surveyed 1,219 randomly selected members, when asked if they had been bullied or harassed in their work situation, 44% responded “Yes”. The consequences of workplace bullying can be profound, giving rise to negative physical (sleeplessness, nausea, vomiting, headaches, weight loss), psychological (depression, stress, anxiety, suicidal

ideation), economic (loss of job, reluctance to apply for promotion) and social (agoraphobia, fear of social contact) effects on teachers and principals (Fahie and Other 2012).

At post-primary level, the *Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland* (ASTI) Survey (2008) reported that 39% of respondents stated that they had been bullied by a colleague in a position of authority, with 38% of men and 26% of women claiming this person to be the Principal. This abuse was verbal (61%), physical (9%), abuse of positions of authority (39%), being ignored/excluded (51%) or had timetables or class assignments used to bully (23% and 14% respectively). However, on balance, it is important to note that the professional body representing principals, the *Irish Primary Principals' Network* (IPPN), reported that their office was receiving increased numbers of calls from Principals who considered themselves to be the target of individual and group bullying (IPPN, 2009). The network indicated that newly appointed principals were particularly vulnerable to bullying behaviour coming from parents, staff, members of the Board of Management or the wider school community.

“...the production of intended effects”

Power, defined as “*the production of intended effects*” (Russell, 2004, p.24), underpins all human relationships (Clegg 1989). Individuals (re)define their interactions with others by means of complex negotiations framed around a constantly-evolving set of power variables (Lee 1998). Unsurprisingly, academics and legislators have consistently focussed on the manner in which power is exercised within the bullying dynamic (for example, Lawrence and Robinson 2007; Bansel et al. 2009; Hutchinson et al. 2010). Indeed, a disparity of power between the parties concerned is regularly cited as a prerequisite for the development and maintenance of a workplace bullying dynamic (Einarsen et al. 2011; Lewis, Giga and Hoel

2011). Critically, power, and how it is manifested, is at the heart of the bullying dynamic as the target attempts to resist the domination of the bully (Rivers 2011).

Power, for Foucault (2002), is a fluid concept constantly changing and circulating and its exercise can have positive and/or negative effects. Power relations (the shape of power) are “*mobile, reversible and unstable*” (Foucault 2002, 293) and, through resistance, change organically as the subjugated attempts to challenge the subjugator’s position. Foucault views resistance as essential to the process of change and as a “*catalyst which brings to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used*” (Foucault 2002, 329). Critically, he challenges the traditional view of power as a subjugating force which radiates from above.

“...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex, strategic situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1998, 93)

Foucault (1980 and 2001) reasons that a dominant discourse, often presented as inevitable and logical, will seek to define, limit and exclude and, as a reflection of the locus power in any given society, will also serve to “other” those who fall outside their conceptualisation of “normal” . The dominant discourse generates distinct regimes of truth which regulate how, for example, people are classified and controlled. In so doing, the existing power structures are bolstered as the constructed “other” provides a clear identifying benchmark against which members of the power elite can be compared and have their position/status (re)confirmed (Bird Claiborne et al. 2009).. As argued by Davies and Hunt (1994, 389) “*the privileged term defines the meaning of the subordinate term as other than itself*”.. This notion has particular application to understanding the dynamics of bullying, as the tactic of ‘exclusion’ is premised on the creation of an easily recognised “other,” a person who has broken the norms of the group. Such persons are punished for their “otherness” by their ritualistic expulsion from the

group through exclusion. As already noted, exclusion is a common bullying behaviour. Critically, Foucault sensitises us to the structures, systems and rules (technologies and governmentality) that influence the manner in which power is exercised.

Regimes of truth are central to these exclusionary processes, delineating people into those who are part of an accepted norm and, alternatively, as “other”. A dominant discourse may be manifested through the cohesion of a group dynamic, which is threatened by the appointment of an outsider to the school for example, or the elevation of one of the group to a higher status position within the organisation, thus challenging the status quo of the group. However, those who act in a manner which is perceived by those in authority as being a *challenge* to the dominant discourse may then be positioned as one who must be controlled in order to preserve and protect the status of those in positions of dominance. At a micro-level, the dominant discourse will seek to subjectify the individuals as docile (Foucault 1991) in order to maintain its own dominance and power relations. Bullying and harassment may then be considered as *mechanics of power* defining, (de)limiting and controlling how certain individuals behave “...so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (Foucault 1991, 138). However, it must be noted that even though a body may be considered docile, this in no way precludes a level of resistance; agency, choice and free-will are part of the human condition. What is critical to this analysis of bullying are the disciplinary processes or technologies of control which position an individual as docile and, crucially, how this docility impacts upon the relational dynamics for all parties concerned.

The Process of Becoming...

Subjectification, for Foucault (1982 and 2000), is the way in which the individual is positioned in the world. Shifting patterns of power impact upon the self, making subjectification a process - a journey rather than a destination- and, in this context, Foucault (1980, 39) takes the position that power “*reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives*”. In so doing, it transforms the way individuals see themselves and are seen by others. For Davies (2006, 426), who defines subjectification as the process through which one becomes a subject, the formation of the subject is predicated on powers external to itself. The subject may be striving to resist or overcome these powers and, indeed, may be unaware that these are the forces that define it. “*The individual subject is not possible without this simultaneous submission and mastery*”. Thus, the exercise of power may be seen as a formative or creative force and the subject can be said to exist *because* of the formative forces of power. Davies argues that there is a duality or double directionality operating within subjectification. She calls this the “*impossible doubleness of subjection*” (428) and maintains that “*we are both acted upon and we act*” (ibid). The key issue here is the concept of agency, and the notion that the individual chooses how to act regardless of the dominance of any particular discourse. Human behaviour is shaped by the process of subjectification and the reflexivity which informs it and individual subjects are

“...emergent, as always being constituted through practice, and to envisage that ongoing practice not as involving individual agents separated out from society/social practice, but as co extensive with it.... The introduction of a different discourse inevitably shifts what the subject is and can be, as well as the site they are located in can be perceived.” (Davies et al. 2004, 38)

This process of subjectification is not always linear or rational. These multiple, and often inconsistent, discourses which operate and around and through the individual are, for Heron (2005), the technologies of power through which one’s subjectivity is constituted. They are, she argues, a part of a wider network of power relations which position an individual at any

given time. Davies and Harre (1990) maintain that the contradictory nature of discourses can create incompatible versions of reality. *“To know anything is to know in terms of one or more discourses”* Subjectification is always susceptible to the influences of new discourses and power relations, indeed these influences are integral to the evolving and organic nature of subjectification. Subjectification, and the sometimes contradictory discourses which impact on the process (Foucault’s 1982 and 2000), underlines the inconsistencies and contradictions which exist in everyday life and, as revealed by the three narratives, underscores how targets of bullying are reconstituted as a legitimate/justified “other” and, in some way, as *deserving* of, and responsible for, the bullying aggression.

Methodology

This paper draws on a qualitative study of workplace bullying in Irish primary schools (Fahie 2010). Throughout, a semi-structured interview framework was employed, thus allowing for, and encouraging, interviewees to be fully participative in the interview process, raising issues which he or she considered to be pertinent and, as observed by Basit (2010), giving clues as to their subjective view of the world. The telling of story was central to this qualitative study of workplace bullying. Employing a Narrative Inquiry framework (Clandinin and Connolly 2000), each of the three interview participants narrated detailed accounts of incidents in their professional lives which brought to the fore their experience of workplace bullying.

The Sample

A common difficulty when researching sensitive issues relates to sample size and sample access (Fahie 2013). For this particular study, quite simply, access to large numbers of self-identifying targets of workplace bullying proved problematic. Consequently, the notion of a self-selected, purposive sample was considered the most appropriate. The primary teachers’

union, the INTO, publishes a magazine entitled *InTouch*, every two months which is distributed to all twenty-five thousand members of the union across Ireland. Through the magazine, the author invited people to contact him if they were prepared to take part in a study of adult bullying in schools. In total, twenty-four teachers responded. Each of these teachers was interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The interview schedule focused on a number of key areas: the nature of the bullying, cause and effect, coping strategies employed, as well as the role of management and trade unions. Lasting between one and a half hours and four hours, the interviews generated more than 400 pages of raw data. Each interview was transcribed by the author verbatim and, having first identified emergent themes, analysed with the support of the “code and retrieve” software MAXQDA (2007).

While previous published research has focussed on the impact of workplace bullying on all 24 teachers and principals in the sample (Fahie and Other 2013; Fahie 2013 and Fahie 2014), this paper, offers three representative case studies which are purposefully selected from the larger sample. Each of these exemplars illustrate different dimensions or aspects of workplace bullying identified in previous research (Bale, Blase and Du 2008, for example), and highlight particular issues or difficulties for class teachers, principals and school managements personell respectively. Case studes are employed to “*represent depth of information, rather than breadth*” (Mertens 2010, 352) and in this context, the first case study focuses on the story of John, a middle-aged teacher employed in a small rural school. The second highlights the experiences of Catherine, a newly appointed principal of a large urban school. The third, and final, case study considers the experiences of Diane, a retired principal who was appointed Chairperson of the Board of Management of a large urban

school. These testimonies were selected based upon the richness of their narratives and, critically, on the generalisability of their discrete experiences.

Some potentially identifying narrative details have been withheld to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

The Class Teacher - John's Story

John taught in a small, rural school and was appointed deputy principal after a number of years. John noted *"I was always quite happy in the school. It wasn't by any means perfect, but I was happy. Everything was grand."* When the principal resigned, John was approached by the Chairperson and asked to apply. Having no interest in the position, he declined. The fact that he had been asked to apply for the post of principal is, he claims, evidence of his efficiency and reputation. He had enjoyed cordial relations with the previous principal and saw no reason why this should not continue. John also points out that his interaction with the local school inspector was always pleasant and that, in over twenty years teaching in the school, he had never been the subject of a complaint or investigation.

A turning point arose, however, when John made a casual complaint to the new principal, Michael, about the way in which his own son was being treated by Michael in class. Michael had commented to the son that he was *"...running home telling what was going on in the class"*. John met with Michael to discuss the matter. At the meeting, Michael blamed John's son for any difficulties. The meeting was unsuccessful and proved an important moment in the disintegration of the professional relationship between John and Michael as, shortly afterwards, Michael made his first complaint against John. The complaint focussed on John's time-keeping which Michael claimed was poor. In his many years in the school, John's

punctuality had never been a cause of discussion before. *“This was out of the blue. I saw this as a result of our meeting. If he could think of anything he could pin on me”*. John argues that there was no justification for the complaint and he soon began to notice a change in the manner in which he was treated by Michael. The situation deteriorated and John felt he was being excluded from all aspects of the school’s life; information was regularly withheld, resources withdrawn and he felt that other staff were reporting back to Michael. Communication in the school had, by this stage, broken down and John felt isolated and vulnerable. After a number of further incidents, John went on sick leave and instituted bullying proceedings against Michael and the Board of Management. John stresses that he never wanted to initiate legal proceedings against the school. He had never been involved in any such proceedings before and was loath to do so now. His motivation stemmed from a desire to protect others who would join the school at a later date *“He is going to do it to somebody else; someone else is going to suffer the way that I did.”*

With his sick leave exhausted, John sought to return to work. However, the Board of Management stated that it wanted a psychiatrist to confirm John’s fitness to resume teaching in the school. At this stage, both his GP and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the Department of Education and Science had certified him as fit to return to work. It could be argued that this may be seen as an attempt to impose a medical discourse onto the bullying experience, one which categorises the target as sick and unwell and one which then allows them to be treated and, ultimately ‘cured’ (Foucault 2001). It also consolidates the power of those in authority as it positions and subjectifies the target of bullying as sick, and in this case, as mentally ill, thus undermining their complaint and their (his)story. Indeed, John points out the central tension at the heart of his case.

“...in order for any case to stand up in court you have to prove that there was damage done. And that you were psychiatrically damaged by all of this. That can

then turn on you and they can say you're so psychiatrically damaged you're not fit to teach. There has to be something in the middle there, that you can actually take a case and still be able to teach"

The whole experience has affected John profoundly. He has been successfully treated for depression, which, he maintains, was a direct result of his experiences in the school. John recognises the effect this case has had on his family life "*We haven't had a life really*". John also indicates that since this ordeal has begun his social life had been affected severely and that he rarely leaves the house and limits his contact with the outside world. Social and sporting events are no longer the attraction they once were. John blames the organisational structure of Boards of Management for the escalation of his problem. He argues that the lack of formal systems of accountability of the principal and the Board means that they are "*a law unto themselves*". As such, the decisions taken are not grounded in proper procedure or any form of externally evaluated due process.

"I think the people on the Boards are not trained, they're not educated. The parents in our school, they're the best in the world who only want the best for their kids. But how can they sort out problems like this? They haven't the expertise. They just do as they're told by the principal."

The Principal – Catherine's Story

Catherine is a recently-appointed principal of a large urban school where there had been a long history of tension and interpersonal strife. Shortly after her own appointment, Catherine was to appoint a new deputy principal. One teacher, whom she refers to as 'X', expressed an interest in the position. However, when a different teacher was appointed to the post, Catherine's previously positive relationship with X changed. Over the following months, an uneasy peace reigned. This period was shattered by another series of incidents where Catherine felt she was the target of bullying behaviour by a number of members of staff. One of these centred on an annual school event. A dispute arose, and one teacher, unhappy with

the decision Catherine made, confronted her and, with her office door open, shouted at her using expletives. Afterwards, the teacher apologised for his aggressive behaviour.

As time progressed, Catherine experienced further intransigence when teachers refused to cooperate with the ongoing and, in Catherine's opinion, necessary reform of school organisational policies and procedures, all of which had been sanctioned by the Board of Management. When Catherine enlisted the support of external, advisory bodies to support her reforms, the staff still refused to engage in any meaningful manner. Catherine cites this as an example of her being obstructed from carrying out her responsibilities as principal. Shortly afterwards, X and some other senior teachers wrote to the Board of Management expressing their discontent. As the Board had received many such letters in the past, "*...the Board didn't take much notice of it and let me deal with it...*" This letter, Catherine believes, is confirmation that she is the target of bullying behaviour amongst a number of staff members and she now regularly finds her authority challenged and her professionalism undermined. She admits to finding working in the school to be difficult at times.

Catherine is convinced that the disrespectful, challenging and undermining behaviours she has experienced have set a marker as to the manner in which all the teachers in the school interact with her. Catherine believes that "*there is a danger of a couple of people stirring it up*" and sees X as the person at the centre of the tensions "*I do feel that X is stirring it and I do feel that it's X who gets the other members of staff together to write to the Board of Management.*" Catherine is clear in her own mind that she is in the middle of a negative dynamic orchestrated by X. She sees his behaviour as central to the unease in the school "*...he's the one who's feeding the trouble.*" She also points out that X has a history himself of interpersonal disputes with other staff members. She contends that the experiences at school

have had little effect on her personally as she is “*strong and tough*” but she does admit that she “*thinks about it a lot*” and she also attends counselling which she found to be “*somewhat useful*”.

Catherine maintains that bullying impacts on the quality of teaching and learning in the school as it discourages real cooperation and team-work. Her vision for an effective, happy school can only be realised if all members of staff work together toward that common goal. She is, however, finding that not all members of staff share this enthusiasm. She states that she continues to work hard to get them on board. Catherine considers herself to be a target of bullying and stated

“I feel that one form of bullying is to be prevented to carry out your duties as you should and I am being prevented from that at the moment. I mean, I’ve learnt a lot and I’ve made mistakes. But I do feel that, if at every turn you’re stopped and problems are put in front of you, then that’s bullying.”

The Chairperson of a Board of Management – Diane’s Story

Diane, a retired principal, is the Chairperson of the Board of Management (BOM) of a primary school. As with Catherine, it became apparent that an historic culture of discord has developed in the school over a number of years. Diane had only just agreed to take the position of chairperson when the first indication of future difficulties arose. A dispute arose between the principal and the staff in relation to the interpretation and application of departmental directives, resulting in the resignation of the teachers’ representative from the BOM. The staff then wrote to the BOM directly demanding an explanation. The letter itself is, according to Diane “*...a classic template for corporate bullying, it is a best practice role model for what is worst practice in all*”. Some weeks later, another letter was sent by the staff to the Board in relation to a procedural error committed, Diane admits, by the principal. The letter also complained about the poor communication between the Board and the staff,

this was despite the fact that their representative had resigned from the Board and no teacher had agreed to replace her. Furthermore, the Board provided staff with reports of each Board meeting. The staff also complained there was still no staff representative on the Board of Management. Diane points out that this is the responsibility of the staff, not the Board. By definition, the staff appoint the staff representative. Diane found the letter to be, both, extremely hurtful to her personally and insulting to the whole Board who had given their services freely, and without remuneration, for the betterment of the local community. As time progressed, the discontent in the school grew. This manifested itself in a culture which created an atmosphere of non-cooperation in the school. Group planning between teachers was abandoned and professional interaction limited. Echoing Foucault's (1980) notion of capillary power, which reasons that power is exercised in a net-like filigree, and can serve to disrupt, reverse/destabilise status-positions and existing regimes of control, Diane employs the metaphor of a stone being dropped in a pond...

"People are caught in the spin-off of bullying you see....This is the great sadness to me, because all the other people are caught up because there is a ripple effect. And this to me is the most obnoxious feature of bullying it brings everybody along in the slipstream and the people who are not part of the bullying tidal wave are seen as being odd and eccentric and that to me is the real damaging part of it. It has to affect the quality of education."

Diane argues that the Board – and particularly the Chairperson of the Board – is often isolated and unsupported *"I think Boards are very much isolated and very much on their own and they are very, very powerless."* In addition, Diane indicates that she also had the added stress of trying to keep the members of the Board on side. In response to the ongoing acrimony in the school, several members of the Board have given strong indications that they wished to resign from the Board as the responsibilities were becoming too onerous and fraught with difficulties.

Candidly, Diane admits that this whole experience had had an effect on her personally. Her sleep patterns have been severely disturbed and she has become so distressed at the personal nature of the dispute that she has been advised to seek counselling. In the end, she has begun to question her own ability to act as Chairperson, particularly as she witnesses the escalation of bullying in the school. She feels that the school culture has been irrevocably compromised *“...because there are teachers who are caught up in this current, in this slipstream and they are now becoming bullying persons themselves”*. Diane views the lack of mobility in schools as being central to the development of a bullying dynamic. The lack of turnover of staff brings with it, she argues *“a very enclosed sort of mind set”*. In her opinion, a school needs to be constantly challenged as a means of uniting the staff in a common purpose, thus encouraging team spirit and discouraging individualism and resentment. Without such endeavours, she maintains, the staff become *“very stagnant and very introverted.”* She adds that disgruntlement in relation to internal promotions and the ongoing repercussions of the historical legacy of a previous principal can also contribute to unhappiness and discontent on the staff *“a legacy of oppressive regimes in the past where a principal has left a sort of mark on the school which was oppressive or domineering and which is hard to overcome in the passage of time”*.

Discussion

Foucault's (1998 and 2000) conceptualisation of power highlights the fraught interpersonal relationship which are key to the development and maintenance of a bullying dynamic and that, if we are to understand bullying completely, we must focus on how power is *exercised* rather than possessed (May 2006). For Foucault, power is constantly changing in response to challenges and resistances of those who are being controlled. Foucault (1991) suggests that, through the use of disciplinary technologies i.e. methods employed by those in power to maintain their influence and authority over others, the powerful seek to control, dominate and

regulate the behaviour of others. In this context, ‘normalising judgement’ may be viewed as the ultimate form of control (Morris 2006), as the bully defines ‘normal’ through techniques of control which constitute the target as ‘other’. Thus, through their defining of the norms of the group/school e.g. the school culture, the target becomes, what Davies et al. (2001) describe as, the *abjected other*. From a macro-perspective, Foucault’s analysis sensitises us to the technologies of control which operate in all organisations and, in the context of primary schools, queries how the national systems/policies impact on the micro-level practices identified in study schools. Examples of which include the relative omnipotence of the principal, the absence of procedure/policy at national or local level and the hierarchical nature of the school management system. At a micro-level, Foucault alerts us to the manner in which power is exercised upon the individual through the process of subjectification, as the individual is controlled by means of the discourses which affect his/her way of seeing the world (Foucault 1982 and 2000). John for example, was cast as a “trouble maker” with an unnamed (and indeed, undiagnosed) psychiatric “disorder”. He was “sick” and school management could, therefore, legitimately and justifiably treat him as unfit for work and as *othered* from the school community. A community of which he had, until a short time before, been a vital part.

The *process* of subjectification, and the power/knowledge dynamic it implies, subverts traditional/psychological notions of control (which suggest that power is finite, controllable and located in a persona or structure) and, instead posits an alternate perspective which argues that the manner in which power is exercised in a given society affords individuals and institutions a legitimacy of control which permits and reifies domination and subjugation.

The behaviours described by the three interviewees included undermining, shouting, public humiliation, overt exclusion, lies and threat of litigation. For Foucault (1991), the public nature of these behaviours is, in itself, a technology of control. The target is disempowered by those who witness the overt confrontation and the resulting humiliation is deliberately designed to compel the target to act in a docile/passive manner and to accept the domination of the bully/bullies. It also serves to act as a warning to the observers not to transgress, as to do so could potentially provoke a similar reaction, this time directed towards them.

The exercise of power is deeply inscribed within the body (Foucault 1980) and this is evident through the manifestations of particular physical effects or symptoms in response to the bullying behaviours. Critically, all three interviewees ascribed some physical deterioration or symptom of their experience of workplace bullying. These included disturbed sleep, tearfulness, high blood pressure, weight loss/gain, nausea/vomiting, irritable bowel syndrome, exhaustion, lethargy and an inability to relax. The key issue here is the ability of targets of bullying to (re)define the situation, having been disempowered by their experiences and reluctant to constitute themselves as bullied in the first place. Such is the profound effect that bullying has on the identity of the individuals that they are unable to think rationally of their experiences and/or articulate them in a coherent manner. This is especially true of Catherine, for example, who insisted on pointing out the positive qualities of the teachers who seem to actively seek to undermine her on a regular basis. Her perception, and that of others, of what is happening in the school may be skewed by a sense of disbelief that other teachers would act in such a manner, thus compromising her ability to tackle the problem effectively. *“It’s a school for God’s sake; we shouldn’t be treating each other like this. It’s hard to believe, isn’t it...?”* (Catherine). However, it may be argued that their perception of the true meaning of the experience is compromised by the trauma of the experience itself.

The impact of bullying on the professional practice of teachers

Interviewees maintained that their experiences of workplace bullying impacted significantly on their professional practice. This dovetails with other research which indicates that a negative workplace environment influences the performance of the organisation and those working within it (Hoel et al. 2011). In the context of schools, Blase and Blase (2006) and Blase et al. (2008) also consider workplace bullying to have an impact on the management and efficacy of the school. However, in this study, the precise effects of the workplace bullying on interviewee's practice as teachers were difficult to ascertain. There are two levels in which the bullying dynamic may have an impact on teacher practice, at a whole-school level and at the level of the individual, specifically in the way they feel about themselves, about their job and their identity as teachers. Expectations around teacher practice emphasise high degrees of mutual co-operation and collaboration between teaching staff (Education Act 1998; Primary Curriculum 1999). However, the findings of the study suggest that a bullying dynamic seriously undermined the potential for such teamwork, not only at the individual level (between bully and target) but also in terms of overall school culture. Catherine and Diane both detailed incidents where the negative atmosphere in the school, and the effect this had on interpersonal relations therein, meant that such initiatives were unsustainable as the individuals concerned were unable, or unwilling, to work collaboratively towards a common goal. Therefore, new programmes and projects were shelved and innovative approaches unexplored. It is reasonable to assume that the quality of teaching and learning in the school may have suffered as a result.

John, Catherine and Diane also bemoaned the loss of the positive culture which had existed in their schools previously, stating that their own commitment and loyalty to the school had

diminished as a result of their experiences. Catherine, in particular, found that the tension and conflict in her school made her reluctant to embark upon any creative or innovative schemes, as she was certain that to do so would provoke the ire and antagonism of teachers on their staff. As a result, change was anathema and initiative inhibited. The negative discourses which have become dominant on the school subjectify the teachers in such a manner that to challenge them by being creative, collaborative and effective is almost impossible. Diane highlighted one such case when she felt unable to exercise her professional duties as Chairperson because of continued interference and non-cooperation from staff. Acts of revenge on the part of the bully also impacted on the professional behaviour of the teachers and John complained that the Principal exacted his revenge by refusing to allow him to buy resources for his class, thus affecting the way in which John could teach. It was clear that all three interviewees modified their behaviour in response to their interaction with the bully. These patterns were also evident across the entire sample for the study.

Organisational Culture

A supportive organisational culture in which all members of staff are treated with respect and dignity is counter-indicative to the development of a bullying dynamic (Padilla et al. 2007; Gordon et al. 2009; Hutchinson et al. 2010). In terms of school culture, the interviewees maintained that their bullying experiences had gone beyond the level of an interpersonal dispute between individuals and had, to use the metaphor offered by Diane, '*infected*' the way the whole school operated. This was particularly apparent, she suggests, in the manner in which parents who arrived in the school were made feel unwelcome. School cultures, like all organisational cultures, are unstable and susceptible to change (Hargreaves 1999; Prosser 1999; Cameron and Quinn 2006). For both John and Diane it was the newly appointed Principal who brought with them a new attitude and affected a change from a hitherto positive culture to one fraught with tension. In these cases, the interviewees linked the

personality of their individual principal to the development of the bullying dynamic, implying that the bullying was a result of a pathological flaw within the persona of the principal. However, it may also be seen as an attempt by the interviewees to demonise the bully and cast them as ‘other’.

The analysis suggests that the issue of workplace bullying needs to be foregrounded in discourses about policy and practice in primary schools. A consistent thread throughout the study was lack of understanding/knowledge of workplace bullying among members of the school community. Comprehensive training for all members of the school community, particularly principals, chairpersons and members of Boards of Management, would militate against this apparent lack of awareness, particularly in relation to the appropriate application of relevant policies and procedures. Secondly, greater attention is needed at a policy level, building on the work that is being done on bullying among children and young people in school. To this effect, anti-bullying policies in schools need to address and name the issue of adult bullying with a named, designated liaison staff member with responsibility for same. In addition, strict adherence to correct appointments procedures to promoted posts of responsibility would serve to pre-empt claims of bias and partiality. The role of leadership in addressing workplace bullying has previously been addressed. School principals have a formal role in the ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of school staff (Education Act 1998). This is reflective of a traditional “top-down”, hierarchical evaluative system. This study has highlighted the complex manner in which power/authority is exercised in schools and recommends that that this system be re-examined to include an element of collegial, “upward” evaluation, whereby non-managerial staff members play a role in assessing the performance of principals. This may be particularly useful when applied within a *Whole*

School Evaluation framework which focuses on the fostering of a healthy school culture. In conclusion, Catherine offers her hopes for the future

“...I just want to be able to forget....to put it all behind me. We just have to talk about it. Someone has to be brave, bite the bullet and talk about it. That’s the only way it’ll stop. I suppose that someone’s me...”

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