



Tackling Bullying from the Inside Out: Shifting Paradigms in Bullying Research and Interventions

UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying in Schools and Cyberspace, Inaugural Lecture delivered on 7th October 2019 at Dublin City University

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Introduction

The decision to have a university Chair dedicated to tackling bullying and cyberbullying was achieved through a partnership between the Government of Ireland, Dublin City University and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Research by UNESCO shows that one-third of children globally experience bullying in schools (UNESCO 2019), so one of the reasons the Chair was established was to ensure that all of the important work being done around the globe to tackle bullying and cyberbullying is amalgamated in one place to create a critical mass of researchers so that we can work internationally to address these problems. In the past, bullying was a very local issue, but today it is understood as an issue that crosses boundaries between nations, time and space and that occurs online as well as offline.

UNESCO awards the status of a Chair to select universities around the world when they assess the university to have reached a high enough standard in research and teaching in a specific area that relates to the goals of the UN. In our case at DCU, it is sustainable development goal number four to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4). DCU's Annual Impact Review 2018/2019 outlines how the university is providing quality education for all through a range of research and teaching initiatives including the work at the National Anti-

Bullying Research and Resource Centre (DCU Impact Review 2018).

The aim of a UNESCO Chair is to promote international inter-university cooperation and networking, to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge sharing and collaborative work, in key priority areas related to UNESCO's fields of competence, and to serve as think-tanks and bridge-builders between academia, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making to inform policy decisions, establishing new teaching initiatives, generating innovation through research and contributing to the enrichment of existing university programmes while promoting cultural diversity.

The specific work of DCU's UNESCO Chair will be to lead a major systematic review of the international evidence in relation to the effects of bullying on how migrant children experience equality and wellbeing in schools, to explore the possibility for whole-school anti-bullying interventions and to support local-level delivery through partner institutions in different countries. The aim is also to consolidate materials and resources for delivery in terms of high-quality training courses. These aims will be achieved through a number of funded projects currently being delivered by the UNESCO Chair which is located at the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre in DCU. Chief among these projects is *TRIBES*, a project focused on migrant experiences of school bullying across the European continent. The project is funded by COST and involves 120 partners in over 40 countries, all of whom are working together to understand the increased vulnerability experienced by migrants and to prevent and intervene where bullying is concerned.

In this lecture, I will revisit our understanding of childhood and how our assumptions have influenced our approach to undertaking research and initiatives to

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tackle bullying in schools and cyberspace. I will explore how the dominant discourse in the field of bullying studies has for almost 50 years been based on traditional assumptions about childhood and has also perpetuated a particular type of research that tends to ignore the realities of childhood as experienced by children today. I will set out a newer view of childhood that has already established itself in other fields, and I will explain how we can apply this new sociology of childhood to our work on tackling bullying in schools and cyberspace.

Defining and Contextualising Bullying

While certain individuals are more likely to bully (*psychological dimension*), the structures in which they exist (*sociological dimension*) can also contribute towards an environment (*educational dimension*) where bullying is more acceptable. Furthermore, social media and other online spaces (*technological dimension*) are now extending the nature and scope of bullying beyond the built environment into cyberspace. Bullying has been defined for some time now as:

occurring when an individual is repeatedly exposed to intentional negative actions by another person(s), creating an imbalance in power between the perpetrator and victim.

(Olweus 2007)

This definition comes from the work of Dan Olweus who is generally recognised as a seminal figure in anti-bullying studies. The definition is not perfect and I will contest it somewhat later on, but for now, we can say that there are four things that characterise bullying behaviour and these are:

- Intentionality
- Repetitiveness
- Power imbalance
- Negative effects

We could spend some time exploring what each of these means, for example, to what extent can a once off event be said to be bullying? Where is the repetition in that? Some would say that as it is just a one-off event, then it is aggression and conflictual but not bullying. On the other hand, it can be argued that the threat of its being repeated in itself means that effect of repetition is present,

and so an apparent once off event can be considered to be bullying.

The first case of bullying ever to be named as such involved a young soldier in the British Army who was reported in *The Times* newspaper in 1862 to have taken his own life because he had been subject to ‘systematic bullying’ and had been the object of constant ‘vexations and attack’. Interestingly the tone of the newspaper article was non-condemnatory with regard to those who had carried out these vexations concluding that bullying was a part of human nature frequently found in a ‘school or a camp, or a barracks, or a ship’s crew’ as cited in Koo (2007).

Similarly, cyberbullying is defined as:

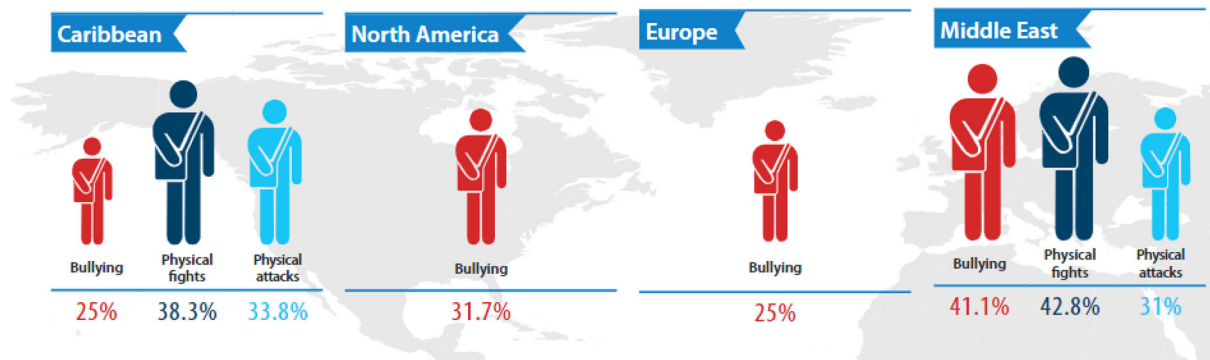
wilful and repeated harm inflicted through computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.

(Hinduja and Patchin 2015:11)

The key differences here between bullying and cyberbullying relate to the fact that victims often cannot tell who is bullying them online, and this increases the power imbalance between the bully and the victim, and as such, this *anonymity* can cause much trauma to the victim. Another key difference is that the potential audience is much larger when the bullying takes place online, and this increases the *scope* of humiliation for the victim. Finally, the fact that the internet is everywhere in our lives is key, it is virtually impossible in many countries to avoid the internet. As such cyberbullying can be extremely *pervasive*—in other words, there is no getting away from it. The extensive lockdown as a result of COVID-19 means that young people have more time and opportunity to engage in cyberbullying.

So how big of a problem is bullying for our young people. Research from UNESCO in 2018 that relied on individual country reports found that one-third of children and young people are victimised in school. Clearly, if we consider the mental health effects and diseases that can result from being bullied, then bullying can be understood in some ways as a problem of pandemic proportions. If one-third of children globally were starving or contracted a disease, we would immediately close our airports and send in the army to tackle the problem—but yet we often accept that bullying is a fact of life and there is little that can be done about it. The number of victims, however, is not consistent across all countries. UNESCO’s report looked at the individual countries where data is available to see what the more local situations are like.

Figure 1. Percentage of students who were bullied, in a physical fight or physically attacked, by region



(UNESCO 2019)

We see that the Middle Eastern countries have a very high prevalence rate of bullying, followed by the US and then Europe and Caribbean countries. It is interesting to drill down into some of those figures and look at Ireland as an example from Europe. In our own meta-analysis of all bullying and cyberbullying studies in Ireland, we found that 26% of primary school children and 12% of post-primary school children had been bullied offline, with 14% of primary and 10% of post-primary being bullied online (Foody et al. 2017).

Furthermore, in a more recent study, we found that 57% of 15–18-year-olds were asked to share a sexual image, 24% shared a sexual image and 13% had a sexual image shared without their consent (O’Higgins Norman et al. 2019). Reaction to the increased participation in sexting, that is, sending sexual content online, among young people naturally raises concern about young people and their safety online and how best to support them. Colleagues in the USA at the Cyberbullying Research Centre are now beginning to suggest that we should educate young people how to sext safely (Patchin and Hinduja 2020). This view is based on data that shows that a large number of students in our schools are sending sexts and so it is argued that it would be better and more responsible to teach them how to do it safely, and in doing so, minimise the risks to their safety and privacy. This is somewhat controversial. In Ireland many schools take a traditionalist approach to sexual matters where children are concerned and sex education in schools has been found to be poor, focused narrowly on biology and avoiding sensitive topics (Keating et al. 2018).

If we return to the *Behind the Numbers* (2019) report from UNESCO, we find that similar to the Middle East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa unclear have very high reported prevalence rates of bullying, while South America and Central America report the lowest rates. As a sociologist, I have to ask what are the societal and cultural factors that lead

to such high prevalence rates in some countries and lower rates in other countries. If we look to the work of Emile Durkheim on suicide and society, we can see that he was able to link suicide rates in different countries to societal norms (Pickering et al. 2000), and there is a similar task to be undertaken for those interested in why prevalence rates vary from one country to another.

If we turn our attention to Asia, we find that the rate of bullying reported there is higher than in Europe but not as high as in the Middle East and African countries. Looking specifically at Japan and relying on data from the Government, we find that the number of cases that were reported in 2018 increased by 28%, with 478 of these cases being investigated and found to be serious. Again this marks an increase from previous years. Of these 55 cases were deemed to be life threatening (Government of Japan 2018). In order to understand the situation with school bullying in Japan, I turn to the work of Japanese colleagues who help us to get behind the numbers for Japan (MEXT 2018).

In Japan conformity is traditionally valued over individual identity, and this can cause problems for people who do not easily fit in or who identify with a minority outlook. An old Japanese saying, *the nail that sticks up gets hammered down*, is suggested as one way of explaining, at least partially, how children who seem to be different might be treated in schools in Japan (Naito and Gielen 2005) Of course, this is not a problem unique to Japan. There are aspects of this in homogeneous Western societies and certainly in Ireland where until recently we had a very homogeneous society. The Western philosopher René Girard advances the notion of ‘scapegoats’ and how people who are perceived to be different to the norm can be pushed out or excluded from society (Girard 1989). Another societal and cultural explanation for why students in schools in Japan may not report bullying to parents or teachers is that culturally it is not acceptable

to burden others with one's own problems. Finally, it is reported that bullying in Japan can be more extreme physically and as such cause school boys and girls to consider suicide as a means of escape from physical pain (Naito and Gielen 2005).

Clearly, the cost of bullying to the individual in terms of mental health and life opportunities can be significant, resulting in low self-esteem, depression, social isolation and even suicidal ideation. Furthermore, the cost can be economic too. Recent research in Sweden found that, if it is not tackled, the cost to the State of 1 year of bullying in schools can be up to two billion euro over the following 30 years (Nilsson Lundmark et al. 2016).

The current geopolitical context is more challenging than ever before to promote inclusion and address discrimination as a form of bullying in schools and cyberspace. In 2017, bullying rates among middle school students in the USA were 18% higher in localities where voters had favoured Donald Trump than in those that had supported Hillary Clinton (Huang and Cornell 2019). Similarly, student reports of peers being teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity were 9% higher in localities favouring the Republican candidate. Research by UNESCO found that appearance and race were the top reasons for bullying in school (2019). Children and young people are rarely bullied because they are perceived to be the same as everyone else. They are often bullied because they stand out in their environment for being different from their peers and the normative life that dominates in a society. In fact, there is now a body of research that shows that racism harms children's health even from before they are born (Trent et al. 2019). This points to the need for schools to promote inclusion and diversity. Research shows that where young people are provided with an opportunity to reflect on difference as a positive aspect of life, levels of bullying and other forms of discrimination decrease (O'Higgins Norman 2008).

Bullying Research

Over the last 50 years, there have been many major studies into school bullying. These have been mostly quantitative in nature with little attention paid to the experience or understanding of bullying and cyberbullying by children and young people (Smith and Berkun 2020). If we look at the first studies of note by Dan Olweus in Norway in the 1970s, these resulted in his now famous Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (Olweus 2007). These early studies by Olweus were so ground-breaking and significant that most of the international studies that followed just repeated the same type of empirical data collection and analysis. While this was useful, the nature of bullying was

not addressed in a deep enough way. Certainly, the recent data from UNESCO shows that school bullying is still a major global problem globally affecting children in schools in most countries (2019).

In order to move our efforts to tackle bullying in school and cyberspace forward we need to return to three basic questions and try to answer them.

What assumptions have we been making about childhood?

How best to undertake research on childhood?

What do we do about it now?

In terms of the assumptions we have been making about children in our research, we can trace these assumptions in the West back to the seventeenth century and the very influential writings of John Locke (1632–1704). Locke argued that all knowledge comes from experience and perception of the world around us. According to him, humans are born as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, and as such, they have no built in content or internal processes, just an open space waiting for the world to fill it in. As such he emphasises nurture over nature and saw children as lacking any ability to make sense of the world around them (Winkler 1996). These ideas were taken up by others such as Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1721–1778) who argued that children were born innocent and pure but with the capacity to be formed by experience (Rousseau 1991). But even before this, from a theological perspective, John Calvin (1509–1564) understood children to be born with the 'seed of sin' in them and therefore needing to be guided and stewarded away from evil towards good (Reeves 2018). All of this led to a situation where children were understood to be incomplete and uninteresting. *Children should be seen and not heard* is an often quoted Victorian phrase, and, in many ways, it sums up the reasons why social scientists have often neglected to enquire from children themselves as to what they know, understand and experience. Returning to Japan, we find that the influence of Shintoism resulted in similar assumptions about childhood. Traditional beliefs about childhood in Japan assumed that a child was a gift from the gods, and as such the child was understood in society to be born pure in nature. In fact, a child was traditionally believed to exist in the realm of the gods until the age of 7 years (Nigolian 1994). This view is not unlike Western Christian beliefs where it was also believed that the age of reason was 7 years and that this age marked was the point when a child would know right from wrong (Shapiro and Perry 1976). The implications of these traditional beliefs for society and child rearing were significant. It was believed that adults needed to protect children from evil influences so that the children could develop their own innate good nature. In this context, mothers, mainly, were responsible for raising their children to become respectable adults. They were also responsible for raising the first boy to excel as the successor in patriarchal family systems.

Because of these assumptions about childhood both in the West and in the East, researchers have tended to focus on

questions regarding the socialisation of children, i.e. to what extent have children acquired the requisite knowledge and skills to become competent members of society. The socialisation perspective defines children as ‘incomplete’ or ‘in process’ rather than as full members of society. We have only had an interest in measuring and observing children from the outside in terms of their future capacity as adults. Until recently, generally speaking, children’s voices have not been recognised as important either in research or in education and wider society. Children, as is said in German, lacked *Mündigkeit* which means maturity or, more literally, the capacity of speaking for themselves. It is the case that others tend to speak for them, and these tend to be mothers and/or female teachers who will often carry and transfer an unconscious bias developed in their socialisation into normative cultures. In research on school children, teachers (mostly female) assess children’s personalities, abilities and promise. These unconscious biases have been found to influence how teachers relate to and represent the children in their classrooms, particularly in terms of gender and social class (Renehan 2006; Skelton et al. 2009; Schmude and Jackisch 2019), reinforcing normative lifestyles with little attention to the voice of children.

I mentioned earlier the seminal works conducted by Dan Olweus and how his early work has influenced so much of the research on bullying that has followed over the past 40 years. It could be said that a singular model of research has been applied to most subsequent studies on bullying. Use of Olweus’ definition and related self-report questionnaire on bullying has been extensive in international research. This approach, however, has been critiqued on the basis that it does not account for nuances in different cultural meanings and terminology associated with the concept of bullying. For example, Smith et al. (2002) point to the fact that in Japan, the term ‘*ijime*’ is used as a bullying equivalent, but the term implies less of a focus on physical violence and greater emphasis on social manipulation. So given just these different cultural meanings and terminology, it is difficult to apply a single research instrument in every context with every child as if they were all the same. Furthermore, the criticism by Lee (2004) of the approach recommended by Olweus (1993) argues that such an approach could possibly be regarded as value-laden and reflects the power of the researcher to define bullying, and this leads to the exclusion of related behaviours. Olweus’ Bullying Questionnaire and other frequently used research instruments such as the Moods and Feelings Questionnaire often carry gendered assumptions about what is considered good behaviour for males and females. This can set up boys and girls to be considered only in terms of narrow binary conceptions of gender, ignoring sexuality and other

individual and social traits. Essentially in this type of research, children are subjects rather than collaborators in that research is done on them rather than with them. This has implications for those who are being asked to create policies and procedures that include definitions of bullying. Maybe some of our policies and programmes in the West have not been as successful as they could have been because they are based on data from studies where the local culture and experience of the child were not considered as much as it should have been. This was a lesson learned in Japan where initial efforts to tackle bullying were purely adaptations of programmes from the West. In recent years, however, greater attention has been given to the specific experience and culture of school children in Japan resulting in some new successful child-centred initiatives (Toda 2019). The core challenge here for policymakers and schools is how to develop a workable definition that sufficiently covers various types of aggressive behaviour and shapes effective school-based programmes to tackle bullying and cyberbullying.

Recent Influence of the New Sociology of Childhood

A new sociology of childhood approach rejects a transmission model of development and education (Durkheim 1975) where children are understood to merely internalise the values and normative behaviours of society. More recent research and theories show that children are not just passive recipients but active agents in their socialisation process. It is now argued that children are both constructed by structure and also active agents, acting in and upon structure. They do not simply internalise the world, but strive to make sense of the world and to participate in it. By active participation in social interactions, children and teenagers incorporate and co-construct many social constructions of various aspects of their social life. It is argued then that we need to investigate how they make sense of social situations in order better to understand their actions and interaction patterns.

According to the new sociology of childhood, children are social actors in their world. We talk about the idea of interpretive reproduction as the means by which children make sense of their world and their experiences. The term interpretive captures innovative and creative aspect of children’s participation in society. Children produce and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns. The term *reproductive* captures the idea that children do not simply internalise society and culture but also actively contribute to cultural production and change. For example, children are known to play with gender rather than simply

accepting adult definitions, they establish within their own peer group cultures and systems that make sense to them (Corsaro 2012).

Both the socialisation and the developmental psychology perspectives have tended to prompt scholars to write about children as if *all children were the same* regardless of social location or context. The ‘new’ sociological perspective stresses ‘a *plurality* of childhoods’ not only within the same society but also across the settings in which children conduct their everyday lives. Using a social constructionist view, scholars focus on how particular cultural representations of children affect children’s relationships, rights and responsibilities. Scholars in the ‘new’ sociology advocate recognising that children in different social locations have different childhoods and that their experience of childhood changes from one context to another. Children are not all the same in every situation and context.

Scholars argue that no matter how benign parents, teachers and other adults may be, relationships between adults and children are characterised by differential power resources. Hence, based on the situation, dependence in relationships with adults may capture the experience of children better than socialisation, which characterises children as deficient relative to adults rather than disadvantaged or oppressed by them. The crucial distinction that makes children *children* is that they are *not adults*; as individuals and as a social group, they lack adulthood. This lack can be defined variously as deficiency, disadvantage and/or oppression. The components may vary according to individual and societal standpoint, but intergenerational relationships between children and adults are established in such a way that children are always inferior to adults and find it harder to have their rights vindicated (Mayall 1994; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt 2014).

This view of childhood as oppression is countered in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). The four foundational principals of the *Convention* are key to understanding how to undertake research with children and to plan initiatives to improve their lives such as in an anti-bullying programmes. The four general principles (United Nations 1989) are:

- That all the rights guaranteed by the Convention must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (Article 2)
- That the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3)
- That every child has the right to life, survival and development (Article 6)
- That the child’s views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (Article 12)

So, if we start our anti-bullying research and initiatives to tackle bullying with a new sociology of childhood perspective

as represented in the UN Convention, we find ourselves starting our work with children with their rights. We now begin to plan our research and anti-bullying programmes differently.

- Involving children and young people as respondents, co-researchers and commissioner of research.
- Avoid privileging adults and instead interact directly with children.
- Think carefully about suitable ways to gather data from children.
- Use qualitative, participatory and ethnographic approaches as they seem most appropriate.
- Making children visible through the way statistics are collected and reported.

In some studies, we have asked the children to explain to us why bullying happens, and the answers they give us are very interesting and important from the point of view of planning anti-bullying programmes.

They tell us that being perceived by their peers as different, odd or deviant in some way can lead to being bullied at school. This ties in with the image mentioned previously of the ‘nail that stands out’ and the need for conformity. According to stigma and labelling theories, when a social group labels a person as deviant, then he or she is understood to have violated important taken for granted social norms of the peer culture. Once the label is applied, the person can be justifiably victimised. Stigma theory (Goffman 1963) and labelling theory (Phelan and Link 1999) explain that it is almost impossible for individuals to improve their situation once they have had a stigmatised label assigned to them (Thornberg 2015). This highlights the importance of diversity education programmes to prevent these exclusionary situations occurring in schools (O’Higgins Norman 2008; Thornberg 2010).

Children also tell us that those who bully often do it because they want to increase their social positioning (Thornberg 2019), that is, to be more powerful than other children in the classroom and that bullying others serves to enable this. Schools are hierarchical in nature with children at the bottom of the pyramid. They often want to appear cool and are driven to obtain a higher social position in the school than other students, seeking to enhance, maintain or show off their power, status and popularity. Being seen to be cool and to have lots of friends can be a way to improve social position in school.

Finally, in our studies, we find children also explain that bullies have psychosocial problems and as such their acting out represents some deeper emotional problem. It is interesting that children can show such understanding and appreciation for mental health and emotional problems. This points us

to the need to develop classroom programmes that allow children to grow and express their emotions while at the same time providing counselling and support for children at a school and community level (Thornberg 2019).

In terms of interventions to tackle bullying and cyberbullying, international research has reported that if a school is to tackle these issues with any success, a whole school and community approach is often recommended (Smith 2014). This is described in different ways by different authors (Smith 2014), but the characteristics that are constant can be described as follows (O'Higgins Norman & Sullivan 2017):

Leadership and change management
 Policy development
 Curriculum planning
 School ethos
 Student voice and bystanders
 Student support services
 Partnership with parents and local communities

What has been missing from many of these whole school approaches is a recognition of the importance of the voice and agency of the child. Anti-bullying initiatives will be more successful if they are commissioned, designed and evaluated with children. I realise that this is challenging for us as researchers and educators who have honed our skills and expertise over many years. However, if our work is to really make a difference, we need to extend the scope of our expertise to include partnership with children and young people who are ultimately the experts in what is like to be a child today (Kellett 2010). While other fields of study have made considerable progress in adopting this approach (Lundy et al. 2019, I think many of us who work in the field of bullying studies have come to it later than in other fields. This is due to a number of factors not least an over reliance on quantitative research methods and the related dominance of particular branches of sociology and psychology in driving research and initiatives in our field.

Furthermore, now that we are coming around to the realisation that research and responses to bullying and cyberbullying must include at least an acknowledgment of the importance of the voice and agency of children, O'Brien and Dadswell (2020) warn that it is not enough to merely acknowledge that children and young people have a right to be heard and to actively participate in research and initiatives to tackle bullying and cyberbullying, but they must be provided with opportunities that are not 'one off' or 'add on' activities; instead they should be embedded within the system to accommodate their participation as partners in research and responses to tackle bullying and cyberbullying. This is a point taken up by Lundy (2018) although she acknowledges that a tokenistic approach to collective child participation might be a

useful and necessary step on a journey towards more meaningful engagement with children. Either way some researchers in the field of bullying are now beginning to lead research and to develop initiatives that attempt to include a greater acknowledgement of the voice and agency of the child (Thornberg 2010; O'Brien 2019; White et al. 2019).

Not only will this approach be more effective, but it will also respect the rights of the child and go towards fulfilling our obligations and objectives under Article 12(1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However, as I have already suggested, such an approach to research and the development of related initiatives to tackle bullying in schools and online brings with it many challenges to the established order within the field of bullying studies. One such challenge is in the area of research ethics. Traditionally, adults have decided what is best for children, including what protects them from harm. Ethical standards are of course necessary to ensure that children and young people are not taken advantage of during the research process and that the researcher does not put his/her needs ahead of the needs of the child. However, when it comes to working ethically with children as respondents, co-researchers and commissioner of research, we must be careful not to allow traditional views of childhood to get in the way of allowing children their right to express themselves and to be heard by society on how they are affected by bullying and cyberbullying. Children and young people have a right to be heard and to be involved in anything that affects them; as such our assumptions and ethical frameworks must change to ensure that these rights are fulfilled. I suggest that university ethics committees need to involve children and young people in producing standards for ethical research and in evaluating research proposals that involve children and young people as respondents, co-researchers and/or commissioner of research.

Conclusion

In this lecture, I have explored traditional assumptions about childhood and the impact of these assumptions on research about childhood and specifically about bullying. I have argued that over almost 50 years, these assumptions led to a dominant discourse in bullying research and related initiatives that was characterised by a particular view of childhood. This view of childhood tended to focus on questions about the extent to which children had acquired the requisite knowledge and skills to become competent adult members of society. This socialisation perspective assumes that children are 'incomplete' adults rather than full members of society in their own right. Consequently, researchers have only had an interest in measuring and observing children in terms of their future capacity as adults. Until relatively recently, generally speaking, children's voices have not been recognised as important either

in research or in education and wider society. However, when we consider the perspective of children's rights and apply a new sociology of childhood approach, our work with children moves beyond traditional assumptions and begins to be underpinned by a view of childhood that recognises that children have agency, are diverse and develop meaningful relationships, ultimately creating their own view of the world around them. Consequently, this changes our approach to research and the development of responses to bullying in school and online. It is clear that our work with children has to fundamentally change to recognise the experience of childhood as something that is valid and contains within it a set of rights that are fundamental to their general wellbeing and specifically to the future success of tackling bullying in schools and cyberspace.

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