# Capacity Building

Support to build sufficient capacity for successful implementation

Introduction to capacity building

Schools that assess and improve capacity to implement strategies to improve student wellbeing, develop social skills and reduce bullying are more likely to ensure its actions are effective, sustainable and system wide. Sufficient leadership, organisational support, resources, and strategy compatibility with school needs are crucial to optimise impact.
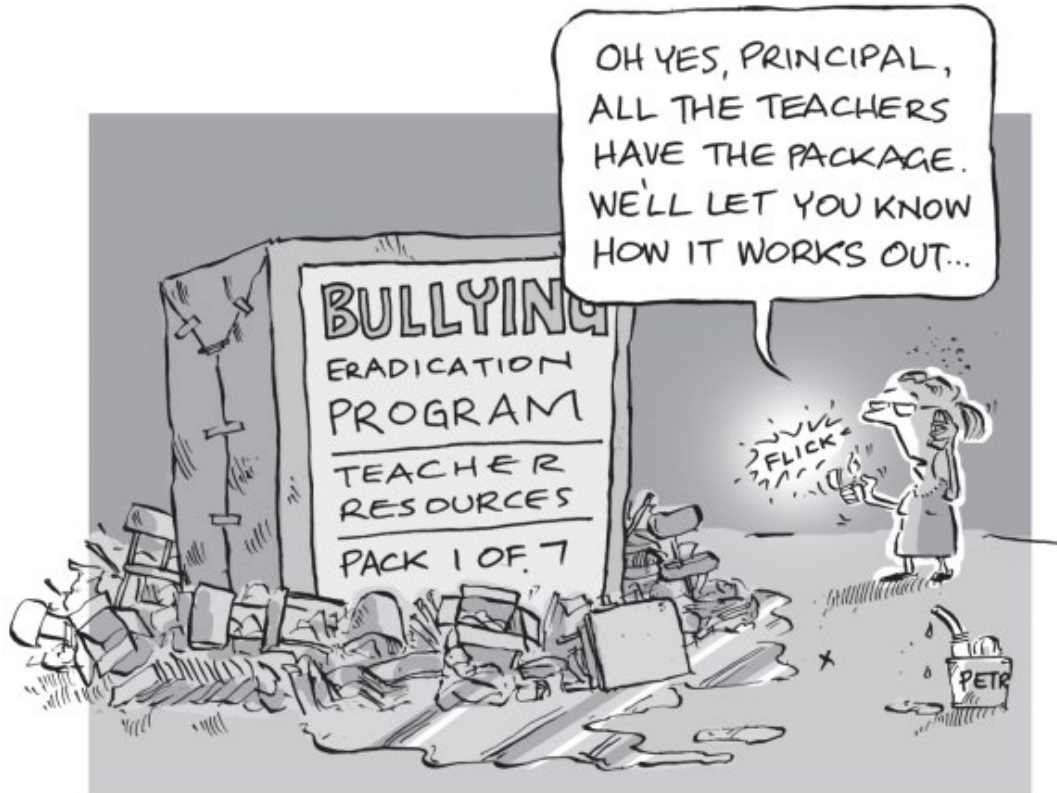
The success of any reform, whether it is a new literacy or pastoral care strategy, is dependent not only on the strategies or practices but how well they are implemented. Even if the practices are evidence-based and found to be effective, it is not sufficient to ensure positive outcomes for students in every school. The "what" (program activities) plus strategies that support "how" these activities will be implemented increases the chance of positive and sustainable outcomes for students.

Why do we need to assess and improve capacity support?

How to create positive outcomes for students.
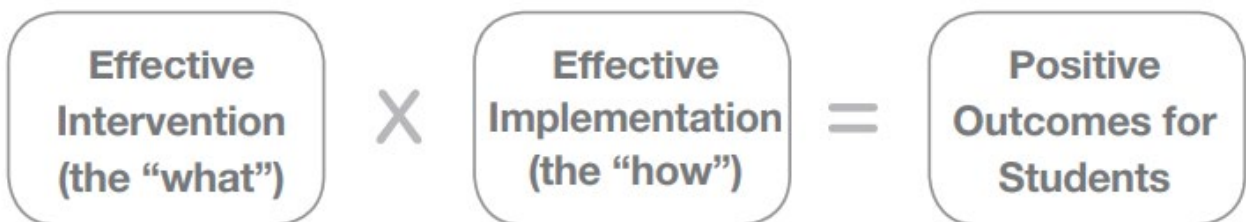For educators, the maths is simple:

Figure 12: How to create positive outcomes for students

Because schools are complex systems, positive change to support effective implementation of a program usually requires a whole-school approach that is delivered in sufficient quantity to students, staff and parents.

A leading expert on educational change, Michael Fullan, states the three basics of school priority and educational change should be numeracy, literacy and wellbeing (1). While it is well known that healthy students learn better, student wellbeing is seldom given the same priority as other educational areas. When schools take on programs such as Friendly Schools, they are not only achieving objectives that aim to enhance student wellbeing but also student learning for numeracy and literacy. Whereas classroom learning activities specifically target student social and emotional skills which in turn reduce student bullying behaviours, whole-school prevention strategies usually involve broad activities that enhance wellbeing, safety, pastoral care and build a supportive school culture.

Fullan also states that successful educational change is based on the improvements of relationships (1). Bullying is a relationship issue and ways to reduce these behaviours are through improving relationships and social skills, creating a positive culture of support and respect and engaging students, staff and parents so they are connected to their school as a community. Building positive relationships between students, between staff and students, and between staff members is crucial not only in achieving change that is supported by everyone, but a school culture that is positive, inclusive and does not tolerate bullying behaviours.

Lastly, Fullan argues that the way to successfully engage and motivate the school community to participate in change is through capacity building (1). Fullan describes capacity building as a powerful, actionable concept that includes a "policy, strategy, or action taken that increases the collective efficacy of a group to improve student learning through new knowledge, enhanced resources, and greater motivation on the part of the people working individually and together" (1). He suggests that the balance between assessment and capacity building has not been achieved, indicating too much emphasis has been placed on standards and assessments and less on action in real contexts (1). While schools are aware of the need to adopt evidence-based practices that prevent and manage bullying, many are faced with insufficient capacity in terms of resources, teacher training and systematic support, to ensure they are implemented successfully (2, 3). Even when a school chooses an evidence-based program like Friendly Schools, they are often not implemented with sufficient fidelity to ensure success(4-6) and furthermore, not sufficiently sustained to positively influence student and parent outcomes (7). Hence recommendations to improve the effectiveness of bullying interventions in schools are largely focused on implementation and sustainability issues (8).

Findings from the Friendly Schools, Friendly Families study (9) showed that over time schools that focus on capacity building strategies as part of overall program delivery, demonstrate improved implementation outcomes. In the study, those schools that received high capacity support demonstrated higher whole-school implementation capacity, higher program implementation levels and higher levels of parent engagement, a primary outcome of this study, compared to schools receiving no capacity support (10). Parent engagement with the school was significantly higher in those schools that implemented, over a three-year period, a whole-school intervention that included specific strategies that assessed and built their capacity to engage parents.

Implementation is defined as "a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions" (11). The known dimensions of a bullying program may be new curriculum, new policy or changes to classroom management. Activities that aim to build the capacity of staff to implement these activities might be professional learning for staff, additional resources such as time for staff to plan for the new activities, and assessment of how compatible the new practices are working within existing structures. There are many factors that can influence the effectiveness of the implementation process, in fact over 300 variables have been identified (12).

Alongside the implementation process itself there are another four domains described by Damschroder and colleagues (13) which play an influential role the implementation of a program:

1) **Intervention characteristics**

Intervention source, evidence of strength and quality, relative advantage over what was done before, adaptability, trialability, complexity, design, quality and packaging and cost of the intervention.

2) **Outer setting**

Extent to which school needs, as well as the barriers and facilitators in meeting those needs, are known and prioritised within the school, degree to which school is networked to external organisations; competitive pressure to implement an intervention and external policies and incentives.

3) **Inner setting**

Structural characteristics such as size, maturity and social architecture of a school; quality of formal and informal communications within the school; school culture, norms and values; and implementation climate such as the shared receptivity of involved individuals to an intervention.

4) **Characteristics of individuals involved**

Knowledge and beliefs about the intervention; self-efficacy to believe they can execute the course of action to achieve implementation goals; individual stage of change in progressing skills and use of the intervention; individual identification and commitment to their school; and other personal attributes such as values, motivation, capacity and competence.

School interventions that aim to reduce bullying behaviours require not only successful implementation to be effective, but also sufficient capacity to enable this implementation. To build school capacity to implement bullying prevention programs the following elements are considered key: (14)

- ➢ a committed and engaged principal and leadership team
- ➢ key staff and students who act as "knowledge brokers"
- ➢ allocated resources such as staff time and evidence-based tools
- ➢ system support in terms of policies, procedures and structures
- ➢ regular staff professional learning
- ➢ compatibility with school community needs
- ➢ collaborative partnerships with parents, agencies and wider community

Capacity building in schools to improve the implementation of programs to reduce bullying behaviours must consider the context in which they are being implemented and how this can affect program outcomes.

Key elements of capacity building

Committed and engaged leadership

To increase staff commitment to implement a new reform, strong leadership and a coordinating team of staff is often necessary (15, 16). The school team needs to include representatives from across the school community. It is important the roles of students, teachers, administration staff, parents and community members in the change process are recognised and consulted if not represented on this team. The school team acts as "knowledge brokers" whose responsibility lies in communicating knowledge throughout the school community and facilitating change in a coordinated way. When responding to bullying incidents an additional structure to the "implementation team" may be necessary, such as a team involving teachers who know the students, the school nurse and school counsellors.

<u>Strategies for good practice:</u>
1. *The principal and the leadership team communicate to the whole-school community a clear vision for increasing social skills and reducing bullying as a priority commitment.*
   - The school vision needs to be developed collaboratively with students, staff and parents.
   - The vision must be clearly and consistently communicated by the principal and the leadership team through a number of mediums such as the school website, newsletters, assemblies and staff meetings.

2. *The principal and the leadership team are actively engaged in leading school action to reduce bullying.*
   - Seeing leaders in the school "walk-the-talk" demonstrates to the school community that the principal and the leadership team are highly committed to making the school a safer and more supportive environment for students.

3. *The principal and the leadership team enable and encourage all members of the whole-school community (staff, students, families) to actively participate in planning and decision-making about school action to reduce bullying through regular, planned monitoring and feedback.*
   - Surveys with students and staff for example, can inform how, where and what types of bullying incidents may be occurring in the school. Surveys can also provide feedback on the effectiveness of current strategies and suggestions for change.
   - Additionally, a student suggestion box and allocated time at staff meetings can be used to obtain feedback and monitor actions being implemented in the school.

4. *The principal and the leadership team develop and promote an effective and clear whole-school policy outlining strategies, structures and systems to reduce bullying.*
   - This may involve training key staff with the skills and knowledge required for policy development and implementation and allocating time for staff to collect information to determine school needs.

5. *Key staff interested in pastoral care, led by a coordinator, take responsibility for helping other staff to implement school strategies to reduce bullying.*
   - The team typically comprises teacher representatives from across the year levels, at least one administrator (principal or deputy principal), parent representatives whose children represent different year levels, and other key members from pastoral care and student services.

Actions for the school team:

- Identify the team coordinator.
- Define the structure and roles of the team.
- Hold informal discussions with key staff, e.g. administrators, teachers, support staff, to establish interest and support.
- Provide potential members with the key information they need to make an informed decision about their participation and role on the team.
- Establish the team and give it a title and focus, for example, "Pastoral Care", "Student Wellbeing" or "Safe and Supportive" team.
- Identify the skills and knowledge required by the team to establish common and consistent understandings about social skill development and bullying behaviours.
- Introduce the team to the whole staff and define its role, which may include:
  - working with the school community to establish common understandings and consistent school responses to incidents of bullying
  - facilitating the development and review of the policies that promote positive social relations and safe and supportive learning environments for all members of the school community
  - reflecting upon and reviewing school actions to reduce bullying

6. *The principal and the leadership team engage the support of wider systems to provide leadership, mentoring and support to the school in their actions to reduce bullying.*
   - Identifying external supports (e.g., professional learning provided by local education authorities) can encourage staff to try new ideas and build confidence to overcome sustainability issues.

Planning for system support and resources

The following school processes are important in facilitating successful program implementation:

- providing adequate time for the team coordinator to plan and provide leadership
- adequate planning time for team staff
- accessible intervention materials to all staff
- intervention plans that are incorporated into school planning processes
- adequate training support for schools
- technical assistance and coaching and quality monitoring
- feedback and communication channels between team members

The following are some strategies suggested by schools to help address the issue of limited/competing staff time:

- A Friendly Schools' notice board was placed in the staff room for team members to communicate with each other and the whole-school staff, and for staff to provide feedback on policy issues.
- Activities were monitored through teacher logs and in-staff performance management plans to formally acknowledge their work and the time allocated to working on the implementation process.
- Teaching staff were given a half day relief from teaching for training and planning time to program the recommended learning activities into their classes.
- The policy was integrated with other priority programs in the school with similar goals to make planning and implementation easier. The policy implementation was then less likely to be seen by staff as another thing to "do".

Strategies for good practice:

1. *School actions to reduce bullying and resources identified to implement them are integrated into school strategic planning.*
   - Identification of current education state and system level polices and guidelines that are consistent with the schools' proposed objectives, can help to justify and support this issue as a high priority.
   - Planning for the provision of funding to support implementation of these school activities is also essential to enable them to proceed.

2. *Strategies to reduce bullying are integrated into existing structures, programs, partnerships and accountability processes where possible.*
   - Pooling of resources and staff time to achieve similar objectives can mean less time and energy by staff is needed and the likelihood of sustainability increased.

3. *Adequate time to plan, implement and sustain school action to reduce bullying is allowed (three to five years to initiate, five to seven years to sustain).*
   - Small objectives and steps that are set yearly will ensure that successes are celebrated along the way and that it is a manageable process for schools to build on over time.

4. *Adequate numbers of staff are part of the pastoral care or student wellbeing team to ensure the workload is shared and the impact on staff is minimised.*
   - Ensuring the team has representatives across the school community by positions or roles can help to select new staff to replace those who leave.
     - For example, having a coordinator of year group positions connected to the team means that all year groups are represented and staff in these positions are automatically nominated.

5. *The team and the coordinator have adequate time to meet regularly, plan and facilitate school action.*
   - This is particularly necessary at the initial planning and policy development stages in the exploring and engaging parts of the implementation process.
   - While set times for the team to meet regularly are essential, identifying numerous channels of communication between team members means that actions can be moving along without needing to meet face-to-face as often.

6. *The principal and leadership team ensure teaching staff have allocated time in the curriculum to develop students' key student understandings and competencies to encourage positive social behaviour.*
   - Lessons that build student social skills, positive bystander actions and skills such as how to stop and report bullying behaviours are key to reducing bullying prevalence.

Ensuring compatibility with school community needs

A school initiative is more likely to succeed if it is perceived by staff to be simple and easy to implement, is better than what they were doing before and is compatible with school priorities, student needs and school ethos (12).

The Bridge-It model suggests implementation success is more likely when school staff are prepared for their role, committed, skilled and experienced, willing, have compatible job expectations and belief in the relative advantage of the innovation over current practice (12).

Training for staff is an important factor in achieving long-term sustainability or institutionalisation of school-based programs (17).

Strategies for good practice:
1. *Assessment of the school's capacity for implementing actions to reduce bullying is conducted to identify strengths, barriers and new opportunities.*
   - Research in schooling and capacity building suggests that each school's context and capacities are unique and, therefore, no blueprint for action can be proposed for all schools.
   - Once results from the student, staff and parent surveys create a picture of what is happening in the school and strategies are chosen to target areas of need, a capacity assessment can help to identify areas requiring capacity development.
   - Strategies to build capacity may include prioritising the program in school planning documents, allocating resources such as staff time to plan or program strategies, increasing knowledge and competencies through staff professional learning, student curriculum and workshops for families as well as leadership structures to mentor and provide support to other staff.

2. *Pre-existing capacities and successful practices within the school to reduce bullying are valued and promoted to encourage a sense of collective self-efficacy in the school community.*
   - A review of past and current school practices is helpful to identify strategies that are working well and ones that have not worked well in the past - allows opportunities for the new policy or program to be integrated into existing structures, partnerships and accountability processes so that efforts are not duplicated and limited resources are maximised.

3. *Surveys of staff and students are conducted regularly to evaluate and inform school action to reduce bullying.*

- Online or paper-based self-report surveys are a reliable way to determine the extent of an issue in the school and perceptions of staff and students to inform school planning and enable targeting of resources.

4. *Strategies chosen to reduce bullying are easy for the whole-school community to implement.*
   - Achieving staff "buy-in" is important and can be influenced by the perceived complexity and length of the intervention, staff perceptions of how it will fi t with their current role, their perceptions that it will be better than what they were doing before, and their competency and understanding of the program's underlying principles to fulfil their part in implementation.

5. *Any "disruptions" occurring inside and outside the school environment that will influence the success of school actions to reduce bullying are acknowledged and ways to overcome these are discussed.*
   - The process of identifying disruptions is useful to help explain why some strategies may have not worked as well as expected.

Summary of capacity building

The development of positive social skills and the prevention of bullying behaviours is a whole-school issue. However, little change will occur unless staff, students and families have an understanding of what has happened previously in the school to reduce bullying, and how successful this has been. Based on this knowledge, school leaders can engage the whole-school community to set actions and assemble resources to achieve change. Establishing timelines and implementing activities needs committed leadership support, adequate resource planning and ensuring compatibility with school needs. Finally, evaluating school action is important not only to identify benefits relating to student behavioural outcomes, but also staff, student and family efficacy and perceptions of improvement over previous action.

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