

Title: Talking about Learning Disability: *Promoting positive perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities in Scottish schools*

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Abstract

Pupils with intellectual disabilities are one of the most bullied groups in the school system and in local communities. Moreover, young people also play a significant role in hate crimes against people with intellectual disabilities of all ages beyond the school gates. This paper describes the development of a research informed programme of lessons for children in mainstream secondary schools, aimed at counteracting bullying towards people with intellectual disabilities by promoting empathy and more positive attitudes towards them. A literature review, a review of current practice and the experiences and views of young people with intellectual disabilities and their families all contributed to the development of the programme. Data from subsequent piloting and feasibility work was used to finalise the programme which consists of the following five lessons concerning: i) difference and disability, ii) an understanding of intellectual disability, iii) the nature and impact of disablist bullying towards people with intellectual disabilities and iv) opportunities for inclusion. One conclusion from this work is that there needs to be further research to explore the impact of school based interventions, promoting an understanding of people with intellectual disabilities, in the wider community. Teachers delivering the lessons may have greater influence than transitory campaigns to counteract bullying and promote positive attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities. However, a first step is to ensure that teachers delivering the lessons have an understanding of people with intellectual disabilities.

Introduction

There are no published evaluations of school based anti-bullying interventions concerning young people with intellectual disabilities. Despite longstanding attempts to promote the inclusion of children and young people with intellectual disabilities in mainstream school settings where they are educated alongside their peers without intellectual disabilities, they continue to be some of the most socially excluded and bullied pupils in the school system (Green, Collingwood and Ross, 2010; Naylor, Walters, Dawson, Digby and Emerson, 2012). Even attending a special school does not necessarily help pupils to escape victimisation beyond the school gates (Kelly and Norwich, 2004; Cooney, Jahoda, Gumley and Knott, 2006). Young people also play a significant role in hate crime against people with intellectual disabilities above school age living in the wider community (DRC, 2004; Gravell, 2012; Beadle-Brown et al, 2013).

A barrier to tackling the bullying faced by young people with intellectual disabilities has been the reluctance to identify and or label them in schools. There has been a concern that using terms such as 'learning disability' or 'intellectual disability', is stigmatising and would set these children and young people apart from their peers as learners in the school (Norwich, 2014). For this reason, children and young people with intellectual disabilities have been labelled more broadly as having 'additional support needs', a term used to describe all pupils who might need extra help with learning, including those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia or those who might have behavioural difficulties. Although the wish to avoid formally labelling children and young people with intellectual disabilities in the school system is understandable, this does not protect them from being seen as different. Nor does it stop children and young people with intellectual disabilities from being informally labelled and bullied or socially marginalised by their peers (Cooney et al, 2006; Mencap, 2007, Stalker and Moscardini, 2013).

A growing awareness of the negative impact of bullying and hate crime on the lives of people with intellectual disabilities has concentrated minds at a policy level internationally (Emerson, 2010; Scior and Werner, 2015). School-based interventions have been used to tackle stigma and discriminatory attitudes in a number of areas, including mental health, race, and attitudes towards the lesbian, gay and transgender

community (Mind, www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/resources-youth-professionals; SeeMe, www.seemescotland.org; Show Racism the Red Card, www.srtrc.org; LGBT Scotland, www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/pro-toolkit). Adopting a school-based approach to changing young people's attitudes to their peers with intellectual disabilities has been suggested by Scior and Werner (2015). Such interventions have the possibility of influencing the views of the wider community the schools are a part of.

This paper outlines the development of a research informed school-based intervention designed to help pupils gain a greater understanding of people with intellectual disabilities. Three forms of enquiry were used to underpin the development of the lessons: i) evidence from the anti-bullying research literature, ii) review of existing best practice, through an event organised to bring together organisations in Scotland actively involved in counteracting bullying, and iii) exploring the views of people with intellectual disabilities and their families themselves, sought through a series of case studies, capturing the experience of young people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

The key findings from the three strands of underpinning work are described, followed by an explanation of how this evidence helped to inform the content and delivery of a programme of lessons for young people in mainstream secondary school. The aim of the lessons is to counteract bullying towards people with intellectual disabilities by promoting empathy and more positive attitudes towards them. Results from initial pilot and feasibility work are then briefly described before a framework for the future use and evaluation of the resource is outlined.

Evidence underpinning the development process

The literature (how is bullying of people with intellectual disabilities currently understood)

A key first question for us to consider was what a targeted intervention concerning people with intellectual disabilities might add to the generic anti-bullying work already being delivered in schools. Earlier work on bullying in schools tended to focus on the individual pathology of bullying, seeking to determine the characteristics of both the

bully and the victim. From this perspective the bullying of children and young people with an intellectual disability tended to be linked to their vulnerability; they were viewed as having characteristics and displaying behaviours that made them more likely to be bullied (McLaughlin, Byers and Peppin-Vaughn, 2010). The key vulnerability factors identified were communication difficulties and a lack of social competence (Luciano and Savage, 2007; Tywman *et al*, 2010). However, the focus of anti-bullying work shifted away from individual pathology and took greater account of the social relational and contextual nature of bullying. In relation to people with intellectual disabilities, this meant that attention was given to the structural and social factors that lead to young people becoming socially marginalised. This included segregated schooling and segregated teaching within mainstream schools, lack of social opportunities and identity based prejudicial bullying (Stalker and Moscardini, 2013). Thus, there was a growing recognition that people with intellectual disabilities may be more vulnerable to bullying not only because of their own impairments and perceived vulnerability, but also because of social and structural factors and negative societal attitudes towards them.

If young people hold negative attitudes towards their peers with intellectual disabilities then they may be less empathic and more likely to exploit their vulnerabilities. This means that while children and young people with an intellectual disability can experience the same type of bullying behaviours as non-disabled children and young people, they can also be subject to particular forms of harassment (Holzabauer, 2008). Thus, young people with intellectual disabilities may experience manipulative bullying where the perpetrator tries to get the victim to act in a certain way; conditional friendship where the victim is 'allowed' to be in the friendship group only on certain conditions and exploitative bullying where features of a child's condition are used to bully them (McLaughlin, Byers and Oliver, 2012). In addition, some children and young people with intellectual disability may be unaware they are being bullied and this may also be the case with adults in the community.

Despite carrying out an extensive review of the literature, we were not able to find any evaluations of school based approaches to counteracting the bullying of people with intellectual disabilities. Hence, it was decided to focus on the large literature concerning

generic anti-bullying approaches (Olweus 1994; Smith, Pepler and Rigby 2004; Myton, DiGuseppi, Gough, Taylor and Logan, 2002; Farrington and Ttofi, 2009; Thompson and Smith, 2010; Barbero, Hernández, Esteban and García, 2012), and to consider whether successful elements of generic interventions adequately address the bullying of young people with intellectual disabilities.

Farrington and Ttofi's (2009) comprehensive review of all known evaluations of school based anti-bullying programmes included a meta-analysis of the general pattern of change. They identified twenty distinct components from the different interventions and examined their effectiveness. However, they did not consider what elements of the programmes they reviewed were most effective at addressing different types of bullying, targeted at particular groups of individuals. Some elements, such as disciplining perpetrators and having proactive strategies such as playground supervision, are likely to prove just as helpful to children and young people with intellectual disabilities as to other pupils while a number of other intervention components, may prove more problematic for pupils with intellectual disabilities.

Farrington and Tofti, in common with several other meta analyses (Barbero et al, 2012; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross and Isava, 2008; Mytonn et al, 2002), highlighted the effectiveness of working with victims of bullying to improve their assertiveness skills and to deal more effectively with being bullied. However training in social skills and teaching coping strategies are less straightforward for young people with intellectual disabilities, whose cognitive impairments are likely to make it more challenging for them to learn such skills and to become more resilient. The reviewed approaches also imply that children and young people have social bonds with their peers and that part of overcoming bullying and victimisation is to build stronger and more positive peer relationships. Again, this is not necessarily straightforward for young people with intellectual disabilities, who are often socially marginalised (Fredrickson & Furnham 2004; Kuhne and Weiner, 2000; Nabuzoka and Smith, 1993), even when they do not face unpleasantness or hostility from peers (Jahoda and Pownall, 2014). This suggests that a key step is to try to close the social gap between young people with intellectual disabilities and their peers. Fredrickson (2010) argues that one way to do this is to inform children and young people about what it means to have an intellectual disability.

She reasons that this understanding enhances peer acceptance and can lead to respectful, helpful relationships between children and young people with intellectual disability and their peers. She posits that these relationships have the potential to develop into friendships within a context of positive opportunities for action.

Whole school interventions, another effective measure (Farrington and Tofti, 2009; Mytonn et al, 2002; Smith et al, 2004) also presents a challenge. Whole school interventions imply that all children and young people share a similar position within the school community. This is not necessarily the experience of children and young people with an intellectual disability, as they may attend separate classes for particular subjects or they may be located in a separate teaching block or be educated in a separate 'special' school for children with additional support needs. Therefore, a starting point for a whole school intervention might be to help pupils understand who their peers with intellectual disabilities are, the lives they lead and the challenges they face both inside and outside school.

The existing generic anti-bullying literature does provide important evidence about the composition and delivery of effective interventions. Farrington and Ttofi's analysis recognised a number of key process issues including the active engagement of the children and young people through the use of 'videos, work with peers and co-operative group work'. They also found that children over the age of 11 years benefited most from anti-bullying interventions, suggesting that this may have be due to the developmental stage of the children and their ability to grasp the concepts being used. Whether or not this was due to the particular content of the interventions or the mode of delivery, it highlighted the importance of producing materials that are engaging and appropriate for the age group of the target children. The length and intensity was also a significant factor, with longer and more intensive interventions being identified as more effective.

The evidence from the literature indicates that generic interventions do not adequately address the bullying of people with intellectual disabilities. In particular, generic interventions fail to take account of negative attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities and their wider social position, both within the school system and society. However, the literature does point to important process and delivery factors which

could be incorporated effectively into a targeted anti-bullying intervention

Understanding existing practice

Enable Scotland, a third sector organisation working on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, hosted an event to bring together practitioners working to reduce the bullying of people with intellectual disabilities. This event involved a formal meeting and workshops. The purpose of the day was twofold: firstly to share information on current initiatives and secondly to deliberate upon the content and delivery of a school-based anti-bullying intervention. A total of sixteen people attended, from 10 organisations across the state and voluntary sector. The discussion on current practice revealed that most school-based interventions tended to be reactive; these included restorative practices and programmes to promote the resilience of young people who were bullied. It was attended by a researcher who observed the proceedings making field notes throughout and who also had access to the minutes of the formal meeting.

Analysis of the event revealed that participants only identified two forms of activity targeted at the bullying of people with intellectual disabilities. School assemblies were used to raise awareness of prejudiced based bullying and input on disability hate crime was provided by statutory agencies such as Police Scotland or community based charities. Organisations working with people with intellectual disabilities outwith schools had also developed community based 'keeping safe' initiatives, including theatre workshops, to support people with intellectual disabilities to feel more confident to recognise and report hate crime. The meeting minutes reflected a strong consensus observed by the researcher about the need for curriculum-based resources taking account of the lived experience of individuals with an intellectual disability, which could be delivered nationally.

Evidence from people with intellectual disabilities and their families

In the second strand of this work the research team sought the views of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Three voluntary organisations and one school for young people with intellectual disabilities were approached and a convenience sample of broad age range of participants were recruited. Twelve young people aged

between 14 to 20 years and six adults aged between 24 to 54 years were recruited for in depth interviewing. The inclusion criteria were that participants should have an intellectual disability, be able to give consent and had experienced bullying. In addition two focus groups (n=6, n=7) were held. Participants were young people (aged 13-17) with intellectual disabilities also recruited via voluntary organisations and school. All of the participants, and the families of five of the young people, were asked about their experiences of bullying and social exclusion and also for their views on what should be done to counteract bullying. Upon obtaining consent we filmed some of the interviews of the young people and their families as we anticipated that this content might contribute to the anti-bullying lessons themselves. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Findings from this strand of the work revealed that participants consistently took the view that supporting children and young people to understand and value difference and disability was important. It was seen a potentially effective way to tackle and help to prevent the bullying and harassment they had experienced because of their intellectual disabilities. Their perspective was consistent with the findings from other research and consultation exercises with disabled children and young people (Anti-bullying alliance, 2010; Stalker and Moscardini, 2013; Sykes, Groom and Desai, 2011). The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2012) has also recommended that schools contribute to preventing bullying and harassment by developing and using materials to help students understand disabled people and the social model of disability, thereby encouraging a better understanding and respect for diversity.

Synthesising the evidence to develop the lessons

Synthesising the evidence involved drawing from the literature review, our understanding of existing practice and views of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Drawing from the literature it is clear that generic anti-bullying interventions fail to address the negative attitudes underlying the prejudicial bullying of people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore they do not routinely take into account the particular individual needs and social challenges faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities. While some of the methods adopted to challenge other prejudicial attitudes can be adapted and developed to tackle the bullying of people with

intellectual disabilities, the particular difficulties faced by people with intellectual disabilities have to be recognised, otherwise how can prejudice be challenged and empathy promoted (Zitek and Hebl, 2007).

This position was supported by our empirical work which identified that it was important that pupils be made more aware of the different lives of people with intellectual disabilities. The synthesis of this evidence led us towards developing an intervention that could focus on respecting diversity and sharing knowledge in order to break down barriers and challenge assumptions about intellectual disability. On this basis it was decided that the most effective means of delivering an intervention with this focus and composition would be a series of lessons for pupils, aged 11-13, in the first and second years (S1 and S2) of their secondary schooling. At this stage of the development we were cautious that acknowledging and identifying impairment effects would not locate people with intellectual disabilities as the source of the problems faced but rather bring to the fore the social dimension and ways to challenge this. Thus the starting point of our anti-bullying resource was a wider position of *'talking about difference'*. Whilst an anti-bullying message remains at the core of the materials our resource was also an attempt to reduce the social gap between those with and without disabilities.

[Developing the intervention - a series of lessons](#)

The series of lessons that were developed begin with an appreciation of difference and disability more broadly (lessons 1 & 2). This provides a context for looking at what it means to have an intellectual disability (lessons 3 & 4), before going onto look at disablist bullying and encouraging pupils to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours (5 & 6). The lessons end by exploring potential opportunities for increased contact and activities between children and young people with and without intellectual disabilities (lesson 7). The intention is to help the pupils move from an understanding of diversity and disability to an understanding and appreciation of what it might be like to live with an intellectual disability. This background should help pupils to understand what it feels like for individuals to be bullied just because of their intellectual disability. The lessons conclude on a positive note by considering the opportunities and benefits of inclusion.

As the aim is to increase empathy as well as understanding, we endeavoured to create lessons that were interesting, informative and emotionally engaging. Throughout the lessons pupils are encouraged to play an active role and to generate their own ideas. Drawing upon the evidence of what works (Farrington and Tofti, 2009) we placed collaborative tasks and activities at the core of each lesson. We also use videos of young people with intellectual disabilities and family members talking about their experiences as stimulus materials. For example, an emotive film, recreating the experience of a young woman with Down's syndrome who was victimised on a bus going home from a swimming gala, was used to prompt discussion about the impact of bullying.

In line with Farrington and Tofti's findings, the lessons were targeted at young people in their first and second year of Secondary school, aged over 11 years old. As the existing anti-bullying literature shows, the key challenge is to try to ensure that a school-based intervention will have the necessary reach and longevity to produce meaningful and lasting effects (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009). Hence, we developed a series of lessons that fitted into the Personal and Social Education (PSE) component of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. Unlike current interventions to address the bullying of people with intellectual disabilities our lessons were delivered by teachers. Thus the materials were produced in collaboration with teachers and teacher educators, to ensure that they were relevant and appropriate for use in a classroom setting. Embedding these lessons into the PSE curriculum had the potential to allow all young people in their first or second year of Secondary education to work with these resources.

Feasibility and Acceptability of the Lessons

Following development of the lessons a feasibility study was carried out to establish i) the possibility of delivering the lessons and to examine teachers' perceptions of the ease of delivery of the lessons, ii) pupils' understanding of the lessons and their engagement with the materials, and iii) the acceptability of the lessons to the pupils and to the teachers delivering them. Initial feasibility work began in two schools in different local authority areas, followed by further work in three schools in another local authority area. This was effectively a convenience sample, consisting of local authorities and schools who were open to participating in the feasibility work. All the schools were from

the Central Belt of Scotland and covered both urban and more rural areas, with young pupils from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The feasibility work contributing to the development of the lessons consisted of semi structured individual and focus group interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews with pupils: A sample of 4 to 6 pupils, were interviewed individually immediately after each of the seven lessons (total=34). . The topics covered included: i) Understanding and Engagement - whether the pupils understood what the lesson was about and whether they could recall what they did during the lesson / what they had learned, ii) possible areas of confusion / what they liked and disliked about the lesson, iii) and whether the activities evoked empathy and understanding for their peers with intellectual disabilities.

Pupil focus groups: Eight pupils from three other participating schools took part in focus groups once the lessons had been completed (n=24). The pupil focus groups began by asking an open question about what participants recalled about the lessons, before discussing the activities and messages from each lesson. The group discussions were audio recorded.

Two focus groups were held with teachers, four teachers from one school and two from another school. Individual feedback was obtained from a further four teachers from three other schools. The topic guide for the teachers' focus groups and individual interviews centred on: i) teachers' perceptions of pupil engagement with and understanding of the lessons, ii) ease of delivery of the materials, including identifying sections that worked particularly well or that proved problematic.

Procedure

The interviews and focus groups took place in a room that afforded privacy. Pupils' responses on the interviews carried out after each lesson were recorded onto prepared response sheets. The focus groups and open ended interviews with teachers were audio recorded and transcribed.

Ethical approval for the feasibility study was granted by the University of Glasgow, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences Ethics Panel.

Analysis

A framework analysis was carried out on the responses from the individual pupil interviews and involved categorising the type of responses given by the pupils to the questions for each lesson. The transcripts of the data from the focus groups and teachers' interviews were analysed using a framework approach (Richie and Lewis, 2003).

Results from feasibility study

Across the two stages of the piloting process the lessons were successfully delivered to 17 classes in five schools, to a total of 390 pupil.

Pupil Post Lesson Interviews

(i) Knowledge and Understanding: The majority of pupils' responses indicated they had a good recall of both the content and the format of the lessons. Most pupils also demonstrated a good grasp of the individual lessons and there were no obvious sources of confusion. The pupils appeared particularly engaged with materials that called for discussion, problem solving and reflection with their peers, as shown by the following response:

I liked it when we were working in groups and got to discuss how people act towards people with disabilities and the difficulties they face. (S1 Male)

These discussions, initiated by the video and scenario materials, stimulated pupils' own thinking on inclusion.

If people have a disability they should be able to go to clubs and school with everyone else. ...And at work people should give people with a disability a chance to work alongside them. (S1 Male)

...that they should all be able to go to the same clubs because they're just the same as us. (S1 Female).

(ii) Pupils' engagement and empathy: All of the young people who were interviewed after the lessons on bullying expressed an emotional reaction, ranging from anger to sadness (shocked, disgusted, angry, sad).

Pupils' Focus Groups

In general, the findings from the pupils' focus groups were consistent with the data obtained from the individuals interviews carried out after each lesson. Their responses also revealed that they were emotionally engaged with the materials:

It (video) was about a lassie named Lucy. She won a gold medal for swimming. She takes the bus, gets on – the bullies said, 'Hi retard, mingo' and loads of insults. They take her flowers off her. I felt disgusted. (S1 male, Lesson 6)

Teachers' Focus Groups and individual interviews

(i) A mature response: All teachers reported that their pupils had engaged well with the materials; they spoke of them 'taking it seriously', 'responding to them very.. well, very sensitively' and also of the overall impact of the lessons. As one teacher explained:

In terms of the message – I think it definitely did have an impact. The children were sensitive towards the video clips. We talked about language around disability. It was good for them to hear from the families - There was a boy in my class who had a family member with Down's syndrome and it gave him a chance to talk about it. ...

(ii) Delivering the lessons and talking openly: Teachers reported no difficulties with the delivery of the lessons, commenting that the PowerPoint presentations for all of the lessons were self explanatory and easy to follow. Across the schools the teachers commented that open discussion of disability bullying was key to the success of the resources. As one teacher explained:

I think talking openly about disability and disability bullying is long overdue! I like how it started by getting them to think about difference and then moving on to harder stuff. I think it did need to be done over a period of weeks to reinforce the messages – I really liked it in the entirety.

(iii) A positive package: While they thought that the individual lessons worked in their own right and were straightforward to deliver, they particularly liked the progressive nature of the resource and how it ended with a positive message.

It was a good message to end with the way forward... more integration.

(iv) Creating space in the curriculum: There were concerns that seven lessons presented a timetabling difficulty. Indeed, in the second phase of the pilot, some schools struggled to complete the lessons in a reasonable timeframe due to other demands within the PSE curriculum. Teachers also commented on how individual lessons could be changed but opinions differed as to what activities should be reduced or extended.

(v) Importance for teachers: It was suggested that the resource could be used for Continuing Professional Development as many teachers have limited knowledge about intellectual disabilities and disablist bullying.

Implications of the feasibility work and final adaptations to the lessons

In addition to evidencing the feasibility of delivering the resource, the data helped us to identify how the resource might be improved, both in its overall shape and with respect to particular activities. Furthermore, it also highlighted the need for additional materials to support teachers to deliver the resource. As seven lessons had proved difficult for some schools to deliver in a reasonable time scale the programme was reduced to five lessons. This was achieved by refining lessons 1 and 2 into one lesson and removing lesson 5 because it contained material pupils had already covered in previous generic anti-bullying lessons. A number of other small changes were made to the exercises and materials to ensure they were engaging and relevant to the pupils and the format of the slides were also improved. In order to address some teachers' limited knowledge about intellectual disabilities, a series of online training videos were developed for teachers. These introduce the lessons and provide guidance about their delivery.

Discussion

The process of developing anti-bullying lessons described in this paper has aimed to build on existing research evidence and best practice, taking account of the views of

people with intellectual disabilities and their families. The lessons aim to help the young people to gain an understanding of who people with intellectual disabilities are and the lives they lead, as part of a positive introduction to difference. In this context the impact of bullying and hate crime are examined, before finishing by considering how greater inclusion can be promoted. The lessons were delivered successfully in all piloted schools and the pupils had grasped the key messages. Both teachers and young people also highlighted the mode of delivery as a key ingredient of the lessons. They found the videos and the more interactive activities to be the most thought provoking aspects of the lessons.

The lessons are novel because they are the first targeted anti-bullying resource concerning people with intellectual disabilities that have been developed to be delivered as part of a school curriculum. The lessons also represent a shift from commonly held views in UK schools that it is discriminatory to label pupils as having an intellectual disability. This standpoint appears to assume that the pupils and teachers fail to see or treat people with intellectual disabilities as different if they are not labelled as such. Hence, avoiding labelling people is a simple way of preventing wider societal prejudices penetrating the school system (Norwich, 2014). The lived experience of families and individuals with intellectual disabilities who contributed to the development of the lessons, in common with the research evidence, would contradict this view. Thus, the starting point for lessons is to talk positively about difference and about who people with intellectual disabilities are.

While an anti-bullying message is central to the lessons, the theoretical framework draws on Fredrickson's (2010) proposition that if young people know why a peer with an intellectual disability (or any other impairment) has difficulty communicating or handling social situations, then it allows them to develop more respectful and helpful relationships. Gaining a greater understanding of peers with intellectual disabilities as persons is a way of counteracting prejudicial attitudes that young people may hold. The aim is not only to change young people's thinking or attributions, it also to make them more empathic towards people with intellectual disabilities. Hence, in line with Fredrickson's views, the materials and activities were designed to be emotionally engaging. The evidence would also suggest that the most effective way of overcoming

prejudicial attitudes is to facilitate positive contact with stigmatised individuals. Hence the lessons finish by exploring ways that pupils can bridge the social gap and spend time with and get to know their peers with an intellectual disability better (Carter, Biggs and Blustein, 2016).

Whether the lessons prove successful in reducing bullying and promote more positive relationships between young people and their peers who have an intellectual disability are empirical questions. It is difficult to measure change in disablist bullying when this is not routinely recorded in schools. Moreover, charting attitude change is a complex matter, given that pupils are often very sensitive to socially desirable responses. This was apparent in another component of the pilot work we have not reported in this paper, where questionnaire based approaches were used to examine pupils' attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities. Thus, there is a need to develop more sensitive approaches to examining changes in attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability. This might include more creative and less opaque methods than questionnaires. Whether the materials developed for teachers and delivering the lessons in schools also helps to shift teachers' perspectives towards those with intellectual disabilities is another question which needs to be addressed.

However, it might be wrong to focus solely on individual change when examining the impact of a school based intervention of this nature. The advantage of introducing lessons as part of the school curriculum is that, over time, they could be delivered to all pupils in a school and all schools in a local area. It would also be interesting to examine if this resulted in structural or organisational changes, such as evidence of greater efforts to promote inclusion within schools or whether links had been forged between mainstream and special schools. Moreover, it would also be interesting to examine whether there were signs of community change, such as a reduction in hate crime against people with intellectual disabilities in a given area, if all schools delivered the lessons to their pupils over the course of a five or ten year period?

To maintain the lessons over the longer term means keeping the materials alive and relevant. If the lessons continue to be maintained in cooperation with teachers and educationalists, this will help to ensure that they continue to fit with the evolving

curriculum and educational priorities. From a practical point of view, having the resources online makes this goal of sustainability more achievable.

Conclusions

This paper has described the process of developing an innovative set of school based lessons (www.talkingabout.org) to promote understanding of people with intellectual disabilities and reduce the bullying they face. The work moves beyond existing anti-bullying approaches to tackle the prejudicial attitudes underlying the victimisation of people with intellectual disabilities. This is essentially a preventative approach that talks openly about difference and includes reference to people with more profound and complex needs, who are often invisible to young people in mainstream education. A challenge when developing the materials has been to achieve a balance between presenting a positive view of people with intellectual disabilities whilst acknowledging some of the challenges they face in their lives. When fostering empathy and understanding the emphasis was about the acceptance of difference, overcoming prejudice and bringing young people closer to their peers with intellectual disabilities. This also provides a context for demonstrating the heightened impact of bullying on an already socially marginalised group. Of course, the question remains as to whether the lessons will prove effective but there is now evidence to suggest that we have developed a sustainable resource that can be delivered in schools over the longer-term. This represents a significant step forward from short-term campaigns and will hopefully complement existing generic anti-bullying teaching provided in schools.

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