Defining Bullying
A conceptual definition of school-based bullying for the Australian research and academic community

A What Works for Kids Evidence Review
A conceptual definition of school-based bullying for the Australian research and academic community

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Executive Summary

Introduction
This paper was commissioned by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education. It was prepared by researchers in the School of Psychology, Australian Catholic University.

The paper presents a conceptual definition of school-based bullying, that is, a statement of the meaning of bullying within school communities, for the Australian research and academic community. The paper focuses on bullying between students, where student relationships are formed through school. It reviews:

- Existing approaches to measuring school-based bullying in Australian and international school communities
- The different types or forms of school-based bullying (for example, verbal, physical and psychological / social)
- The rationale for and conceptual challenges involved in developing a consistent conceptual definition of school-based bullying.

The current review was undertaken in recognition of the importance of having a shared conceptual definition of school-based bullying. Different conceptualisations of bullying (especially around the kinds of behaviours, intentions, contexts and power-relations involved) lead to inconsistent approaches to how bullying is researched and measured. In particular, this inconsistency has meant there is significant variation in bullying prevalence estimates and, as a result, it is nearly impossible to determine whether differences in prevalence estimates reflect genuine differences in bullying behaviours and experiences or simply the different measures used. It is then difficult to draw general conclusions about school-based bullying and to compare findings across studies and across contexts and jurisdictions. This

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1 Although workplace bullying may impact on a school’s climate (and therefore on students), any bullying which falls within the ambit of employment law and / or workplace health and safety laws is outside the scope of this paper. While it is recognised that school-based bullying can occur between students, students and teachers, parents and teachers, and parents and students, most research has focused on student-to-student bullying.

2 See Appendix A for a table summarising the variation in prevalence rates based on the use of different definitions of school-based bullying.
has implications for the development of bullying policy and preventive interventions.

The process for undertaking the current review included:

- The completion of two draft reviews in consultation with ARACY and the Department of Education.
- A Roundtable to discuss the second draft which included recognised Australian bullying researchers and experts in the field, the Department of Education, and ARACY.
- Based on the feedback from the Roundtable, the completion of a third draft that was reviewed by four peer reviewers.
- The completion of the final version of the review based on the feedback of the reviewers, ARACY, and the Department of Education.

**Review conclusions**

The review concludes there is consensus around three aspects of the contemporary definition of bullying. These are: intentional or deliberate acts; repeated over time; and involving a power imbalance. However, while most bullying researchers would identify these three concepts as the core features of bullying, the specific meanings or parameters of these concepts have not been consistently defined and the measures most often used in studies of bullying have not consistently captured these central features, making it difficult to compare studies or accurately interpret the findings. The review unpacks these concepts further and highlights the variations in interpretations and related challenges to consistent measurement.

Over and above these issues, the study highlights the need for the definition to accurately reflect what many stakeholders would agree bullying is, as a cultural phenomenon, not just the description and categorisation of a set of behaviours. The definition therefore includes a general statement of what bullying is at a high level as well as including the detail of the various components or behaviours.
The proposed definition centres on the three aspects of the contemporary definition but goes further to seek to address the issues raised by better defining the nuances of each of these aspects and recommending a way through the potential variations in interpretations:

**Proposed definition: school-based bullying**

School-based bullying is a systematic abuse of power in a relationship formed at school characterised by:

1. **aggressive acts** directed (by one or more individuals) toward victims that a reasonable person would avoid;
2. acts which usually occur **repeatedly** over a period of time; and
3. acts in which there **is an actual or perceived power imbalance** between perpetrators and victims, with victims often being unable to defend themselves effectively from perpetrators.

An important outcome of this review has been the recognition of the importance of operationalising a technical definition through a formative process in order to fully address the measurement issues highlighted in the review – while researchers may agree in theory on a high level conceptual definition, this quickly unravels in practice when it is operationalised in different ways. While this proposed definition provides a clearer way forward, the operationalising of the definition, including the development of agreed measures and indicators, is what is required to support a better system of data collection and consistent prevalence statistics. Hence, this conceptual definition is the first step, that is, it is a ‘draft’ and a ‘work in progress’ to be revisited once further formative work has been undertaken.

**Paper structure**

**Section 1** of the review provides a succinct description of the history of conceptualisations of bullying in the research literature, with a focus on existing definitions of school-based bullying used in Australian and international research and challenges in conceptualising and defining bullying. A brief summary of the prevalence of different forms of school-based bullying is provided in **Appendix A** to demonstrate how prevalence rates are influenced greatly by how bullying is defined (and then operationalised).
Section 2 proposes a conceptual definition for the Australian academic / research context that encapsulates the various forms of school-based bullying occurring in school communities. The conceptual definition described in this review is the starting point in a broader process (see Section 3) that will include the development of an operational definition of the conceptual definition that includes consistent indicators and measures of school-based bullying.

Section 3 describes the next steps in trialling the conceptual definition and also operationalising this definition of school-based bullying for use by researchers and academics.
Section 1: Concepts and challenges in defining bullying

Presenting definitive prevalence estimates for the different forms of school-based bullying is challenging as a result of variation in conceptual definitions of bullying used across existing studies, and disparity in the way bullying has been operationalised for measurement (Appendix A demonstrates this variation across a range of studies). The purpose of this review is to develop a shared conceptual definition of school-based bullying for academics and researchers. This will then inform the development of a shared approach to operationalising the conceptual definition of bullying, with the aim of adopting a consistent approach to measuring bullying and thus enabling an accurate picture of bullying prevalence and a better understanding of the variation in bullying prevalence estimates. This section of the review provides a succinct review of conceptual definitions of school-based bullying, followed by existing conceptual definitions of school-based bullying from the Australian and international context, and a description of the benefits and limitations of the existing definitions.

1.1. Overview of the history of bullying definitions

Over time, there have been significant changes to the way bullying has been conceptualised, and the types of behaviours that have been included in bullying definitions. Table 1 provides a summary of the major developments in the history of conceptualising bullying. In a literature review examining the evolution of conceptual definitions of school bullying in the international context, Koo (2007) noted that the first major academic publication addressing bullying among young people was written by Burk (1897), after which there was a lengthy gap in research reports on bullying.

Published research conducted in Scandinavia appeared in the 1970s, through the work of Pikas (1975) and Olweus (1978), and reignited academic discussion on school-based bullying, with a focus on student-to-student bullying. Early research conducted in the Scandinavian context used mobbing (that is, multiple individuals bullying another individual) to describe patterns of bullying; however, this form of behaviour represents a subset of broader behaviours that comprise bullying. During the 1970s, bullying was theorised and conceptualised as being part of a child’s misbehaviour.
Research conducted from the 1980s to the present has seen the meaning of bullying expanded to include direct verbal taunting and social exclusion. For example, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz and Kaukiainen (1982) included indirect forms of bullying, such as spreading rumours, in their definition. Later, Olweus (1999) defined bullying including gestures and facial expression as indirect bullying. The emergence of the internet and use of technology-based social media has provided a new medium through which bullying can occur; this has been termed cyber-bullying.

The continued debate over the core or essential features of bullying, including whether cyberbullying should be considered a form of bullying or a separate phenomenon, underscores the need for a shared, consensus-based definition.

**Table 1: Developments in the conceptualisation of school-based bullying**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Development/definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Burk</td>
<td>First major academic publication on bullying amongst young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Pikas</td>
<td>Mobbing, as distinct from bullying, is a negative activity, employed by two or more people, against one person or a well-defined group. The perpetrators must interact with one another (they reinforce each other), and there must be no negative intentions other than the persecution of the victim. In other words, “mobbing tends to be a goal in itself”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Olweus</td>
<td>“Bullying . . . has a broader meaning compared to mobbing, and it is different from mobbing, especially in the number of assaulters. Mobbing happens to someone who is somewhat different from the major group and it could be considered as part of human nature in rejecting someone different from the majority. Although for victims of bullying, external characteristics could be a part of the reasons for being bullied, there could be many other reasons as well (e.g. personality)” (cited in Koo, 2007, p. 109).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Olweus</td>
<td>“A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p.9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Farrington</td>
<td>“Bullying is repeated oppression of a less powerful person, physical or psychological, by a more powerful person” (p.381).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Smith &amp; Sharp</td>
<td>Bullying is “the systematic abuse of power.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 1.2. Key concepts in contemporary definitions of bullying

Contemporary definitions of bullying have incorporated (with different levels of consistency) a number of key concepts. Bullying is generally considered to be a subset of aggressive behaviour (Koo, 2007; Spears, 2005), with the latter defined as behaviour that intends to cause harm or injury to another (Baron, 1977) and usually results in personal injury or destruction of property (Bandura, 1973). School-based bullying is generally characterised as including three main features:

1. **Aggressive or negative intentional or deliberate acts directed (by one or more individuals) toward victims, in order to cause physical, verbal, psychological, or social harm or hurt;**
2. **Acts which occur **repeatedly** over a period of time; and**
3. **Acts where there is a power imbalance between perpetrators and victims, with victims often being unable to easily defend themselves from perpetrators (Olweus, 1993). This power imbalance may be physical (for example, the perpetrator is stronger than the victim) or sociological (for example, the victim belongs to an ethnic minority group).**

These three features of bullying are included in definitions from Australia’s National Centre Against Bullying (2013), the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), and other international organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Pepler, Craig, Connolly, Yuile, McMaster, &amp; Jiang</td>
<td>Bullying is a relationship problem “because it is a form of aggression that unfolds in the context of a relationship in which one child asserts interpersonal power through aggression” (p. 376).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Langos</td>
<td>“Cyberbullying involves the use of ICTs (information and communication technologies) to carry out a series of acts as in the case of direct cyberbullying, or an act as in the case of indirect cyberbullying, intended to harm another (the victim) who cannot easily defend him or herself” (p. 288).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Rigby</td>
<td>Bullying is “a desire to hurt + hurtful action + a power imbalance + (typically) repetition + an unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by the aggressor and a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Control and Prevention (2012), and within the academic / research setting both in Australia and internationally (for example, Due et al., 2005; Farrington, Baldry, Kyvsgaard, and Ttofi, 2010; Hemphill, Tollit, and Kotevski, 2012). Definitions of bullying need to take into account how to separate bullying from other similar behaviours. The three core features ensure this. Without reference to a power imbalance and repetitiveness, the behaviour described is simply aggression or violence. These behaviours can be considered ‘school-based bullying’ when they involve relationships that are formed through schools.

Within these three features of bullying, research has also established that bullying may be overt (that is, behaviour visible to others such as physically or verbally attacking another person) or covert (that is, behaviour that is not visible to others such as spreading rumours or deliberately excluding another individual from a social exchange) (Crick and Bigbee, 1998). In the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS), covert bullying was defined as:

“any form of aggressive behaviour that is repeated, intended to cause harm and characterised by an imbalance of power, and is ‘hidden’, out of sight of, or unacknowledged by, adults. Covert bullying includes behaviours linked to social aggression, relational aggression and indirect aggression, including bullying by means of technology where the bullying behaviour is either unwitnessed, or not addressed, by an adult” (Cross et al., 2009, p. 22).

A more detailed description of the differences between covert bullying, social aggression, relational aggression, and indirect aggression is beyond the scope of this review; for further information, refer to Cross et al (2009) Chapter 2. Within the broad domains of overt and covert bullying, the following types of bullying have been recognised (Due et al., 2005; Farrington and Ttofi, 2010; National Centre Against Bullying, 2013):

- **Physical bullying** including hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, and pushing or damaging the property of another person.
- **Verbal bullying** including name-calling, insulting, teasing, intimidating, making homophobic or racist remarks, or verbally abusing another person.
- **Psychological or social bullying**, designed to harm another persons’ social reputation and / or cause this person humiliation, including lying and spreading rumours, hurtfully mimicking behaviour,
playing nasty jokes designed to cause embarrassment and humiliation, damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance, encouraging others to socially exclude another person, mobbing, and making negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks, towards another person.

1.3. Traditional bullying versus cyberbullying

The use of the technology as a medium through which bullying can occur has resulted in a re-examination of existing definitions of school-based bullying. Cyber-bullying has been described as bullying carried out using technology (David-Ferdon and Hertz, 2009; Hemphill, Tollit, and Kotevski, 2012), including behaviours such as harassing another person via a mobile phone or internet-based social networking site, setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from interacting within social networking spaces. In Langos’ (2012) definition (see Table 1), direct cyber-bullying refers to repeated, unwanted communications with the victim, whereas indirect cyber-bullying applies in situations where the perpetrator places material on a public forum that is not sent directly to the victim.

Given technological advancements, and the removal of ‘face-to-face’ elements traditionally associated with bullying, the emergence of cyber-bullying raises potential conceptual and practical questions about application of the traditionally used bullying criteria to cyber-bullying. More specifically, questions have been raised about the repetitiveness of behaviours over time, as well as how the intentionality of behaviour and power differentials are determined. For example, one overt act of cyber-bullying (for example, insulting another person through a social networking site) may have detrimental consequences for the victim without the behaviour necessarily being repeated at another point in time. Further, although the person perpetrating an act of cyber-bullying may engage in this behaviour only once, if the material is repetitively circulated more widely by other persons, potentially resulting in a greater level of harm, questions are raised as to whether these acts meet the traditional bullying criteria of repetition.

The nature of bullying acts perpetrated using technology and in cyberspace may also challenge evaluations of behaviour against the traditional bullying criteria of intent and power imbalance – particularly in terms of how intent and power imbalance are understood and measured. However, in a study
across six European countries (Italy, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Estonia and France), the authors concluded that intentionality (intention to harm another person) and imbalance of power, which “occurs when someone who is more powerful in some way targets a person with less power causing a feeling of powerlessness for the victim and also makes it difficult to defend oneself” (p. 10), were essential features of the definition of cyber-bullying (Menesini et al. 2012).

Menesini et al. (2012) proposed that there were two additional criteria that may be relevant to cyber-bullying: anonymity (the victim may not know who the perpetrator is) and ‘public versus private’ (the impact of cyber-bullying may be greater when it occurs in public over the internet rather than as a private exchange using electronic communication between perpetrator and victim) (Nocentini et al., 2010; Slonje and Smith, 2008). Menesini et al. (2012) found that adolescents defined cyber-bullying according to three main criteria: an imbalance of power (focused on the consequences for the victim and that the victim did not know how to defend him / herself), intentionality, and anonymity. In the case of anonymity, if the imbalance of power is not present, the act was more likely to be considered cyber-bullying if it was intentional and the perpetrator was not anonymous. The public versus private dimension was not identified in the Menesini et al. (2012) study as key criteria for cyber-bullying.

Cyber-bullying also raises challenges for the conceptualisation of ‘school-based’ bullying, given it can occur primarily or exclusively outside of school grounds and school hours. However, as is not uncommon for the effects of cyber-bullying to impact on the school environment most schools now generally consider this form of bullying as one they do need to understand and take steps to prevent and it is appropriate to include it in a conceptual definition of bullying.

1.4. Australian policy definitions of school-based bullying

Australian policy definitions of school-based bullying have been informed by research conducted to date. The Safe and Supportive School Communities (SSSC) is a working group funded by the Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) and includes nominated representatives from all Australian jurisdictions, as well as representatives from the Catholic and independent school sectors.
The SSSC researched and agreed on a definition of bullying that was included in the revised National Safe Schools Framework, endorsed by all Education Ministers in 2010. The National Safe Schools Framework (MCEECDYA, 2011) defines bullying as:

- Repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behaviour that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons. Cyber-bullying refers to bullying through information and communication technologies.
- Conflict or fights between equals and single incidents are not defined as bullying.
- Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved including bystanders.

While these definitions are appropriate and useful for informing current and future policy and practice, including mobilising government, schools, young people and families in bullying prevention initiatives, they do not meet the requirements of a research or technical definition. Researchers require a definition that identifies the constructs that underpin the practice of bullying, a definition that precisely identifies all of the important components of bullying and is therefore able to be operationalised for consistent measurement.

1.5. Challenges in defining bullying

Conceptual definitions of school-based bullying generally share key concepts, including 1) intentional aggressive acts towards another person to cause (psychological, social, or physical) harm, 2) repeated engagement in this behaviour, and 3) a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. In general, most researchers refer to these characteristics when discussing bullying.

However, while most bullying researchers would identify these three concepts as the core features of bullying, the specific meanings or parameters of these concepts have not been consistently defined and the measures most often used in studies of bullying have not consistently captured these central features. Roundtable members noted that bullying studies often conceptualise and measure different components of bullying, or utilise different interpretations of the key concepts, making it difficult to compare studies or accurately interpret the findings.
Key conceptual issues discussed by the Roundtable are outlined below.

**Intentionality**

Although there is general consensus that intention to cause harm is central to bullying, this concept is not as straightforward as it might seem. Harm may be intended but not experienced, or not explicitly intended (in the instance of exclusionary behaviours, for example) but nonetheless experienced. If intentional aggressive acts are not experienced as distressing, is the behaviour still considered bullying? Intent can be difficult to objectively identify, let alone measure, and may be conceptually inadequate if it does not take into account the expectation that individuals anticipate the potential harm that may be caused by particular behaviours. Similarly, if intention to harm is denied by an alleged perpetrator, is there any objective standard for determining which behaviours clearly violate community norms and expectations?

Roundtable members suggested that the concept of the ‘reasonable person’ may be appropriate to encapsulate ‘intent to harm’ in a more tangible way. A reasonable person can be defined as “a hypothetical person in society who exercises average care, skill, and judgment in conduct,” and it is a concept that forms a comparative standard of acceptable behaviour in a legal context (Lehman and Phelps, 2005). Langos (2012) has described how the concept of the reasonable person applies to intent to harm in the context of bullying “An intention to harm is established where a reasonable person, adopting the position of the victim and having regard to all the circumstances, would regard the behaviours as acts intended to harm to the victim” (p.288).

**Bullying as behaviour versus interpersonal relationship**

Roundtable discussion highlighted a critical aspect of the conceptual definition is the need for an agreed statement or higher-level (simple) construct to describe what bullying is. One such position stemming from the application of bullying definitions on the ground is that bullying is a ‘type of relationship / social dynamic / interactional pattern’ rather than ‘a behaviour’ (such as an act of aggression). Further, it was argued, as bullying is a culturally-derived concept (rather than ‘a thing’), the definition needs to be developed by a cultural consensus-building process rather than being arrived at by discerning an essential aspect (or ‘essence’) of a physical thing.

As part of exploring the relationship and experience aspects of bullying the discussion also raised the issue of whether the definition focused on what the bully does (that is, the behaviours or acts) or what the victim experiences.
This issue overlaps with those raised with regard to the determination of intentionality of acts (see above).

Repeated behaviours
Repetition is another generally agreed characteristic of bullying that may be more complex than it first appears, particularly in the context of cyber-bullying.

A definition of bullying ought to recognise that bullying may only require one action to have a profound impact on the victim. Additionally, in the context of cyber-bullying, the repetition criteria could be met by the spread of a single original post to multiple recipients through the internet. That is, an act – or the consequences of an act – are repeated or sustained over time (for example, an embarrassing picture is posted online and continues to distress the target if it cannot be removed).

Power imbalance
Power imbalances can also be difficult to determine objectively and require a relatively nuanced (and often contextually specific) understanding of power relations. For instance, the power imbalance may be actual (older and younger students) or perceived (relating to social status or online anonymity). Power imbalance may be reflected in a range of characteristics such as physical (for example, the perpetrator is stronger than the victim), sociological (for example, the victim belongs to an ethnic minority group), anonymity or skill differentials (for example, the victim is not as skilled at using technology).

Another important concept here is that bullying is an abuse of this power imbalance that, because of the repetition of bullying acts, can be considered a systematic abuse. This systematic abuse of power is also what makes it difficult for victims to defend themselves.

School-based
The meaning of ‘school-based’ bullying has also been a source of confusion, with some researchers and practitioners taking this to mean only bullying which takes place within school grounds and hours, and others interpreting it as relating to relationships formed through school and impacting social and emotional wellbeing within school.

Children’s age and capacity
Another challenge in current conceptualisations of bullying is how to take into account age differences in what is considered to be appropriate behaviour.
For example, at what age do children have the cognitive capacity to intentionally harm another and / or from what age does the ‘reasonable person’ standard apply?

This is an important issue that requires further consideration when operationalising the definition and may involve further expert consultation and / or qualitative research with young people.

1.6. Challenges in measuring bullying

In addition to posing challenges to conceptual clarity, these issues raise significant issues for the consistency of measurement. For example:

- How do researchers ensure the wording of questions reflects a deliberate or intentional act?
- How do researchers capture the notion of power imbalance in their surveys?
- How is the ‘cut-off’ point for bullying specified? An act repeated one or more times can have a different meaning to an act repeated two or more times.
- Do survey questions ask about bullying that happened at school or in school, or about bullying that happened between people from school?

In addition, published studies have shown that prevalence estimates vary depending on whether respondents are provided with lists of behaviours that constitute bullying or given a description of bullying before completing the survey (Crothers and Levinson, 2011).

It is this variation in how bullying is measured that makes the variability in prevalence estimates and research findings about school-based bullying difficult to interpret, and makes it challenging to identify and understand true difference in prevalence (see Appendix A).
Section 2: Proposed definition

The conceptual definition of bullying needs to ensure the majority (if not all) likely bullying scenarios within school environments are captured. The proposed conceptual definition of bullying has been selected to be consistent with that currently used in both the Australian and international research and academic community, and to provide additional clarity around the conceptual challenges identified in the previous section.

Proposed definition: school-based bullying

School-based bullying is a systematic abuse of power in a relationship formed at school characterised by:

1. **aggressive acts** directed (by one or more individuals) toward victims that a reasonable person would avoid;
2. acts which usually occur **repeatedly** over a period of time; and
3. acts in which there is **an actual or perceived power imbalance** between perpetrators and victims, with victims often being unable to defend themselves effectively from perpetrators

This definition provides specificity and enables consistency around a number of conceptual issues:

- It establishes bullying as a systematic abuse of power,
- It clarifies that school-based bullying applies to relationships formed at school,
- It establishes the perspective of the ‘reasonable person’ as the mechanism for determining intentionality,
- It retains the criteria of repetition but with flexibility that allows for different patterns of bullying identified as part of cyber-bullying, and
- It notes the importance of actual and perceived power imbalances.
Section 3: Proposed next steps

The brief of this review was to generate a conceptual definition of school-based bullying. This is an important first step towards more consistent measurement of school-based bullying, as it sets the foundation for the development of common indicators and measures of bullying, which can then be incorporated consistently into all bullying prevalence studies. As noted by Roundtable participants, it is a normal part of the research process for conceptual ideas to be trialled and modified through an iterative process.

A short statement of the bullying concept (‘Bullying is a systematic abuse of power in a relationship formed at school’) has been included in the proposed definition, however, it will be necessary to explore this further as it will have implications for how bullying is measured, how clearly the concept is articulated and understood in practice, and ultimately how accurately the measured concepts reflect the phenomenon. In operationalising the definition, research and consultation will aim to test, validate or challenge the conceptual definition and its adequacy and usefulness when applied in practice. The formative process can be designed to include a cultural consensus-building process as well as the technical aspects of defining and measuring behaviours. Useful questions to explore in the formative testing and feedback stage may therefore include:

1. What kind of phenomenon is ‘bullying’? Is the concept able to be described in a short statement by a range of stakeholders?

2. Is the more detailed definition accurate?

3. Is the more detailed definition comprehensive?

4. Is the more detailed definition adequate to distinguish bullying from other behaviours or incidents?

The following outlines agreed next steps for operationalising this definition of school-based bullying.

Stage 1: Operationalise the definition
Several sub-steps will be required to operationalise this definition:

i) Undertake review work and a roundtable discussion to scope available indicators, measures and instruments, in order to establish a
consistent process that enables the proposed conceptual definition to be effectively operationalised.

ii) On the basis of the review, recommend a draft operationalisation of the conceptual definition and in particular describe the measures and indicators that could be used to operationalise the conceptual definition of school-based bullying.

iii) The draft operationalisation of the conceptual definition can then be trialled, tested, or formatively evaluated by seeking feedback from academics using the draft definition in their research. The outcome of this formative work would be a detailed definition that incorporates a high-level concept ‘bullying is a...’ statement and the components of the definition, as well as the constructs, indicators, and measures that are best used to capture this.

iv) During the process of operationalising the conceptual definition, it will also be important to obtain the perspectives and understandings of young people and to ensure the development of ‘plain language’ definitions for young people and their families.

v) Consistent with research processes, after a trial period, revisit the conceptual definition and if needed, propose a revised, detailed conceptual definition and how this can be operationalised.

Stage 2: Promote the acceptance and use of the definition
To promote the acceptance and use of the conceptual definition and the operationalisation of this definition developed from the formative process, the following activities can be undertaken:

- Publication of outcomes of this formative work in a peer-reviewed journal article (so other researchers can cite the definition in their work).
- Presentations of the definition and research at conferences where bullying researchers and academics are likely to present (to raise awareness of the work and promote use of the definition and citation of the peer-reviewed journal article).
• Webinars organised by ARACY targeted at the research and academic community and presented by the authors of the review to disseminate the definitions and encourage their usage through citations in their own research.

• Placing a summary of the work on relevant websites such as the ARACY website.

• ARACY to collaborate with the National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB) to promote the use of the definition among researchers within NCAB and its networks and citation of the published paper to show support of the definitions.
References


Farrington, D.P., & Ttofi, M.M. (2010). *School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization*. Campbell Systematic Reviews: 6, 10.4073/csr.2009.6


Appendix A: Variation in prevalence rates of bullying according to definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Bullying definition</th>
<th>Example measure/item</th>
<th>Rates in sample</th>
<th>Rates ³ (males)</th>
<th>Rates (females)</th>
<th>Age of sample</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-to-student bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘During this term, how often have you been bullied at school?’ Responses were recorded into three levels: (1) never / once or twice, (2) sometimes, and (3) about every week / all the time.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TP 6.3%</td>
<td>TP 5.1%</td>
<td>11-15 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>“Bullying is defined as a deliberate, repeated or long-term exposure to negative acts performed by a person or group of persons regarded of higher status or greater strength than the victim (Olweus, 1993). Bullying might be verbal acts such as threats, insults or nicknames or physical acts such as assault or theft. Also social acts such as exclusion from the peer group are considered bullying.” (p.129)</td>
<td>‘During this term, how often have you been bullied at school?’ Responses were recorded into three levels: (1) never / once or twice, (2) sometimes, and (3) about every week / all the time.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TP 6.3%</td>
<td>TP 5.1%</td>
<td>11-15 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TP 41.1%</td>
<td>TP 38.2%</td>
<td>11-15 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ Note: TP = traditional bullying perpetration; CP = cyber-bullying perpetration; TV = traditional bullying victimisation; CV = cyber-bullying victimisation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Bullying definition</th>
<th>Example measure/item</th>
<th>Rates in sample</th>
<th>Rates (^3) (males)</th>
<th>Rates (females)</th>
<th>Age of sample</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) | USA     | “Traditional bullying includes bullying by a peer that occurred at school. Students were asked whether another student had made fun of them, called them names, or insulted them; spread rumours about them; threatened them with harm; pushed or shoved them; forced them to do something they did not want to do; excluded them from activities; or destroyed their property.” (p.10, Footnote 11) | “During this school year, has any student bullied you? That is, has another student:  
(a) Made fun of you, called you names, or insulted you?  
(b) Spread rumours about you?  
(c) Threatened you with harm?  
(d) Pushed you, shoved you, tripped you, or spit on you?  
(e) Tried to make you do things you did not want to do, for example, give them money or other things?  
(f) Excluded you from activities on purpose?  
(g) Destroyed your property on  | TP 32%  
CP 3.7% | N/A                      | N/A                       | 12-18 yrs       |
<table>
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<th>Authors</th>
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<th>Bullying definition</th>
<th>Example measure/item</th>
<th>Rates in sample</th>
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<th>Rates (females)</th>
<th>Age of sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Bullying: “repeated behaviour that was intended to cause harm to someone who finds it hard to stop it from happening.” (p. 399)</td>
<td>“This term, how often: (a) were you bullied by another student or group of students again and again?; and (b) did you bully another student or group of students again and again?” Response categories were: never, once or twice, every few weeks, about once a week, most days this term.”</td>
<td>TV 24-29%</td>
<td>TP &amp; CP 11%</td>
<td>TP &amp; CP 7%</td>
<td>8-14 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemphill et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“Traditional bullying includes aggressive / negative intentional acts repeatedly directed (by one or more individuals)”</td>
<td>Traditional bullying: Students asked had they “taken part in bullying another student(s) at school</td>
<td>TV 28%</td>
<td>TV 28%</td>
<td>TV 15%</td>
<td>14-17 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Bullying definition</td>
<td>Example measure/item</td>
<td>Rates in sample</td>
<td>Rates (^3) (males)</td>
<td>Rates (^3) (females)</td>
<td>Age of sample</td>
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<td>Ybarra &amp; Mitchell (2004)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>“Both online and offline bullying are rooted in aggression, though bullying is typically defined as acting out towards someone known to the aggressor, whereas Internet harassment may be directed at a victim unknown to the provoker.” (p. 321)</td>
<td>“Youth were asked if they had engaged in two possible online harassment behaviours in the past year: (a) making rude or nasty comments to someone on the Internet, or (b) using the Internet to harass</td>
<td>CP 15%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10-17 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Bullying definition</td>
<td>Example measure/item</td>
<td>Rates in sample</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twemlow et al. (2006)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>“A bullying teacher was defined as a teacher who uses his / her power to punish, manipulate or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure.” (p. 191)</td>
<td>Asked teachers: “How many teachers have you known to bully students in the past school year: 0, 1, 2, 3, 6.”</td>
<td>Isolated cases 70%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>K to Grade 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McEvoy (2005)</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>“Bullying by teachers ... is an abuse of power that tends to be chronic and often is expressed in a public manner.” (p. 1)</td>
<td>“Is there a high degree of agreement among students on which teachers in a school are perceived to bully students?”</td>
<td>47% of students identified 3 or more teachers they considered bullies</td>
<td>TP 30% involved only male teachers</td>
<td>TP 12% involved only female teachers</td>
<td>15-23 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Bullying definition</td>
<td>Example measure/item</td>
<td>Rates in sample</td>
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<td>Rates (females)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delfrabbro et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“Bullying can usually be defined as a repeated pattern of aggressive behaviour directed towards another person who has less status or power (Rigby, 1997). Such aggression need not be physical, and can include a variety of non-physical forms such as emotional and verbal abuse, threats, as well as exclusion in which a person directly, or indirectly, ostracizes another person from a social group.” (p. 72)</td>
<td>“Participants were presented with five statements regarding various forms of victimisation (i.e. ‘I get picked on by other kids’, ‘I get picked on by some teachers’) Response options: Rated on a 4-point scale the extent to which each of these had been their experience both in school and outside of school (1 never; 4 very often).”</td>
<td>TV (all) 7.5%</td>
<td>TV (by teachers) 8.5%</td>
<td>TV (by teachers) 10%</td>
<td>High schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry (1998)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>“Bullying occurs in situations where the victim cannot easily Teachers were asked, ‘How often would you say that Teachers: 56% bullied at TV 63% of male TV 50% of</td>
<td>High schools</td>
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**Student-to-teacher bullying**
escape. It occurs when an uneven balance of power is exploited and abused by an individual or individuals who in that particular circumstance have the advantage. Bullying is characterised by persistent, repetitive acts of physical or psychological aggression.” (p. 261)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Bullying definition</th>
<th>Example measure/item</th>
<th>Rates in sample</th>
<th>Rates 3 (males)</th>
<th>Rates (females)</th>
<th>Age of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ozkilic (2012)</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>Male teachers experienced more physical bullying</td>
<td>Female teachers experienced more verbal bullying</td>
<td>Primary and high schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39% verbal bullying</td>
<td>18% physical bullying</td>
<td>25% social bullying (e.g., gossiping)</td>
<td>11% had their personal property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Bullying definition</td>
<td>Example measure/item</td>
<td>Rates in sample</td>
<td>Rates (^3) (males)</td>
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</table>
| Kauppi & Porhola (2012a,b)      | Finland | “A teacher is repeatedly subjected, by one or more students, to interaction that he or she perceives as insulting, upsetting, or intimidating. Bullying can be verbal, nonverbal, or physical in nature.” (p. 399) | “Are your bullies students whom you currently teach or have taught in the past?”  
Response options:  
(a) “students, whom you currently teach,”  
(b) “students whom you have taught in the past,” and  
(c) “students whom you have never taught.” | TV   
90% obscene or inappropriate comments made towards them  
60-80% various forms of social bullying (e.g., name calling, mimicking)  
31% physical bullying  
31% damage to personal property  
CV   
7-15% various forms of cyber-bullying (e.g., email, text messages, | Male students more likely to be perpetrator | N/A | Respondents 20-60yrs (reporting on experiences in primary and secondary schools) |
### Parent-to-teacher bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Bullying definition</th>
<th>Example measure/item</th>
<th>Rates in sample</th>
<th>Rates $^3$ (males)</th>
<th>Rates (females)</th>
<th>Age of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duncan and Riley (2005)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“The definition adopted for this research was that used by Salin (2003, p. 10): repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s), which involve a persistent power imbalance and create a hostile work environment.” (p. 48)</td>
<td>The questionnaire consisted mostly of closed-format items with some open ended components.</td>
<td>Parents along with school executives were most likely to be the bullies of school staff</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Primary and high schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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