The Blame Game or Sharing the Blame?
Hearing Stakeholders Talk about Each Other:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of School Bullying

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Objectives

• Illustrating the application of CDA as a theoretical framework and tool for studying bullying.

• Discussing implicit biases and power differentials in relationships among non-student stakeholders.

• Exploring potential remedies for identified challenges/problems.
Introduction and Background

- Bullying has widespread impact - directly and indirectly.

- People’s experiences of bullying differs.

- Studies have compared and contrasted the views of different stakeholders in their analysis and perceptions of the anatomy of school bullying.

- Examining the views of multiple stakeholders is a worthy academic and intellectual exercise to provide deep and valuable insights on school bullying, and bullying in general.

(Frisén, Holmqvist & Oscarsson, 2008; Mooij, 2011; Thornberg, 2010)
• Few studies exist that examine stakeholders’ perceptions of each other in relation to bullying, and bullying prevention efforts.

• The use of discursive frameworks, particularly, critical discourse analysis in studying bullying in general, and school bullying is uncommon.

(Beaulieu, 2016; Bethune & Gonick, 2016; Donoghue, Rosen, Almeida & Brandwein, 2015)
Introduction and Background

• People sometimes hold contradictory views of what qualifies as bullying - (Mishna et al., 2008).

• The “current definition of cyberbullying may be too simplistic and may not capture some of the conceptual subtleties that need to be considered” (Alipan, Skues, Theiler & Wise, 2015, p. 12).

• The integration of the perspectives of diverse stakeholders is necessary to better define cyberbullying. A proper understanding of cyberbullying is contingent on a multidimensional view (Alipan et al., 2015).
Image – Roundtable/Congregational
Stakeholder perspectives commonly examined:

- Children’s perspectives of bullying,

- Engaging parents because of the centrality of the home environment in understanding bullying behavior

- Incorporating the views of school officials
  
  (e.g., Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Horn & Hathorn, 2005).

- Delayed or rather slow admission of the importance of the perspectives of stakeholders such as bus drivers in understanding school bullying (de Lara, 2008; Evans, 2015).

- The current study asks: how do different stakeholders refer to themselves and others in bullying discourse?
Theoretical and Methodological Framework
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

• A field committed to the critical investigation of social phenomena through an examination of discourses.

• CDA demonstrates how social phenomena is influenced and structured by discourse.

(Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Saichaie, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2009)
Main Principles of CDA

• CDA deals with social problems.
• Discourse has an ideological component.
• Discourse analysis serves to explain.
• Discourse is historical.
• Discourse constitutes a form of social action.
• There is a mediated link between text and society.
• Society and culture are composed by discourse.
• Power relations are constituted by discourse.
Representation of Social Actors

- The representation of social actors pertains to the ways in which people are denoted in discourse (Davari & Moini, 2016).

- Representation is important because it can be used to “reallocate roles or rearrange the social relations between participants” in an activity (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 32).

- In examining the representation of social actors, many aspects of the interactions that occur among people can be made visible.
  - One may sometimes find patterns of exclusion and inclusion that reveal underlying power asymmetries or social disparities.
  - Again, patterns of exclusion and inclusion that may be tied to ideological goals or reinforcing particular notions may be identified.

(van Leeuwen, 2008)
Analytical Framework

• Eclectic analytical framework based off:
  – KhosraviNik’s (2010) three-level text analysis framework,
  – van Leeuwen’s (2008) socio-semantic inventory,
The Representation of Social Actors

Text

Level 1: Actor  Level 2: Action  Level 3: Argumentation
Van Leeuwen Socio-semantic Inventory

• Exclusion: Pattern of inclusion and exclusion:

• Role Allocation: Passivation/Activation

• Genericization and Specification

• Assimilation: Individualization/Groups (Assimilation)

• Association and Dissociation

• Indetermination and Differentiation

• Nomination and Categorization

• Functionalization and Identification

• Personalization and Impersonalization

• Overdetermination
Fairclough’s Framework

• Emphasizes the need for critical discourse analysts to focus on the vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures of the discourse under examination.

• Fairclough (1989) states that words and verbal forms may be particularly selected or arranged in particular ways so as to promote desired versions of reality (Fairclough, 1989).

• The concept of intertextuality: examines how discourses may be connected or related to each other (Fairclough, 1995).
  
  – Intertextuality was applied in this study in examining similarities and connections in the discourses of the various stakeholders.
Procedures and Findings
Procedures

The data included seven transcribed focus group discussions with:

- Social workers (n = 14),
- School principals (n = 9),
- Parents (n = 4)
- Bus drivers and bus attendants (n = 18).

Purposively selected for the focus group discussions (approx. 90 minutes).
Principals, social workers, and bus drivers and bus attendants have convergent/divergent views. They all speak of bullying in sociological and psychological terms.

- Sociological: Bullying is a function of our social structures.

- Psychological: Bullying is related to or linked to children’s mental health, emotive and affective conditions.
Bus Drivers and Attendants

- Days and times impact bullying.
- Principals are activated, and problematized.
- Bullying can be traced to family dynamics – Societal breakdown.
- Lack of action on student conduct exacerbates bullying.
- Parents are activated and problematized - lack of parent accountability/parents bully too.
- Bullying and aggressive conduct may be mental health related/special needs.
- Social workers are minimally referenced.
Principals

- Principals’ discourse on bullying covers social workers, parents, students/children, themselves (i.e., principals), the district, the legislature, other school staff – e.g. behavioral assistants, special ed assistants, teachers, and bus drivers.

- Parents are portrayed as collaborative partners or aides in addressing bullying.

- Parents are also problematized. They contribute to students/children’s bullying behavior, and aggressive conduct.

- Schools are overburdened.

- Social workers are mostly activated and functionalized. Social workers play critical roles in the operations of the school.
Principals

- Bus drivers are largely excluded in discourses about the people/groups who contribute to bullying investigations, bullying prevention efforts.
- Bus drivers are largely passivated, backgrounded, and impersonalized.
- Bus drivers are rendered invisible on the bus.
- Students are activated in a way that probably excuses the failings of school administrators/staff.
- The District is nominated as a stakeholder.
Social Workers

- Outside agencies are activated and nominated – they violate/invade the space of social workers.

- Social workers mainly passivate bus drivers. The social workers mention the bus as a site/hotbed for bullying. However, they cite inanimate factors such as lack of structure and organization.

- Social workers background bus drivers. They do not suggest they are directly responsible for bullying.

- Students are activated and differentiated - Students with SED, emotional disabilities, students needing IEPs.
Social workers

- Workforce issues are highlighted. Social workers activate principals, the District, and the school system.
- Parents are activated and differentiated. Some parents are supportive, others are not.
- Other social actors referenced include behavioral specialists.
Recommendations
Recommendations

• Schools need to have an explicit protocol for engagement with other stakeholders or revisit existing protocols.

• Facilitated Collaborative Inquiries are necessary (Kurtz & Shimshock, 2011).
References


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