New Developments of the Shared Concern Method

ANATOL PIKAS

Department of Education, Uppsala University

ABSTRACT   The Shared Concern method (SCm) has become a well-known tool for tackling actual group bullying amongst teenagers by individual talks. A decade after its launch to English readers the author reviews the original approach and describes new developments. The psychological mechanisms of healing in the bully group and what hinders the bully therapist in eliciting them have become better clarified. It is expressed in terms of know-how: (1) do not demonize the bully suspects; (2) consider the bullying as a conflict between the parties and elicit the archetype of a mediator through your behaviour; (3) prepare the summit meeting between those involved by shuttle-diplomacy and (4) seal the agreement with a communication contract. The most important recent advancement of the SCm approach is its capacity to discover clandestine bullying: when a bully therapist has acquired routines in solving actual cases with SCm he or she is capable of guiding a discussion with a teenage class about the methods to deal with bullying with the result that the class entrusts conflicts including bullying to the bully therapist for mediation. Information about this mediation-centred treatment is spread amongst the students, improving the school atmosphere and introducing a model for conflict resolution for future citizens.

The Shared Concern method (SCm) was described in English for the first time in this journal (Pikas, 1989). During the ten years since then it has found many followers and has been described in English speaking countries in at least four books which compare different methods (Rigby, 1997; Sharp and Smith, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Sullivan, 2000). The first two of these authors have practised the SCm themselves and give favourable descriptions of its methodology which was valid at the time when the authors became acquainted with it and, basically, still is.

Address correspondence to: Professor Anatol Pikas, Department of Education, Uppsala University, POB 2109, S-750 02 Uppsala, Sweden. Email: anatol.pikas@ped.uu.se. http://surf.to/scm or http://www.bahnhof.se/~annalenapikas/scm/

It is apparent that the SCm, if properly used, has lifted the burden of bullying from many victims and met approval from new practitioners. I have, however, observed some users other than the above mentioned authors who have made some changes or additions to the 'Pikas method' which reduce its long-term effect. In the worst cases they have even been counter-productive.

In order to separate the wheat from the chaff I must first summarize the original publication.

Surrendering to the current use of English language
Re-reading my article of 1989 I have not found anything that warrants changing except the labels. I used, then, the term 'Common Concern method' (CCm). Some respected gurus of the English language advised me to change it to 'Shared Concern method' (SCm). In 1989 I compared this main method of mine with an older method I called 'Suggestive Command method' (SCm). The same gurus advised me to change it to 'Persuasive Coercion 'method' (PCm). These changes were easy to cope with; I started to use these new labels in the early 1990's during my lectures in Great Britain, Australia and Canada. They are now well-established and will not be changed again.

What was more difficult was to abandon the authentic Scandinavian use of the word 'mobbing'[1] and replace it with the prevalent English concept 'bullying'. As users of the English language know, the word 'bullying' automatically embodies 'intentional abuse exerted by *one or more* children'. I call this definition, emanating from the popular use of the word, 'the wide definition'. If I have to maintain the professional distinction between (1) handling of single bullies whose behaviour is initiated by their own personal dynamics and (2) group bullying driven by interaction in a bully group, I have to call the last mentioned phenomenon 'group bullying'.

So, I hereby declare my surrender to the customary English usage and will use the term 'group bullying' instead of 'mobbing'.

The contextual reasons why SCm has been, and still is, a method intended to deal only with the treatment of *group* bullying, defined as illegal *group* violence, mental and physical, continue to be the following:

1. Members of a bully group are bound together by one 'common denominator': finding pleasure in tormenting their victim.
2. In individual therapeutic talks about their *group* relations those pupils who participate in bullying reveal that they (a) feel the pressure of the *group* to take part, (b) are afraid that the *group* will turn against them and (c) have guilt-feelings that they are 'several against one'.

By creating bonds between the therapist and individual participants we loosen the harmful group dynamics the bullies have ensnared themselves in.

The wide definition is obscuring the methods of treatment

Why do abundant statistics, which increase their face validity by differentiating keenly between gender, age, social group etc. omit a distinction which is of great importance in treatment: the difference in the dynamics of a *single bully* versus the dynamics of a *bully group*?

The answer is obvious: the purpose of the statistical investigations is not treatment. By combining both the individual offenders and offending groups into the same wide definition they can become popular by augmenting the public disquiet about the high figures of bullying coupled to its need to demonize the bullies.

There is nothing wrong with demonizing the concept of bullies; however the unfortunate consequence is that when teachers encounter the actual members of a group of alleged bullies an enemy image is released. School psychologists with clinical training know better, but as they lack a good theory for tackling bullying they are tempted to fall into public demonizing. Certainly they apply common sense when exerting their authority against the bully suspects, which works with the pupils who accept the value system of the school, but challenges those who do not. The school psychologists are often then obliged to resort to psychodynamic methods plausible for exploring background factors, but which come up short when dealing with bullying as phenomena in the group of youngsters where none of the individuals deviate from the average.

Employing the construct of the bully personality is virtually useless for a practitioner of therapy with a bully group. The statistical evidence offered by personality researchers is caught in a closed circle: 'Those who have the aggressive bully personality are more aggressive than average pupils'. By contrast, the basis for therapy of group bullying is found when we realize how small but normal traits of aggressiveness in the individual members of a group are mutually reinforced, whereas no group bullying is released in some groups even though they include personalities who are rated as aggressive.

In considering group dynamics instead of individuals we gain insight into two processes. One is how escalated harassment may find casual victims and gradually make permanent their status as 'typical' victims. The other is that there are sometimes objective reasons for a group to defend itself against an intruder or disloyal member and in so doing they discover a new game; a justified defence developing into bullying.

A new approach: mapping *group* bullying as a case of conflict

The word 'bully' has the capacity to elicit an enemy image. Reactions of horror and aggression are released in us; we enjoy 'stamping out bullying' – which is adequate *if* those pupils really are evil. However, they frequently are not. Still more important for the therapeutic approach is that the bullies very seldom are evil in their own self-image.

According to some form of juridical model which a primitive psychological treatment tries to follow, we would investigate the guilt first and then acquit or convict. Lacking appropriate methods, the school staff still attempts an investigation amongst pupils even if they know that they are liable to fail. The adults then resort to threats, which in accordance with lawful restrictions, are empty. This makes bad things worse behind the backs of the teachers, who, compared to professional law reinforcers, are less able to protect the victim.

In this state of affairs I propose a new approach: mapping *group* bullying as a case of conflict and introducing the teacher-therapist as *mediator of conflict between parties.*

That means that we need first to sort out some distinctions in the general concept of conflict. We begin by asking two simple questions about those disturbances in human interaction called conflicts:

1. Are the parties equally strong/equally matched or not? (in technical terms: is the conflict symmetric or asymmetric?);
2. Is it a group or an individual who is acting? Is a happening the result of a difference between individuals or are group dynamics involved?

These two questions give rise to four kinds of conflict (see Figure 1).

The natural realm of school psychologists and other professionals working with psychotherapeutic means is in areas 2 and 3 (see Figure 1). For managing area 2 they need a training in individual therapy. For area 3, therapy approaches to group bullying are appropriate. For my students I recommend that they start with the Shared Concern method (SCm) in the right corner of area 3, leaving the problems of the remaining areas to others and return to them after they have succeeded there.

The Shared Concern method (SCm) aims at breaking up the bully group through individual talks with its members in a genuine two-way communication by eliciting a shared concern about bullying and preparing a shared conflict solution accomplished in group talks with the victim.

Some new guidelines when instructing therapists

When modelling the task of the therapist I have begun to bring forward certain elements latent in the old SCm and to apply a new metaphor.

	Symmetric conflicts = the parties (approx) **equal**	Asymmetric conflict s = the parties (approx) **unequal**
Dynamics between **Individuals**	**1** Duel Fight 'Usual conflict'	**2** A single bully harassing (tormenting, etc.) his victim
Group- dynamics	Gangs of equal strength fight each other Nations at war **4**	A strong group violates the weaker physically and mentally The weaker is a group ⋮ The weaker is an individual i.e. ***bullying*** **3** The topic of this article

Figure 1

'Archetype' instead of 'role'
I have discovered the power of the metaphor 'archetype' to convey some insights when applying the proper SCm. Instead of talking about the therapist 'taking the role' of mediator, I say 'elicit the archetype' of a mediator. Here I am not discussing the Jungian mythology of arche-types, I am using 'archetype' just as an educational metaphor, explaining it simply: an 'archetype' is an idea that elicits a certain aggregate of emotions. ('mother', 'father', 'brother', 'friend', 'enemy' are words that trigger basically similar associations in all human beings in their language.) Whether an archetype is inherited or learned is not to be decided here. What matters is that we reach deeper task involve-ment in training bully therapists. They establish better contact with the pupils.

'Shuttle diplomacy' as a working concept

Preparing the summit meeting between the bully suspects and the probable victim by 'shuttle diplomacy' has become a stable method ingredient in SCm. That means that the therapist tests the victim's acceptance of the ideas and promises the bullies have contrived and vice versa: the victim's wishes are discussed with the bullies before the parties meet. In some simple cases the ingredients of the forthcoming agreement have mainly been prepared already during the final steps of the individual talks. In more complicated cases, the therapist may have four to five preparatory meetings before the summit meeting.

Looking for the bully suspect's worries about own security instead of guilt feelings

If the bully suspect has spontaneous guilt feelings, the therapist has a good start to channel them into a constructive solution. If he or she has not, but you think that he or she should have them and you suggest it to him or her, you will create a resistance. What then remains is to overcome his or her denials with force. But if you assume that *deep in him or her, he or she has a feeling that the violent atmosphere in the group may turn against him or her,* you have a better entry to a shared concern approach. Certainly, you cannot put the question about his or her fears directly, but if you are in a trustful atmosphere and are talking about bullying, you have a good chance of revealing his or her worries about his or her own skin.

Stressing the 'communication contract' when sealing the agreement of the summit meeting

When the parties in the conflict and the therapist have found the agreement at the summit meeting, dwell together awhile in happy relief. But the experienced therapist knows the danger of relapse and so puts the question: 'But what shall we do if any of you breaks the agreement?'

A discussion of different propositions arrives at the following conclusion. If one of the parties feels that the other party's behaviour is not in accordance with the agreement, this party has to declare: 'Remember our communication contract!' That 'contract' is an amendment to the agreement stating that a quiet discussion has to take place to sort out the problem. If some of the parties will not join in the discussion, the other party has, so says the agreement, to tell the therapist.

Stating clearly when SCm is out of place

Professional tackling of bullying states the scope and limits of its favourite method. There are two approaches in tackling bullying which are better than SCm – under certain circumstances.

1. If you see outright group violence, you don't need to think of any

'method'. Immediate intervention works because the pupils know that that is the teacher's duty The element of surprise gives you the advantage. If you have doubts about your being strong enough, call for help. After some hours you may try SCm, but not now.

2. The best way to tackle bullying is class discussions/group discussions on actual bullying in the class – *if* such discussions are possible. Such class discussions have to be established as a regular habit and also include positive topics and feelings. However, the teenagers have a need to keep their world to themselves; such regular, intimate and honest class discussions are not possible except in exceptional classes and with exceptional teachers.

That's why we need SCm as a tool for school psychologists and anti-bullying-team members for treating *reported* bullying amongst teenagers.

Phases and steps in the SCm
There are, according to the new terminology, five 'phases' in SCm, each containing a various number of 'steps' as we now call the sub-division units within the phases. The first step in the first phase implies that the teacher-therapist or school psychologist has got a report about bullying and starts to ask one of the suspected bullies to give his or her view of what has happened. All the following phases and steps depend on the success of the preceding one in their way towards the final goal: a constructive meeting between the bullies and the victim. That means that the therapist shall not proceed to the next step before the previous phase or step is accomplished with the intended result. He or she must be prepared to make a pause in treatment, say a day or even longer, and make a new attempt with the failed phase or step before trying the next one. However, such an interruption seldom is needed in practice.

Emphasising some points in the method and commenting upon some additions made by followers
I am happy that independent developers of the SCm produce their own applications which hopefully contain improvements. Some of the modifications are, however, counter productive to the idea of SCm.

I will make comment and sometimes also give warnings in relation to a short presentation of the five phases.

Phase I. Individual talks with the suspected bullies
The reason for starting with the individual bullies was and still is twofold: (1) To protect the victim against the accusations from the suspected bullies that he or she has been 'telling tales' and (2) to establish

a bond of intimate and confident communication between the individual therapist and the suspected bully which liberates him or her from the influence of the bully group.

Comment. Some practitioners are keen to gather reliable external information about the pupils involved before they meet them. However, the reliability of such information is a vain goal and above all: what is the purpose? Supposedly to convict the bullies who outrage. But what is the plan after the bully has been convicted but does not admit that? Punishment or just threat? Do you think that it guarantees the safety of the victim behind the teacher's back? Some practitioners who are keen on gathering evidence start talks with the alleged victim. This makes it inevitable that when individual talks with the bullies begin, you take the role of a persecutor against the alleged bullies. I am not saying that it is wrong, I just say that it is the good old but primitive Persuasive Coercion (PCm) I myself used in the 1970's. In SCm you do not elicit guilt, you focus on the worries the bully suspect has about the whole situation and the way out of it.

The worst application of any tackling of bullying happens, however, if the individual talks with the bully suspects are carried out by two or more adults. Even if the adults are 'mild' in their approach, they still are 'many against one'. Such a constellation is perceived by the youngsters as 'group bullying'. It is understandable if the parents of the alleged bullies protest strongly against such a method.

Step 1 (in Phase I). Build up confidence. The therapist builds up confidence non-verbally by giving signals indicating that his or her role is different from what the pupil has met before. One is neither the instructor from the classroom nor an interrogator. Key sentence:

'Haven't you been rather hard on K?'

Comment. Avoid saying 'I have heard that. . .'. If the youngster asks 'Who has said that?', break away with: 'The most important thing right now is your view. Tell me about that.'

Step 2 (in Phase I). Transform the bullying into shared concern. The therapist gets the actual bullying to appear as a shared concern by reinforcing anything said by the conversation partner that goes in the right direction.

The therapist's sentences are cognitive, e.g. 'What do you think about K's situation?' but not emotional (Like 'Can you put yourself into K's shoes?')

Comment. Avoid eliciting the bully's guilt feelings as a driving force. What works is his fear of being bullied himself or herself. But do not raise an explicit question saying so.

Step 3 (in Phase I). Reach a turning point. As soon as there are signs of admission from the suspect bully that the situation regarding K is not good, the therapist goes over to Step 4.

Key sentence:

'Enough said about that!' (Implied: We are going on to talk about solutions!)

Comment. This step is no real 'step'; it is just a reminder to the therapist not to dwell too long on talking about the misery; as soon as the bully admits problems, put the constructive question.

Step 4 (in Phase I). Stimulate constructive solutions. Key sentence:

'What shall we do?' (After a pause:)

'What do you suggest?'

Comment The therapist reinforces even the slightest utterance from the suspected bully which may be developed towards a constructive solution.

Step 5. (in Phase I). Prepare for a group meeting. The therapist prepares for the group meetings by summarizing and supporting all indications that things could be sorted out in a common meeting with the victim. 'We shall meet and check how we can sort this out together. Later we can have K in with us.'

Comment This preparation is just like a casual remark. The real preparation will be made in Phase III.

Phase II. Individual talk with the victim
The therapist meets the victim immediately after the talks with those suspected of bullying and listens to his or her views, giving signs of empathy and sympathy. The therapist follows different lines depending on whether the victim appears to be classical or provocative.

Inform the victim that your meetings with the suspected bullies showed positive attitudes and ask what the victim finds constructive in them. Outlines of an agreement emerge. 'But I must meet them first as a group,' says the therapist, 'and check their promises and ensure that they are positively disposed'.

Phase III. Preparatory group meeting with the former bullies exclusively
Begin by spending a few minutes pleasantly together. Example of an introductory remark:

'How has it been for K (the victim)?

Mention the individual conversations you have had with the individual

bullies, reinforce their reports about sincere attempts to improve the victim's situation.

Comment Also the first sentences have to be prepared, for example, 'What do we do in order to introduce a positive spirit from the beginning?' The shuttle-diplomacy approach earlier mentioned is an essential part of the preparation.

Phase IV. Summit meeting: the victim and the former bullies meet with you as the mediator

The lowest aim is an agreement about decent coexistence. A higher aim is that the former victim should be included in the circle of the former bullying group on equal terms.

If they don't get any further than 'We shall leave K alone', make it clear that this should not mean freezing out.

Comment. The agreement has to be 'sealed'. The therapist puts the question: 'What shall we do if somebody doesn't keep to the agreement?'

The discussion ends with a communication contract and an understanding that joking shall be tolerated to a certain extent but objected to emphatically if anyone goes beyond this.

Phase V. Follow-up of the results

In order to ensure that the common meeting goes as expected, there needs to be *a preparatory group meeting exclusively with the former bullies* making use of any constructive factors found within the group. Individuals should be enabled to express their points of view without contradiction. A plan for coexistence that excludes bullying is developed. Here is example of a dialogue from our training:

It often happens in the training of SCm therapists that, in the midst of the dialogue between one person who is playing the role of therapist and the other who is playing the suspected bully, the 'therapist' interrupts the performance and asks me, the instructor: 'What shall I say now?' (Or: 'I have forgotten what is the next step'.)

Then a dialogue develops between me (AP) and the trainee – the teacher-therapist (T):

AP: 'Let's go back to the aims of the SCm. What do the letters SCm mean?'

T: 'I'll elicit a shared concern for the bullying. And I cannot start by saying 'We share a concern' simply because he does not share *my* concern'.

AP: 'He doesn't yet. . . Do you remember how SCm approaches bullying in order to avoid demonizing the bullies?'

T: 'SCm sees bullying as a conflict. The bullies and the victim are parties.'

AP: 'Exactly! And you are a mediator. How does a good mediator start? '

T: 'By asking the suspected bully for his view of what's happened. This I have done, I know his view. He considers himself as innocent and the victim as guilty. No shared concern!'

AP: 'But suppose he is right about his innocence. But innocent people have concern – if they are decent. Ask if he possibly feels uncomfortable in the situation. And if he gives a hint that he is?

T: 'I will ask if he has any ideas what to do'.

AP: 'Right you are.'

Now and then we need to repeat the distinction between *(1) general ideas about bullies and (2) the actual young people they will meet in therapeutic talks.* The therapist's empathetic and warm attitude has its deep roots in the insight that the young flesh and blood people reported as having been bullying *may* be either bad or good. Not as 'personalities' but according to the group dynamics they are enmeshed in.

In order to diminish the effects of the universal demonizing of the bully concept, we balance the anticipation of the meeting with the ideas about misinterpreted figures in fiction, e.g. Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. We find that he is seen by the people around as rowdy, but the reader, who knows his real thoughts, considers him to be a decent and well-meaning person caught up in circumstances which may make him appear a trouble-maker. Mark Twain indicates just incidentally about his 'unfavourable background', he never pities Huckleberry, he just renders his thoughts.

In the abundant production of violence fiction in television there is a frequent motive: a group of sympathetic persons is attacked by another group of unsympathetic persons. But so far I have not seen the following story. A group of good guys in their teens are troubled by a bad guy of the same age and while they defend themselves against the bad guy they discover their group power. They transform gradually into a bully group converting the troublemaker into a victim.

My collaborators and I have frequently found how individual good guys are transformed to bad guys in a group. Sometimes this story can be seen flitting past in the mass media, but we rarely can find how the bullies are converted back to good individuals. They just suddenly appear as evil and the evil must then be driven out by another evil calling itself a 'necessary evil'.

SCm does not propose the alternative of 'love without limit'. SCm is a rational method of conflict resolution giving the one who is possibly

weaker a status of appearing as an equal party in respects relevant for conflict resolution with long-term effects. The emotional part consists of our caring about the bullying situation and we elicit a concern shared by all who are involved.

Our conditions to evaluate improvements in tackling bullying

Every treatment is automatically followed up by interviews with those involved, and if everything is not alright, new meetings occur. So when evaluating SCm we do not ask: 'Success or not?' because every bullying case has to be treated until bullying ceases. But still the question remains: Are not both bullies and victims glossing over the reality?

Everyone acquainted with scientific methodology knows that for a completely satisfying evaluation of a treatment we need to compare reliable observations of behaviour of the subjects before and after the application of the treatment we are evaluating. But how does one observe the pupils' behaviour behind the backs of the teachers? What would the parents say if we have video cameras in every room, corridor or playground?

At the beginning of my career as a developer of anti-bullying methods my university students and I organized 'casual visitors' observations', which meant that students on training, disguised as craftsmen or other normal visitors to the schoolhouse, passed by in playgrounds and corridors watching the interactions of the youngsters during two weeks. The observers were changed at every break in order to diminish the likelihood of pupils noticing them.

The observers did not see bullying of those we had treated (but bullying of others) during the ten school days we made the observations. Then they did not feel the need to observe more. In response to the critical question: 'What happened the third week or the next month?' they would say: 'Come and work yourself with treating bullying by a method built on co-operation. During your contact with real cases you will achieve so strong evidence of co-operation that you will regard such a question as absurd'.

The reason why we did not resort to the usual expedient, the so-called objective questionnaires was of course that we could ask the victims treated in a confidential interview.

External validations of SCm

The most representative study so far in Great Britain on anti-bullying methods is expressed in two publications by the Sheffield Anti-Bullying-project team that worked on commission from the Ministry of Education (Sharp and Smith, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Giving an account of

the methods for dealing with bullying that had been discovered by school personnel, the authors refer to three methods, giving most space to the 'Pikas method' which they tested themselves and on which they give, compared with the two others, the most positive verdict.[2]

> It appears that (SCm) can be a powerful short term tool for combating bullying, although long term change may depend on additional action where very persistent bullying is concerned (p. 200).

Another author who has written in detail about SCm is Rigby (1996). In his survey Rigby refers more to Pikas' work than anyone else's, apart from his own and that of his co-workers. Rigby summarizes his conclusions thus:

> My own view is that a humanistic approach such as proposed by Pikas is certainly desirable as a first stage in all but the most serious cases of bullying and that, in a sense, the use of punishment is always the second best (Rigby, 1996. p 222).[3]

There are several other British school psychologists and pastoral care teachers, who after my lecture trips to Great Britain in the beginning of the 1990's, sent me reports on their practice which gave support and expressed their satisfaction. A good example of this response is provided by Alison Duncan, a School Psychologist in Arborath, Scotland, who has published reports about her own use of SCm and the verdict of the trainees using SCm after my lectures and workshops in Dundee in March 1993. In an article she sums up:

> Experience has shown SCM to be a very powerful technique. Young people are responding positively to the opportunity SCM gives them to break negative cycles of behaviour and show more tolerance for their former victims. Using this strategy has sometimes uncovered harassment far beyond anything that teachers imagined but it has also produced results which have astounded schools. A few serious cases where parents have kept their children away from school and threatened litigation have been resolved by the EP using SCM (Duncan, 1996, p 98).[4]

It further appears from Duncan's article that she has understood that the core of the SCm is mediation in conflict providing an experience beyond the usual declaration of norms.

> Bullying usually constitutes asymmetric conflict . . . SCm shows it is still possible to use the principles of mediation to develop a long-lasting solution to bullying problems. The successful resolution of conflict is a valuable experience for young people and offers considerable potential for personal growth (Duncan, 1996, p 98).

I would add: the experience provided implies a good education of future citizens.

The division of labour between SCm and PCm

There is an internal evaluation problem: how much does the application of the practitioners contain pure SCm and how much is it mixed with elements from my first approach, the Persuasive Coercion method, PCm?

The difference between the two approaches – PCm and SCm – is methodically important. It is the difference between two resources: (1) the persuasive suggestions the therapist uses to bring the bully suspect into desired insights and actions and (2) the genuine concern the therapist and the alleged bullies share in the bullying situation

The driving force of PCm is mainly the bully suspect's guilt feelings. The driving force of SCm is mainly the bully suspect's subconscious feeling of being personally threatened by the prevailing aggressive atmosphere in the bully group.

PCm is appropriate in preadolescent years when bullying is reported to school psychologists or antibullying teams, i.e. in cases when the colleagues cannot manage the treatment of bullying in a way which I consider to be the best of all: in class discussions. Using PCm for tackling teenage bullying you may be happy at rapid results but you take risks. Every persuasion that fails creates a backlash. We cannot be sure how long the pupils' promises to quit bullying will last.

SCm is designed to deal with teenager and adult bullying. It is, because of the deeper involvement it creates, a 'long-term tool'. SCm does not take the same risks as PCm because it does not try to persuade the bullies.

It is normal for bully therapists to be inclined to apply PCm in the beginning of their careers. Gradually pure SCm takes over – if the therapist realizes its long-term advantages. SCm emerged from PCm in my own development. Now I encourage every therapist to increase the SCm elements with a persistent patience and improve the techniques in its application.

PCm was launched by me in a book in Swedish in 1975. It was the very first method for dealing with actual cases of group bullying. In my article in *School Psychology International* (Pikas, 1989), I labelled it 'Suggestive Command method', SCm, and, in describing it, I said: 'Its therapeutic effect depends on the suggestions which the therapist gives to the individual.' Later I was advised to emphasize the elements of Persuasion and Coercion so I re-labelled it as the Persuasive Coercion method – PCm.

PCm and SCm can be seen as different attitudes in the same formal setting. Both are, at first sight, considered 'humanistic' (when contrasting them with 'punitive'). Their phases and steps are the same, even the key lines at the first step of the first phase. The difference can be felt in the non-verbal messages. In 'pure SCm' the therapist is persistent in

listening to the bully suspect's views and invests a great deal of effort in involving him by non-verbal means and a relaxed attitude to find elements of co-operative solutions amongst his own ideas. In 'pure PCm' the therapist tells the bully suspect what to do.

In the late 1990's I discovered that I had not been able to make this difference between PCm and SCm sufficiently clear in my workshops in the early 1990's in Great Britain. The training Smith and Sharp received in 1991 on the SCm was brief and the elements from PCm and SCm were mixed in the presentation of SCm. This explains why Smith and Sharp say in the above quote that SCm is a powerful 'short term tool'. This verdict would be more suitable for PCm.

Four years later, on a workshop tour in Australia, I explained the difference between PCm and SCm more explicitly to Ken Rigby who was also trained by me in SCm.

If the teacher-therapist or school psychologist does not succeed in eliciting shared concern about the threatening group dynamics that emerges in the bully suspect's own story, the adult can make a pause in treatment and after some days try a new attempt. Most often, such delays cannot be made. Therefore the rule is – aim at the SCm, but if your conversation partners do not follow, apply PCm.

But if the PCm is not enough either, if the bullies refuse to talk to you or say that they think that bullying is fun?

First of all: neither myself or my collaborators have met this in our practice. This question appears only in the minds of those who have not understood the idea of shared concern. The question is theoretical and the answer is, therefore, theoretical: you use 'harder means'.

You never shall surrender to the bullies. But if you want to break the circle of violence, take a well prepared chance to apply SCm.

SCm meeting a dream criterion of evaluation
Here is my 'dream criterion' validating a method in treatment of bullying: the teenager students in a class discussion with the teacher develop so firm a trust in the method that they: (a) give the teacher-therapist the mandate to treat the case and (b) reveal (in a question-naire) who in their class 'need help' in conflicts or bullying in which they are involved.

I go into a class of teenagers and begin by saying:

'How is it that if one asks pupils in anonymous questionnaires: 'Is there bullying in the class?', then one gets answers that indicate that around 10 percent *are* bullied. But if one asks the same pupils to write the name of a bully or somebody who is being bullied then *nobody* will give a name. Can *you* explain it?'

Note that I start with a *problem.* My voice and my body language

indicate that I am talking to people who know more about their life behind the teacher's back than I do.

What surprised me at first was that most of the answers do *not* deal with the fear of revenge from the bullies. Instead they express concern about the victim, who would become an object of attention (or picked upon) if they revealed his or her name.

The pupils do not expect any response from the teachers other than interrogation with its accompanying reprimands. Among the first contributions there are supporters for the 'strict policy' towards the bullies. But as they note my unassertive approach, which concedes victims may be but are not always entirely innocent, a new balanced approach emerges.

Then I ask the class 'If we had a method that solved the problem without any trouble for those involved...'

Then something happens that I wish every teacher could experience: *the pupils come out with proposals involving the key concepts 'resolving conflict' and 'mediation'.* It is natural for them to give both parties equal chances. We have out the basic ideas of democracy inherent in them.

This experience is salutary for a teacher who previously regarded 'raising awareness' as the main device for prevention and interrogation as a means for tackling the actual cases.

We raise the problem 'What to do?' and I reinforce the answers of the pupils who want justice for all, including the bully suspects. In fact I present SCm, not as a lecture, but piecemeal in a dialogue.

If you have reached a stable agreement with the majority of the class it's time to 'sell' the idea of yourself as a mediator of their conflicts, including bullying.

Actually, it is not myself I have sold as mediator but the teachers listening to my discussion with the class. On a tape-recording you may hear how I talk about a course in mediation which a group of teachers in the school have passed and how I then put the question to the class: 'Have you enough confidence in your teacher, NN, to let him be a mediator in your conflicts?' Their response was a clear, convincing 'Yes!'

Then (and not before) a questionnaire can be distributed. It asks about freezing out and persecution going on in the class at the time and ends by saying: 'If you want the person who is harassed or excluded to get help, please write his or her name'. Note that we are *not* asking the names of the bullies. The teacher who has gained the confidence of the class is ready to make contact with those whose names have been mentioned and, in the atmosphere of trust now prevailing, also gets the names of those who 'could make useful contributions'.

How do I know that the pupils are not pulling my leg? I and many others of my course participants can tell from the quality of the class discussion and the treatment of the revealed cases. Moreover, the

readers of my Swedish book (1998) can appreciate it when they read the transcripts of authentic tapes accompanied by my comments on strategy. This makes a 20 page chapter.

'There are not many teachers who can manage such a discussion', I hear a reader say. 'Quite true', I reply. Those who can do it have, before starting such a discussion, managed two or more cases with SCm. Certainly there may be some who can do it without SCm, those who already are good conflict resolvers and are capable of managing a class discussion with teenagers as indicated above.[5]

I call a class discussion on the methods where the youngsters show their trust to the adults by indicating victims a 'dream validation' of a method that will make a new deal for Whole School Programmes for tackling bullying.

Counter-productive effects of prevailing 'Whole School Programmes'

The 'Whole School Programmes' promoting anti-bullying work at present contain four main elements:

1. Prevention through enlightenment on the perils of bullying. Creating empathy with the victim by dramatic performances preceding group work leading to declarations condemning bullying.
2. Treatment of reported cases by adults following the spirit of demonizing the bullies.
3. Peer intervention by selected and trained pupils.
4. Supervision by adults at breaks.

Researchers who measure the effects of these programmes are often proud of reaching 50–70 percent improvement. But let us see what is indicated as 'improvement'. We find that the data do not give observations about what really is happening behind the backs of the teachers. They give the students' answers on a questionnaire asking them 'Are you being bullied?' and 'Have you been bullying others?' Thus, behind the figures supposed to give 'the amount of bullying' we can find an accumulation of *feelings* about bullying containing a mixture of two contradictory motives: (1) sensitive pupils exaggerating their being treated badly and (2) victims who deny themselves that they are being bullied.

'Improvement' reflects attitude changes in the pupils in some unknown direction.

Questionnaires to the pupils do not either indicate which of the elements of the programme caused the 'improvement'. Could it be that some elements were counter-productive as 50–30 percent of bullying, according to the opinions of the pupils, still remains?

When you try to prevent bullying through an attitude formation programme you certainly will reach people who already conform or halfway conform with the norms of the adults. Those who already have developed a different value system (the really malicious bullies) think: 'The grown-ups are scared. This is fun. We must work up some new tricks.' Those who consider themselves innocent think: 'Those bullies they talk about in the campaign – that's not us! We are just punishing someone who actually 'did' something.' Those who are bystanders notice that the bullies are getting away with it.

Peer intervention and/or mediation is a wonderful means – provided that those students who do it do not form a selected elite who are adopting the same positions as previously held by the prefects in the famous British public schools.

Supervision of playgrounds presents a dilemma. If it is mild and discrete, the guards cannot see behind their backs. If it is effective, the situation in the school becomes like the atmosphere of a prison.

School inspectors reproach schools who do not have 'Whole School Policy Programmes'. When realizing the benevolent but basically simplistic design of these programmes, the undercurrent of which is 'bullying the bullies', I have begun to wonder if the teachers' reluctance to apply that sort of programmes reveals a better insight.

But what is the alternative to a prevention that demonizes the bullies? It cannot possibly be permissiveness.

A proposal for a new 'Whole School Programme'

Organizing anti-bullying work in a school always depends on the personnel resources. If there is a school psychologist or pastoral care teacher or some other person who is dedicated to the task of tackling bullying and has the capacity to gather other dedicated staff members, let him or her organize a team. Let the team discuss how to improve the stereotype contents now prevailing in the 'Whole School Programme' tradition. If those people who want to work together already have critical ideas, organize seminars about it – without necessarily employing a guru from outside – and interchange experiences the team members have had when applying a certain method.

But not before you have obtained some personal experience from treating cases with SCm will you be ready to discuss with a teenage class in genuine two-way communication about the methods. That means that none in the discussion dictates to the other what approach is the best, but both are concerned about bullying and have a basic democratic view of life.

When you have reached a consensus with the students and validated it by their trusting you as a mediator, you suddenly notice that you have started a new 'Whole School Programme' which even contains prevention

of bullying. This prevention is not carried by a propaganda drive as happens in political life or when public relations firms sell commercial products. Information about treatment of bullying as mediation in conflicts is conveyed to all students by the most credible source the teenagers know – their communication with other peers.

Notes

Since the acceptance of this article, the author has been made aware of significant developments in a number of related areas which he would be happy to share with interested correspondents.

1. The origins of the label 'mobbing' as designing 'group bullying' are described in my 1989 article (Pikas 1989). An attempt to introduce the same label to British school medical officers, psychologists and educationists was also made by a British doctor, William T. Orton in three publications (Orton 1975; 1982; 1983)

These descriptions of group bullying were considered interesting, but the label 'mobbing' was not accepted. Apparently the word 'bullying' is very deeply rooted in the minds of the English speaking people, who have used it since their school days as a mixed definition of two harmful activities: one exerted by a gang the other by a single person. (The word 'mobbing' is used by Anglo-Saxon zoologists to describe a group of small animals attacking an intruder, but not by sociologists of crowd theory, explaining the emergence of a violent group.)

2. Smith and Sharp (1994) have a chapter – 'Working Directly with the Pupils Involved in Bullying Situations' – which compares three methods including Pikas' SCm. The authors give most space to the Pikas method (seven pages). They are critical of the two others because they lack independent evaluation and do not record how the process of change happens. In contrast to this, Smith and Sharp give prominence to Pikas' SCm, which they themselves tested in seven secondary schools in Sheffield. The authors had been trained by Pikas in workshops. They themselves trained 21 teachers and reported: 'Twelve of the teachers were able to use the method and all have reported that they found it an appropriate and helpful response to bullying' (p. 200).

3. I have recently learned of a fourth book referring to SCm. Dr Keith Sullivan, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington wrote to me:

> I have recently written a book entitled *The Anti-Bullying Handbook* which will be published in New Zealand and Australia. In this book I attempt to provide an overview of the best approaches to dealing with bullying to date and provide a useful description of your method based on what I've read and heard. Many thanks for your inspiration.

(Keith Sullivan's book will be published by Oxford University Press, Melbourne, London and New York, 2000)

4. Duncan (1996) refers to results of a questionnaire she sent to 14 trainees about a year after my visit.

> 'It was found that SCM had been used at least 38 times since the original training. Children and young people from the age of 7 to 16 had been involved in SCM. The most common age of subject was between 8 and 12 years, although 14 attempts had been made with secondary school children'. . . In 34 of the 38 cases SCM was found to be either very successful or successful. (Duncan, 1996, p 96)

Address queries to: Alison Duncan, Bruce House, Wellgate, Arbroath, DD11 3TE, Scotland.

5. There are, so far, no representative statistics on the class discussions carried out. Two of ten parents on a voluntary course managed such class discussions and treated the cases. There were more course participants who could have managed the same thing – but the teachers were reluctant to let them in to the school. How many teachers are themselves applying the class discussion for teenagers is unknown to me. The interesting thing is, however, that the existence of my recent book on SCm is spreading by means of the 'word-of-mouth' method. Some politicians seem to be willing to help a voluntary group of my university students who are trained in SCm to go in to the schools, and have class discussions with teenagers according to this model. Another Swedish university has now decided to introduce two week's study of the SCm, including examination on a course, for future school psychologists. Volunteers among the students are provided the opportunity to apply SCm in the schools.

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