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A 'whole-school/community development' approach to preventing and countering bullying: the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011)

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This paper describes how a 'whole-school/community development' anti-bullying programme was designed, implemented and evaluated in an initiative in Erris, Co. Mayo, Ireland, involving local primary and post-primary schools and community groups. Students from seven participating schools (five primary, two post-primary) completed modified versions of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire both prior to and following programme implementation. Thereafter, there were reductions in students' reports of involvement in bully/victim problems and increases in their reports of feelings about bullying and countering bullying that were consistent with an anti-bullying ethos. The sizes of these effects were modest, in some cases perhaps due to the significantly low incidence of students' involvement in bully/victim problems prior to the programme. This model is in continued use in Erris, and in its further development it is intended to seek out opportunities to implement and evaluate it in other locations.

Keywords: school bullying; anti-bullying programmes; whole-school approach; whole-school/community development approach

Background to the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011)

The past three decades have seen large-scale implementations of 'whole-school' anti-bullying programmes at national and regional levels – initially, in Norway (Olweus and Roland 1983), and later, elsewhere (Farrington and Ttofi 2009; Smith 2003; Smith, Pepler, and Rigby 2004; Smith et al. 1999). What is described here is an extension of this type of programme beyond that of a predominantly schools-based focus – the 'whole-school/community development' approach. The article documents how such a programme – the design and evaluation of which was informed by previous Norwegian and Irish whole-school anti-bullying programmes – was co-designed and implemented via the activities of a community development project in Erris, Co. Mayo, between August 2009 and September 2011.

Defining bullying and understanding its effects

The Department of Education and Science's 'Guidelines on Countering Bullying in Primary and Post-Primary Schools' (1993, 6) define bullying as '... repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group

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against others'. Internationally, bullying is usually conceptualised as a sub-type of the more general category of aggressive behaviour (e.g. Olweus 1999; Roland and Idsøe 2001), and is distinct in two ways: (1) *repetition* ('A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, *repeatedly and over time*, to negative interactions on the part of one or more other persons') (Olweus 1991, 413; italics ours); and (2) the existence of a *power imbalance*, between the perpetrator(s) and the target, that favours the perpetrator(s) ('Aggressive behaviour may involve conflict between *equals*, whereas bullying always involves *hurting someone who is not quite able to defend himself/ herself*') (Roland & Idsøe 2001, 446; italics ours). It can be seen that the Department of Education and Science's (1993) definition omits the existence of a power imbalance. It has been argued that such an omission precludes the possibility of the differentiation of bullying behaviour from 'fair-fights', which is problematic when considering working at the practical level in schools (Minton 2010).

The negative effects on young people who have been bullied have been documented in both the popular media (see e.g. Ó Cionnaith 2012) and the scientific research literature. Olweus' longitudinal studies in Norway and Sweden showed that those bullied at school had higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem in adulthood (Olweus 1993). Roland's (2002) study of 2083 eighth graders (ca. 14 years old) in Norway showed that depression and suicidality were associated with having been bullied. This has been found to be true also of Finnish (Kaltiala-Heino et al. 1999) and Irish adolescents (Mills et al. 2004).

Studies of the experiences of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people having been bullied are also instructive in understanding the effects of bullying. Homophobic bullying is certainly widespread: Carolan and Redmond (2003) and Minton et al. (2008) showed that 44 and 50% of their participants (in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, respectively) reported having been bullied at school in the last three months because of their sexual orientation. Mayock et al.'s (2009) study of 1100 LGBT people in Ireland showed that 58% reported the existence of homophobic bullying in their schools, and 5% of their participants had actually left school early because of homophobic bullying (Mayock et al. 2009).

Anti-bullying actions in Norway and the 'whole-school' approach

Norway was the first country, and remains one of only two countries, to have implemented nationwide 'whole-school' intervention programmes against school bullying (the other being, in recent years, Finland [Salmivalli, Kärnä, and Poskiparta 2010]). The occurrence of three bullying-related suicides of school students in a single year led the Norwegian Ministry of Education to support the implementation of a nationwide programme to prevent and manage bullying in schools in 1983 (Olweus 1999). A general *prerequisite* for what has become the Olweus anti-bullying programme is awareness and involvement on the part of adults. *Core* programme measures at the *school* level are a questionnaire survey, a school conference day and better supervision during break periods; at the *class* level, class rules against bullying and regular class meetings with students; and at the *individual* level, serious talks with involved students and their parents. *Highly desirable* measures are the formation of a coordinating group at the *school* level; class parent–teacher association at the *class* level; and teacher and parent use of imagination at the *individual* level (Olweus 1999).

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Olweus' own evaluation of the first nationwide anti-bullying programme, based on data from schools in Bergen, indicated that reports of having been bullied and having bullied others fell by 50% or more, and his evaluation of a second implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in schools in Oslo (1999–2000) indicated that reports of having been bullied and having bullied fell by 42 and 52%, respectively (Olweus 2004). However, in an evaluation of the first nationwide anti-bullying programme (using Olweus' evaluation questionnaire) in 1986 in Rogaland, Munthe and Roland (1989) recorded that there had been less success than Olweus had indicated and that some schools showed *increased* levels of bullying. Furthermore, the results of large-scale implementations of the Olweus programme in countries outside Norway – in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany (Hanewinkel 2004), and South Carolina, USA (Limber et al. 2004) – have been less impressive. Limber et al.'s (2004) evaluation of the Olweus programme in 18 middle schools in South Carolina, USA, in 1995–1997 showed a statistically significant post-programme decrease in reports of having been bullied and having bullied others was recorded amongst boys, although this was not the case amongst girls. The Schleswig-Holstein programme (Hanewinkel 2004) was carried out in 47 schools (14,788 students) and evaluated at 37 of these schools (10,600 students). Reports of direct bullying in the primary (third and fourth grades) and lower levels of secondary school (fifth and sixth grade) showed an average reduction rate of about 2%. Prevalence rates for targets in the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grades remained almost unchanged, whilst in higher grades (11th and 12th grade) there was an increase of around 6–10% (Schäfer and Korn 2001).

On 23 September 2002, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, the Union of Education, the National Parents' Committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education, the Ombudsman for Children, and the Prime Minister (on behalf of the government of Norway) signed the *'Manifesto mot mobbing'* ['Manifesto against Bullying']. Over a three-year period, the Manifesto parties committed themselves 'to contributing actively to ensuring that bullying does not take place in schools', and to encourage all their 'respective local branches to cooperate on concrete measures that can prevent or stop bullying' (Manifesto against Bullying 2004, 3). This activity was underpinned by a change in legislation – specifically, under Chapter 9A of the 2003 Education Act (which concerns children's rights to psychosocial health in schools), schools were given a legal duty to prevent and stop all forms of bullying (Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education 2003, 4). Practically, most schools in Norway choose from one of the government-approved national models (the '*Olweus*' or the '*Zero*' programme [see below]), or are assisted in developing their own models (Munthe et al. 2005). By 2003, over 375 schools nationwide were participating in the Olweus programme in Norway (Olweus 2004).

SAF [*Senter for atferdsforskning* (The Centre for Behavioural Research)], a research institute at the University of Stavanger, operates the '*Zero*' anti-bullying programme, which is supported by the Norwegian Department of Education. The '*Zero*' programme shares the fundamentals of whole-school emphasis, basic intervention approaches of awareness-raising and behavioural management and outcome study evaluation methodologies with the Olweus programme. It is distinct in its training models and resources, and its greater emphasis on implementation strategies (Roland et al. 2010), in keeping with Roland's long-standing position

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regarding the necessity of embedding of anti-bullying principles in the school's day-to-day practice (Midthassel, Minton, and O' Moore 2009; Munthe and Roland 1989). The school year-long programme is initiated in September, and a series of five seminars for a project groups comprising key personnel within the schools is scheduled, steering the schools through the programme (Midthassel, Minton, and O' Moore 2009).

In an evaluation of the 'Zero' programme, as it was conducted in the school year 2003–2004 at 151 participating primary schools (20,430 students) in Norway, there was a statistically significant reduction in reports of having been bullied and having bullied amongst fifth to seventh grade students, but not amongst second to fourth graders in the sample. In pure outcome terms, the overall post-programme reduction in the number of second to seventh grade students reporting having been bullied weekly or more often was around 25%, although Roland et al. (2010, 50) acknowledge that 'there was no real control group and the schools were not randomly selected'. As we have already seen (above), the Norwegian Manifesto against Bullying was operating at that time, and Zero was one of two governmentally recommended programmes. However, Roland et al. (2010, 51) argued that even 'acknowledging these limits, there are positive considerations as this study entails a large number of pupils and the evaluation is done in a context that is of importance for Norwegian authorities'.

Anti-bullying action in Ireland

Prior to the implementation of '*Zero*', a similar type of programme had been implemented in Ireland; a similar programme was implemented in 42 primary schools in Co. Donegal, Ireland, in 1998–2000 (O' Moore and Minton 2005). A professional network comprising 11 teachers were trained and resourced, by Trinity College Dublin's Professor Mona O' Moore and her colleagues, to provide training and support for boards of management, staff, students and parents in the prevention and countering of bullying. Professional network members subsequently held an in-service training day for staff, and an after-school meeting for parents, as well as acting as an adviser/support to schools in relation to bullying problems thereafter, in three to five schools each. Following the programme, there were statistically significant reductions in students' reports of involvement in bully/victim problems – of 19.6 and 50% in reports of having been bullied and frequently (once a week or more often) bullied, respectively, and of 17.3 and 69.2% in reports of bullied and frequently bullied others, respectively (O' Moore and Minton 2005).

The Irish government has, in the past, formulated policy guidelines on bullying (Department of Education and Science 1993) and violence (Department of Education and Science 1999) and conducted a task force on discipline in secondary schools (Department of Education and Science 2006), as well as launching curricular initiatives (social, personal and health education; see NCCA 1996) in order to address aspects of bullying. The teachers' trade unions have published reports on student indiscipline, following similar reports by the Department of Education (1985, 1997 in O' Moore and Minton 2003); and on workplace bullying (ASTI 1999; INTO 1998; TUI 1999 in O' Moore and Minton 2003), as well as supporting publications designed to raise awareness of and counter homophobic bullying, in which they have been joined by the National Association of Principals and Deputy

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Principals and the National Parents' Council (post-primary) (BeLonG To/The Equality Authority 2006; GLEN, ASTI, and TUI 2009).

The aims of the Department of Education's Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour (1993, 5) were to: (1) 'assist schools in devising school-based measures to prevent and deal with bullying behaviour'; and (2) 'increase the awareness of bullying behaviour in the school as a whole'. These guidelines documented the effects of bullying, indications and characteristics of bullying behaviour and where bullying takes place; thereafter, step-by-step guidance on the prevention and countering of bullying behaviour via general and specific school policy was provided, with the importance of the active involvement of students, staff, parents and guardians, local and community agencies, the School Board of Management and the local Inspectorate in the generation and implementation of anti-bullying policy being emphasised throughout (O' Moore and Minton 2003).

Under the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), schools are obliged to provide a Code of Behaviour clarifying the schools' duty of care and policy concerning violence, indiscipline and bullying (specifying suspension and expulsion procedures), and failure on the part of the school to act in cases of violent behaviour resulting in causal injury to a member of staff or pupil constitutes a legal breach of the school's duty of care (Glendenning 1999). Nevertheless, there is no legislation in Ireland that is equivalent to Norway's Education Act (2003) under which, as we have seen, schools have been effectively prescribed a legal duty to attempt to stop all forms of bullying. Neither have Irish schools been centrally supported in the implementation or development of whole-school anti-bullying programmes to prevent and counter bullying behaviour, unlike their Norwegian counterparts (Midthassel, Minton, and O' Moore 2009; O' Moore and Minton 2005).

Context-specific local measures in Erris

Erris is a rural area of some 210,000 acres (850 km^2), located in north-western Co. Mayo; according to the 2006 Census of Population (Central Statistics Office 2007), there were 8602 inhabitants, with 2391 of these being under the age of 19. Erris includes large *Gaeltacht* areas (i.e. where the Irish language is the first or predominant language). It has five parishes, 3 post-primary schools and 19 national (primary) schools, and is considered one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country.[1] Monk (2003) identified a clear link between isolation, stress and suicide in rural areas; suicide rates in remote rural areas can be up to 25% higher than in urban areas (O' Leary 2010).[2]

From August 2009, the staff of the Iorras Le Chéile Community Development Project began work in earnest on putting together a comprehensive strategic plan to help to create a zero tolerance towards bullying in the entire Erris community.[3] The model that emerged was one of attempting to make a positive difference to young people's lives through training, resourcing and supporting a core group of school staff and community members to develop sustainable competence in preventing and dealing with bullying behaviour. There was to be a genuine attempt to include the whole Erris community in all aspects of the initiative's planning and implementation, via the work of a local Steering Committee (which comprised members from youth and community development groups, the Gardaí, Gaelic Athletic Association and soccer clubs, teachers and Board of Management members from local primary and

post-primary schools, psychotherapists and parents) and the ongoing work of the Community Development Project.

The programme utilised (1) some of the general parameters of previous 'whole-school' anti-bullying programmes (e.g. 'Donegal Primary Schools', 'Olweus', 'Zero'), including the emphasis on implementation (as in 'Zero'); (2) a community development emphasis, including the idea that children and teenagers should be receiving a consistent message around anti-bullying, both inside and outside of school; and (3) standardised evaluation materials and procedures (as in the 'Donegal Primary Schools' and 'Olweus' programmes).

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Methodology

Overview of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative

Essentially, the initiative was designed to run in the participating schools and in the community for the course of the school year 2010–2011. Table 1 shows a timeline of the major planning, implementation and evaluation features of the initiative.

A 'snowballing' strategy, advanced by the continuing local work of the Iorras le Chéile Community Development Project, was employed in securing the active participation of community organisations. In April 2010, 5 of the 19 primary schools, and all three post-primary schools had signalled their intention to fully participate, but all of the schools were kept abreast of developments, invited to nominate staff representatives for the July summer course, and provided with resources. By October 2010, 35 local organisations were represented at the presentation and training to community organisations, and shortly afterwards, all 19 primary schools had at least some level of engagement with the initiative.

Evaluation materials

The principal data-gathering instrument that was employed was a modified, English language version (Whitney and Smith 1993) of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus 1989) – an anonymous, self-report measure, completed by participating school students. The definition of bullying that is supplied to those who complete this questionnaire runs as follows:

> We say that a pupil is being bullied when he or she is singled out in an unpleasant way, and is picked on again and again, by another pupil or group of pupils. For example, it is bullying when a pupil has nasty or unpleasant things said to him or her, or is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, or when no one ever talks to him or her, and things like that. These things can happen often, and it may be difficult for the pupil being bullied to defend himself or herself.

The original (Swedish and Norwegian language) versions of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire were worded so that children of an age equivalent to Irish second class (ca. 6–7 years) could complete it for themselves (Olweus 1989). In its English language translation (Whitney and Smith 1993), it has been used without difficulty from this age/stage upwards for almost 20 years in the UK (Whitney and Smith 1993) and Ireland (Minton 2010; O' Moore, Kirkham, and Smith 1997; O' Moore and Minton 2005).

Table 1. Timeline of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011).

Date	Initiative event/phase
August 2009–March 2010	Design of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011), including community consultation via the activities of a Steering Committee and the Iorras le Chéile Community Development Project.
April–June 2010	Local schools and community organisations invited to nominate and send key staff members to participate in a five-day summer training programme ('Erris Community and Whole-School Anti-Bullying Programme'), organised by Mayo Education Centre.
May 2010	Pre-programme survey of students regarding bullying behaviour in participating schools.
5–9 July 2010	Implementation of five-day summer training programme (9 am–2 pm daily). Daily themes were (1) what is bullying?; (2) working with anti-bullying policy; (3) working with staff and young people; (4) working with parents; and, (5) cyber-bullying.
August–October 2010	Final refinement and dissemination of programme resources to those involved in a facilitation role in the initiative. These included sample anti-bullying policy templates, incident reporting forms and behavioural agreement documents; materials from the summer course; 'Zero' programme school resources for management and teaching staff, parents and students; and a list of other useful resources.
11–15 October 2010	Erris Anti-Bullying Week (2010). Formal launch; training for representatives of community organisations; community evening presentation; wristbands, T-shirts, posters and stickers produced. Anti-bullying activities each morning in participating schools; community activities each afternoon: a talk on bullying, a 'Monster Bingo' session (held by the Irish Wheelchair Association), a 'National School Anti –Bullying Banner and Chant Showcase', 'GAA Football Blitz', a 'Balloon Launch', and 'Blue Friday' (many people wore blue on this day to raise awareness of anti-bullying in Erris).
26 October 2010	Community evening seminar (conducted by John Lonergan, Rev. Dr. Tony Byrne and Sr. Kathleen Maguire) on 'Confronting Bullying in the Workplace, Home, School and Society'.
October 2010–March 2010	Programme of structured practical work (using the programme resources) undertaken by staff members with young people on anti-bullying in each of the participating schools and community organisations (local assistance provided by Iorras le Chéile).
January–February 2011	Development of a 'Code of Common Practice' for the Erris community regarding anti-bullying work.
April 2011	Visit by first author to some participating schools. Training session on 'Advanced Strategy Implementation' to representatives of the participating schools and community organisations.
May 2011	Post-programme (evaluation) survey in participating schools.
3–7 October 2011	Erris Anti-Bullying Week (2011).
November 2011	Compilation and dissemination of the final report on initiative (2009–2011). Feedback (principal results of student surveys) provided to schools.

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Evaluation procedure

In the pre-programme survey (May/June 2010), 71 primary school students (at five schools – all mixed-gender enrolment, located in villages, Roman Catholic denomination) and 219 post-primary students (at three schools – all mixed-gender enrolment; one community school, one Roman Catholic secondary school located in a small town, and one *gaelcholáiste* located in a village) completed anonymous, modified versions of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, in regular school time. In April 2010, all 19 primary schools and all 3 post-primary schools were invited to participate in all aspects of the initiative, including the pre-programme survey; the sample comprised all third, fourth and fifth class (primary) and first and second year (post-primary) students who were present in the schools who had consented to be so involved by May 2010.

Following the 2010–2011 implementation of the programme in the schools, 95 primary school students (at the same five schools that had been involved in the pre-programme survey) and 207 post-primary students (at the two schools located in the small town) completed anonymous, modified versions of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire in regular school time. The post-primary sample comprised all fourth, fifth and sixth class (primary) and second and third year (post-primary) students who were present in the schools who participated in both evaluation surveys on the day that the post-programme survey was implemented in May 2011.

The results of the pre- and post-programme questionnaires were subsequently analysed and compared, in order to evaluate the programme. The comparisons that were made in this analysis were:

- *Primary comparisons:* Third, fourth and fifth class students (ca. 8–11 years old) in May/June 2010 (pre-programme questionnaire) with fourth, fifth and sixth class students (ca. 9–12 years old) in May/June 2011 (post-programme questionnaire) in the five primary schools that participated in both the pre- and post-programme surveys.
- *Post-primary comparisons:* First and second year students (ca. 12–14 years old) in May/June 2010 (pre-programme questionnaire) with second and third year students (ca. 13–15 years old) in May/June 2011 (post-programme questionnaire) in the two post-primary schools that participated in both the pre- and post-programme surveys.

The principal results of this analysis are presented in Tables 3–5 inclusively. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines for graduate members of the British Psychological Society, of which the first author is a chartered member.

Results

Student survey-based baseline measures

First, it is possible to offer a comparison of the percentages of students reporting having been bullied and having bullied others ('now and again' or more often) within the last three months in the pre-programme survey, with those obtained in various school-based studies conducted in Ireland in recent

Table 2. Percentages of primary and post-primary students reporting having been bullied or having bullied others in the EABI pre-programme survey and other surveys.

	Primary students		Post-primary students	
Name of study	Have been bullied	Have bullied others	Have been bullied	Have bullied others
EABI pre-programme survey ($n=71$ primary, 219 post-primary)	15.1	7.0	17.9	14.3
Nationwide Survey of Bullying Behaviour (O' Moore 1993–1994; in O' Moore et al. 1997) ($n=9599$ primary, 10,843 post-primary)	31.3	26.4	15.6	14.9
Nationwide Survey of Bullying Behaviour (O' Moore, 1993–1994) ($\times$Mayo Results Only) ($n=349$ primary, 14 post-primary)[a]	28.9	23.9	28.6*	42.9*
Donegal Primary Programme pre-programme Survey (O' Moore 1998–1999; in O' Moore and Minton 2005) ($n=763$ primary)	39.0	28.7	Not applicable	Not applicable
'ABC' pre-programme survey (Minton and O' Moore, 2004–2005; in Minton and O' Moore 2008) ($n=2{,}312$ primary, 3257 post-primary)	29.8	15.6	23.0	21.4

[a]NB – no females were included; the Mayo post-primary sample comprised a single class, at a single school, of 14 males.

years, in which the same modified Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire was employed (see Table 2).

From Table 2, it can be seen that amongst primary school students in the EABI pre-programme survey, the incidence rates for reports of having been bullied and having bullied others were lower than in previous surveys. Amongst primary students, the incidence rate of for reports of having been bullied in the EABI pre-programme survey was statistically significantly lower than in the Nationwide Survey of Bullying Behaviour ($\chi^2=8.20$, 1 df, $p<0.01$), in the Mayo sub-sample of the Nationwide Survey of Bullying Behaviour ($\chi^2=5.45$, 1 df, $p<0.02$), the Donegal Primary Schools Programme pre-programme survey ($\chi^2=15.46$, 1 df, $p<0.001$) and the 'ABC' pre-programme survey ($\chi^2=6.80$, 1 df, $p<0.01$). Similarly, the incidence rate for reports of having bullied others in the EABI pre-programme survey was statistically significantly lower than that obtained in the same four previous surveys ($\chi^2=13.63$, 1 df, $p<0.001$; $\chi^2=9.98$, 1 df, $p<0.01$; $\chi^2=15.51$, 1 df, $p<0.001$; and $\chi^2=3.89$, 1 df, $p<0.05$, respectively). However, the incidence rates for reports of having been bullied and having bullied others amongst post-primary students in the present sample were not significantly different from those obtained in the previous Nationwide and 'ABC' pre-programme surveys.

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Student survey-based outcome measures

The chief results of the comparison of the pre- and post-programme survey data are presented in Tables 3–5.

From Table 3, it can be seen that following the implementation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011), there were reductions in frequencies of reports of having been involved in *all* categories of bully/victim problems in school amongst primary school students and in two categories of bully/victim problems (having been bullied in the last school term and having bullied others in the last five school days) amongst post-primary school students. However, these reductions were not statistically significant, with the observed χ^2 failing to exceed the critical value of 3.84 at the alpha ($p < 0.05$, at df = 1) in each case.

From Table 4, it can be seen that following the implementation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011), amongst primary school students, there were increases (although again, not statistically significant) in frequencies of students' reports of *all* categories of their teachers', peers' and own positive responses in situations of bullying at school, and in all but one of such categories (reporting that teachers 'almost always knew' about it when a student was being bullied) amongst post-primary school students.

From Table 5, it can be seen that following the implementation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011), amongst primary school students, there were increases (although once again, not statistically significant) in frequencies of students' reports in two categories of feelings about bullying consistent with an anti-bullying ethos (reporting that it is 'never' a student's own fault if he or she is being bullied and that those who bully 'always' or 'mostly' intend to hurt someone else's feelings) and in one such category (reporting that they would feel upset ['yes' or 'yes, very much so'] if another student was being bullied) amongst post-primary school students.

Table 3. Students' reports of having been bullied and having bullied others.

		Pre-programme questionnaire		Post-programme questionnaire			
Students' responses to questionnaire items	School level	Count	%	Count	%	Percentage change	χ^2 value
Reported having been bullied in the last school term	Primary	13/55	23.6	18/95	18.9	−19.9	0.46
	Post-primary	37/207	17.9	33/191	17.3	−2.2	0.02
Reported having been bullied in the last five school days	Primary	7/55	12.7	10/95	10.5	−17.3	0.17
	Post-primary	19/207	9.2	20/190	10.5	+ 12.4	0.20
Reported having bullied others in the last school term	Primary	5/55	9.1	5/95	5.3	− 41.7	0.82
	Post-primary	29/206	14.1	17/188	14.1	0	0.00
Reported having bullied others in the last five school days	Primary	4/55	7.3	3/95	3.2	− 56.2	1.33
	Post-primary	10/205	4.9	8/187	4.3	− 12.2	0.08

Table 4. Students' reports of what their teachers, peers and they themselves do in situations of bullying behaviour.

		Pre-programme questionnaire		Post-programme questionnaire			
Students' responses to questionnaire items	School level	Count	%	Count	%	Percentage change	χ^2 value
Reported that teachers 'almost always' knew about it when a student was being bullied	Primary	6/55	10.9	12/95	12.6	+ 13.5	0.09
	Post-primary	19/205	9.3	15/195	7.7	− 17.2	0.32
Reported that teachers 'almost always' put a stop to it when they knew a student was being bullied	Primary	18/54	33.3	35/84	41.7	+ 20.1	0.22
	Post-primary	92/202	45.5	91/196	46.4	+ 1.9	0.03
Reported that other students 'almost always' put a stop to it when they knew a student was being bullied	Primary	4/52	7.7	12/93	12.9	+ 40.3	0.92
	Post-primary	25/202	12.4	25/194	12.9	+ 3.9	0.02
Reported that they themselves 'helped' a student of their own age when they knew that he or she was being bullied	Primary	16/54	29.6	33/93	35.5	+ 16.6	0.64
	Post-primary	62/202	30.7	62/193	32.1	+ 4.4	0.09
Reported that they would 'not' or 'definitely not' join in the bullying of another student	Primary	42/54	77.8	81/93	86.2	+ 9.7	1.72
	Post-primary	111/202	55.0	119/197	60.4	+ 8.9	1.22

Discussion

Although the influence of previous Norwegian and Irish-designed whole-school anti-bullying programmes is acknowledged, in considering the design, implementation and evaluation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011), it is worth reflecting on what rendered it distinct. As we have seen, there has been a focus during the past 10 years of anti-bullying intervention in Norway on attempting to ensure fidelity to the design of the programme, ultimately driving the careful 'steering' implementation design of the 'Zero' programme (Midthassel, Minton, and O' Moore 2009; Roland et al. 2010). The tactic taken in Erris was *not* one of ensuring the equity of school circumstances to give an externally designed model its best chance of success, but rather the reverse – that of 'fitting' the programme to the circumstances and needs of the community and its schools. Hence, the Erris model marked a move from the

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Table 5. Students' reports of their beliefs and feelings regarding bullying behaviour.

		Pre-programme questionnaire		Post-programme questionnaire			
Students' responses to questionnaire items	School level	Count	%	Count	%	Percentage change	χ^2 value
Reported that it is 'never' a student's own fault if he or she is being bullied	Primary	25/54	46.3	45/93	48.3	+4.1	0.05
	Post-primary	74/202	36.6	69/192	35.9	−1.9	0.02
Reported that those who bully 'always' or 'mostly' intend to hurt someone else's feelings	Primary	32/54	59.3	63/94	67.0	+11.5	0.89
	Post-primary	139/201	69.2	129/195	66.2	−4.3	0.43
Reported that they would feel upset ('yes' or 'yes, very much so') if another student was being bullied	Primary	41/54	75.9	69/94	73.4	−3.3	0.11
	Post-primary	111/202	55.0	122/192	63.5	+13.4	3.00

'*whole-school*' approach exemplified in the various anti-bullying programmes documented in the introductory sections of this article (i.e. 'Olweus', 'Zero', 'Donegal Primary Schools'), towards a '*whole-school/community development*' approach.

In the evaluation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative as it was implemented in the academic year 2010–2011, it was found that, following the implementation of the programme, there were reductions in frequencies of reports of having been involved in *all* categories of bully/victim problems amongst primary school students; increases in frequencies of reports in *all* categories of their estimations of their teachers', peers' and own positive responses in situations of bullying at school; and increases in frequencies of students' reports in two (of the three) categories of feelings about bullying consistent with an anti-bullying ethos. Amongst post-primary students, there were reductions in frequencies of reports in two categories of bully/victim problems; increases in frequencies of reports in four (of the five) categories of their estimations of their teachers', peers' and own positive responses in situations of bullying at school; and increases in frequencies of students' reports in one category of feelings about bullying consistent with an anti-bullying ethos, Tables 3–5 inclusively and their accompanying text). Nevertheless, as noted above, these differences did not reach statistical significance. It is important that we attempt to understand why this might have been the case.

In the first place, it was noted above (see Table 2 and its accompanying text) that the frequencies of reports of primary school students' involvement in bully/victim problems *prior to* the implementation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative were statistically significantly lower than previous medium- to large-scale surveys utilising the same measurement criteria. Why this should have been the case is not known. It

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is possible to speculate that low bully/victim problems could be down to positive school ethos, and an already existent capacity for preventing and countering such issues in the participating primary schools. It could also be suggested that such a positive ethos could be easier to maintain in a small school, and the participating schools (as are many schools in rural western Ireland) were indeed small. It is to be recalled that the post-programme survey sample, which comprised all fourth-, fifth- and sixth-class students present in the five schools on the day of testing, numbered no more than 95 students.

In itself, this is also a factor that could have diminished the size of the effect observed following the implementation of the programme. The test–retest, pre- versus post-programme survey comparison is one that has been used extensively in evaluating the effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes (Farrington and Ttofi 2009; Smith Pepler, and Rigby 2004). By surveying all of those present in given classes or grades on the days of the surveys, one is able to preserve anonymity quite easily, as one does not have to 'track' individual students over time, but only target the same class or grade in one's sample as it rises. Nevertheless, it is possible to see how simple factors such absenteeism could produce a confounding effect on the validity of this sampling strategy (and consequently, the results) when working with small class/ school sizes.

Furthermore, two other general factors concerning how the results of the evaluation of anti-bullying programmes may become skewed should also be considered. Although *post hoc* statistical analysis showed that this was not a factor in the Donegal Primary Schools Programme study (O' Moore and Minton 2005), Smith, Madsen, and Moody (1999) have argued that due to the fact that involvement in bully/victim problems tends to decline towards the end of the primary school years, the effectiveness of programmes in which students 'age towards' these years appears to be less easy to determine. Additionally, it has sometimes been observed that the implementation of an anti-bullying programme can cause an increase in reports of bully/victim problems in a post-programme survey (Smith, Pepler, and Rigby 2004). Eslea and Smith (1998) have argued that this is because such a programme increases students' general awareness of what bullying is – they may recognise, for the first time, that what has been happening to them (or what they have been doing to others) constitutes bullying, or perhaps feel 'safer' to categorise (and report) the problem in a school that is now explicitly addressing the issue.

Limitations

This implementation and evaluation was not without its limitations. It may be argued that the fact that very few students reported having been involved in bully/ victim problems suggests that bullying is not a major problem in the area, and that this could undermine the rationale for such an initiative. The simple reason why the initiative was evaluated in Erris is because this is where the model was first designed and implemented. It is also to be recalled (see above) that the development of the initiative sprang from a wish within the Erris community to work preventatively, rather than as a crisis response. Nonetheless, the opportunity to design/refine, implement and evaluate the whole-school/community development approach at other locations[4] would be most welcome. According to the arguments we have outlined above, should the initial levels of students' involvement of bully/victim

problems be greater in other locations, then it would be easier to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the model designed in Erris.

It is also possible that the changes that were observed did not reach statistical significance because of weaknesses in the programme. In terms of evaluation methodology, we must acknowledge that we have repeated a flaw that has existed in the evaluation in each of the programmes mentioned in the introduction, and thus missed an opportunity to test for such weaknesses. That flaw is the absence of comparison groups in the evaluation design; Roland et al. (2010) saw this as a weakness in their evaluation of the 'Zero' programme (alas, published too late for our own initiative's design). It is arguable that it would be difficult to 'match up' schools in order to make such comparisons. Additionally, when utilising snowballing and community-inclusive strategies, it is difficult to see how one could simultaneously operate a system in which some of the schools were asked to act as 'controls', and participate only in the evaluation aspects. Nevertheless, now that a working model of a 'whole-school/community development' programme has been developed a more stringent test of its potential in other locations is desirable in a number of respects.

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Conclusions

In conclusion, the design and implementation strategies of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2009–2011) made it distinct as a 'whole-school/community development' programme. As well as receiving a consistent anti-bullying message from school managers, teachers and parents (the whole-school approach), this message was reinforced for participating children and teens in community groups (via various clubs, teams and businesses) through their engagement in the programme (the whole-school/community development approach). The size of the effects produced by Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative as it was implemented in the academic year 2010–2011 must at best be described as modest. However, one should consider: (1) the significantly low levels of primary school students' involvement in bully/victim problems prior to the implementation of the programme; (2) the small size of the participating primary schools and the confounding effect that this could have had on the evaluation strategies; (3) the possible existence of an 'age-related decline' in bullying behaviour amongst primary school students; and (4) the phenomenon of anti-bullying programmes raising students' general awareness of bullying, such that an apparent 'increase' in *post hoc* surveys of incidence of bully/victim problems is observed. One limitation of previous programme evaluation designs was repeated here – the non-use of a comparison group. In addressing this and other limitations outlined above, and in further refining the model of the 'whole-school/community development' approach developed in Erris, the opportunity to implement programmes of this type in other locations will be actively sought out.

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Notes

1. The Haase Index of Deprivation (Haase and Pratschke 2005) provides a single measurement of the overall deprivation of an area, and is used by all major Irish state and semi-state bodies. It takes into consideration the social class composition, the level of education, the level of unemployment and long-term unemployment, the proportion of lone parents, the extent of small farming and the age dependency rate. The index rankings range from one (most affluent 10%) to ten (most disadvantaged 10%). Erris' rank factor score is 10.
2. Almost 200 people in Erris have received the 'Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training' (ASIST), delivered by the Health Services Executive in conjunction with the Iorras Le Chéile Community Development Project.
3. The community approach to dealing with bullying in Ireland was outlined by Brendan Byrne as early as 1994. Dr Byrne's community model and our own community development model are not conceptually linked.
4. The Initiative continues to operate in Erris. The second year of implementation of the Erris Anti-Bullying Initiative (2011–2012) was marked by both a sustained focus in the schools, and an increased attention to providing training for an increasing number of participating community groups.

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