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# Anti-bullying task force : a community's response to address bullying behaviors and attitudes : a project based upon an independent investigation

Brian Christopher Kellen

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Brian Christopher Kellen  
Anti-Bullying Task Force: A  
Community's Response to  
Address Bullying Behaviors  
and Attitudes

## ABSTRACT

A terrible tragedy occurred in the town of South Hadley involving a student's suicide. Part of the response by the school administration and the community was to form an Anti-Bullying Task Force for Civil and Ethical Behaviors.

This study was a qualitative participant observer case study involving this task force. This researcher participated in one of the seven sub-groups of the Anti-Bullying Task Force for Civil and Ethical Behavior in the role of group note taker. The sub-group that was focused on was the Community Programs group. The two questions used to guide this research were: (1) What is the process of organizing and developing a community and school collaborative task-force, whose goal was to address the social problem of bullying? (2) How does the task force function and what are some of the characteristics that affected the members of the task force and the group's process?

Studying the Anti-Bullying Task Force for Civil and Ethical Behaviors illustrates a community's effort to address the issue of bullying through many avenues. The Community Programs group's work and process was shaped by their goals. The goals of the Community Programs group emphasize the importance of positive behaviors and attitudes of adults in the community and the effect this can have on bullying behaviors.

ANTI-BULLYING TASK FORCE: A COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO  
ADDRESS BULLYING BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Brian Christopher Kellen

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2010

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as a class of intentional and repeated acts that occur through physical, verbal and relational forms in situations where a power difference is present (Olweus, 1993 in Bradshaw et al., 2007). Bullying affects a large number of students, The National Youth Violence Prevention Program reports that nearly 30% of the 5.6 million students surveyed in 2007 reported having been a bully, a victim, or both in the past year (Nansel et al., 2001).

“... The myth is that bullying is born within the schools and that teachers are the ones who must take the lead in stopping it. There is little understanding that bullying is usually a problem incubated within local communities and refined by the behavior of hostile adults whose model of aggression is a potent sculptor of developing young minds. It is at this level that we should intervene and try to stop a process through which children become bullies whose motivations are contrary to those required by a truly civilized society.” (Randall, 1996. p ix ).

Caring for and valuing youth in the community can manifest itself by the development of after school programming. In positive communities children can learn how adults solve problems peacefully, be encouraged to make academic achievements and view a community where violence is an ineffective solution to a problem. A positive community will respect individual differences and celebrate diversity. These

characteristics in a community can make it more likely that the amount of violence and bullying by children will decrease (Orpinas and Horne, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to observe the process of a community Anti-Bullying task force. The task force for this research was the town of South Hadley's Anti-Bullying Task Force to Promote Civil and Ethical Behavior (Anti-Bullying task force). The task force was developed by the school administration in the wake of a tragic event involving a high school student and bullying behaviors.

The study was a qualitative, case study, with the research being conducted through a participant-observer role. This researcher engaged with a community task force in attempt to learn about the process of the task force and the task force's use of a community wide approach to address the problem of bullying through multiple avenues (school programs, parents, school district policies, cyber bullying, teachers, and community programs and members.) This study is based on my involvement with the Anti-Bullying task force and the Community Programs sub-group. The aim of this research project was to use a participant observer approach to develop a multi-dimensional descriptive account of a specific task force's functions and operation. The research questions used to guide this qualitative, case study are: (1) What is the process of organizing and developing a community and school collaborative task-force, whose goal was to address the social problem of bullying? (2) How does the task force function and what are some of the characteristics that affect the members of the task force and their process? This research was used for the MSW thesis, for presentation and possible publication.

This thesis is organized into five sections. The first section is the introduction, which explains briefly the issue of bullying and describes how one community was involved in addressing this issue. The purpose of this study was to investigate as a participant observer how the process of the task force developed their goals and rationale behind their decisions. The subsequent sections of this thesis are the literature review, methodology, findings and finally a discussion.

The literature review covers aspects of community organizing in school and communities working in task forces and project planning, and existing community models of anti-bullying task forces and programs. The methodology section will discuss my method of research, which was a participant observer model, the population involved with my research, and my data collection methods. The fourth section presents my findings. This section includes a description of the structure of the task-force and of the task force meetings. Also looking at how the group functioned and the ways the group members worked together to achieve their group's goals. The final chapter is the discussion section.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE RIVIEW

There has been a lot of research done on the topic of bullying and programs that attempt to address this subject. In my research I have found that the majority of programs that have been developed are used in the school setting. For my study I was interested in learning how efforts of a community can be utilized to assist the school in developing and sustaining a holistic school and community effort.

While researching the topic of community task forces related to anti-bullying efforts I found literature on different areas of the subject that are independent of one another. This section will review these topics individually and clarify their relevance to the present project. The topics that will be covered are: Community Organizing, School and Communities Working Together, Task Force and Project Planning, and Previous Community Anti-Bullying projects.

#### *Community Organizing*

According to Rubin and Rubin (2008), the concept of community describes various ways in which people are defined or consider themselves linked together, sharing a common connection. It could be by living near one another or sharing characteristics or having common belief. Community is also a way in which people define themselves as part of a socially constructed group.

There are a variety of ways that communities can bond. One way relevant to a task force is through an activist network, this is when people are connected by their

willingness to address an issue. A second way of bonding is called a perceptual community occurs when people are seen by others as sharing a belief or characteristic, for this type of bond the individuals might not know one another. A third way a community can bond is through ascriptive attributes, when individuals share a place of birth, gender or background. An additional way for a community to bond is through what Rubin and Rubin (2008) refer to as a community of interest, this is when individuals come together for the purpose of addressing an issue which people in communities share and understand in a similar way (Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

Rubin and Rubin (2008) describe ways in which a community can build and strengthen their connection to one another. The first is by reinforcing community's social networks. A network is a link between individuals. One type of network is an issue network, which can be used when forming a task force. Issue networks are when individuals are linked to one another through an interest in a shared concern (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Another way to strengthen a community's connection is through a community's social glue (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Social glue is links or commonalities that a community has that connect them to one another. To strength a community connection the community also needs to have social bridges, these are links to the world outside of immediate acquaintances (Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

One type of community is a neighborhood. This community is defined as an area of people, connected by a physical space. This type of community is the easiest to organize when it faces an immediate problem that affects the whole community (Rubin & Rubin, 2008), such as bullying.

One way a neighborhood can try to build culture is through the use of an issue community. An issue community is a group that shares a common framing of both a problem and solutions (Rubin and Rubin 2008). In task force work individuals are more likely to join the group if they share a common framing for a problem and possible solutions. Framing can help to foster solidarity within the community. Framing is a way to turn an issue from a problem to something the community can take pride in addressing. Issue communities develop shared narratives stories of who they are and why they do what they do (Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

Participating in an issue community group strengthens individual's identities with the community; this result is independent of whether or not the group accomplishes its original goals (Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

One asset an issue community utilizes to address an issue is the community's social capital. Social capital is the density and pattern of connections that enable people to cooperate and collaborate in the community. It is a willingness to share knowledge, help handle matters, and share connections. It can help members feel obligated to one another. Social capital can make individuals more likely to participate and help one another and their community to solve problems (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). A main reason for forming a task force is because a community identifies an issue and the members of that community have the desire to work together to try and solve the problem.

A second asset that can be utilized by an issue community is the use of collective efficiency. This is when the individuals share a belief that others have a willingness to stand together for a common interest (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). A task force is also a group of individuals that are working together on a common interest of a goal.

Social capital measures potential of people to organize and help each other, collective efficiency is the belief you will have success (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Both can measure the strength of the community. Social capital can be turned into collective efficiency by having the community look at all of their assets instead of just looking at the problem (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Another asset of an issue community can be the connections of individuals, industries and institutions. You can use these assets, social capital, and collective efficiency and community connections, to begin action in an issue community (Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

The term Rubin and Rubin (2008) use to define when an issue group addresses an issue is called collective action. This is used to help with the problem and bring people closer together. The building of social capital allows members to take ownership and responsibility for their community (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Ownership and a feeling of responsibility are important characteristics to a community task force. Social capital can increase as the community's assets begin to work collaboratively. This also expands the earlier mentioned social bridges (Rubin and Rubin, 2008).

People who have confidence in their self and others will experiment with new ideas and verbalize solutions. Feeling part of something can create a bond and motivate people into collective actions. Social capital can provide groups with ways to act to address problem. It can bond people together to create social change (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). The use of social capital can benefit a community task force by providing assets to the group to help them in accomplishing the task force's goals.

A community problem is a matter that engages those in the community or group. Some solutions to a community problem involve addressing the here and now type of

problem, other solutions, such as sectoral solutions, are for problems that do not have an immediate resolutions (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). A sectoral solution is an attempts to address attempt to identify all of the reasons for a problem and then to address the multiple aspects of a problem simultaneously (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Another type of solution is a transformative approach, which Rubin and Rubin (2008) defines as, “Seeking to change underlying social, economic, political, or cultural structures that allow a problem to persist”( Rubin & Rubin, 2008, p35)

There are a variety of social change models in community organizing and they can change over time (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). They differ by responses to three broad concerns. First is whether to focus more on if the response needs immediate, direct action or if a sustained effort over time would be a more efficient response . Second, to be concerned more about here and now or transforming the system and third, having more direct membership involvement or work through professional staff (Rubin and Rubin, 2008).

Three types of social change models which can be differentiated. They are action focus, ideology, and transformative action or system repair (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Action focus models are used purposely bring about social change. Ideology models differ based on whether or not they reflect an underlying ideology. Ideologies are ideas about what a society should be and what path they should follow. Transformative actions or system repair models use framing, and typification to shape the responses and goals (Rubin and Rubin, 2008).

Framing is the intentional effort to define why a problem occurs (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Framing affects the scope of solutions that are proposed. Ideologies are

more sophisticated ways of framing. They use broader perspectives to explain why society is how it is, and also has suggestions about how it should be (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Another way to define why problems occur is with the use of typifications. This is a story or set of examples, that encapsulates the problem (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Typifications can be used in ways to harm the vulnerable (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). Ideas about bullying behavior such as “they deserve it” or “it’s a natural part of growing up,” (Randall, 1996) are examples of typification.

The decision about what social change model should be use in never a simple one. Should the community focus on immediate problems or try to combat the underlines structure that allows the problem to develop or continue (Rubin and Rubin, 2008)?

Data gathering is used for action research. Group can gather data by; using available data, surveys, research, experiments, observations and participant observations, in-depth interviewing, focus groups, and community network analysis (Rubin and Rubin, 2008). For task force work it is important use data to assist the group in identifying areas of a problem as well as to define the extent of solutions needed to address it.

### *School and Communities Working Together*

Communities want to be involved and know the reasoning behind school decisions (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). Citizens have become more educated and also more interested in the education system. One way to involve the community is by goal setting with community members. This allows the school to share community expectations of goals with the school board (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). For programs to work involving school, community and school boards all parties need to be fully committed and also believe in the goals that develop by these three parties working

together (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). In task force work involving the community, school personnel and school board members agreed upon goals will benefit the group process by giving a cohesive plan for the work. By having approval by all parties beforehand the goals are more likely to be supported by the board and funds can be allocated when necessary to help meet the goals (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005).

When working with the community the school should develop both a time frame, and define leadership for the work together. The goals and size of participation of the community needs to be factored when deciding if tasks should be district wide or on a school to school basis. Anyone from the community who wants to be involved should be allowed. Teachers, board members, students, other school faculty, community members, and school administration should be members of the group and be present when goal setting takes place. All of these preplanning decision as well as the characteristics of a school working with a community mirror the planning and characteristics of a community anti-bullying task force. The work of the group should be publicized though out the entire process (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). Varying points of view all need fair considering though out the goals setting process (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005) which is the same in a task force's process of developing the group's goals. When working with the community school administration and board members need to be aware of individuals pushing their own agendas. These agendas can impact responsibilities and time constraints put on a group (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005).

Schools and communities working together can also be affected by unfair criticism usually aimed at the school and their staff (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). Criticism of public schools can undermine and weaken confidence of group's to work

together and believe their goals can get accomplished. When working with the community schools cannot ignore the criticisms, they need to be addressed. Criticism can help to measure the communities' interest and how important an issue is to them (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). Knowing a community's interest are crucial when developing a community task force. If people are interested in an issue they are much more likely to join and support a task force than if the issue is not relevant to them. If people are criticizing the school, the school may take this opportunity to try and involve more citizens in a task force, or goal making process. Criticism can also be valuable in providing a perspective that may not have been considered by the school administration (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). There are different types of critics from the community; hostile critics, uninformed critics, enlightened critics and professional critics. The hostile and uninformed critics have characteristics that do not benefit the process of the school and community working together. These critics are often angry, their complaints are often personal not system wide. They also repeat information that has already been stated focusing on the negative (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005).

In developing school and community organizations there are three types of plans; a centralized plan, a decentralized plan and coordinated plan (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). For this research project the coordinated plan is most relevant to discuss. Coordinated plan is developed to organize school boards, school administration, faculty, students, and the community to reinforce and support one in other while working together toward a goal.



### *Task Force and Project Planning*

There are many recommendations and strategies that have been shown to be effective in planning and operating groups, especially task forces. For this research project the goal was not to evaluate the productivity of the task force but to use the opportunity to learn from their process. The literature reviewed is used as a frame work to help to understand the process and to help organize different aspects of the group process.

An organization is a network of smaller groups, each group having their own set of values, standards and beliefs (Olmstead, 2002). Sometimes the smaller groups can be similar to one another and other times they will differ. In an organization there is a system of relationships between members. Individuals have a lot of contact with few other members, some too little contact with other members and no contact with the majority of the members. Interaction between members in groups are not random but are based on the responsibilities and the division of work. Relationships can begin to develop as small groups are formed to perform specific tasks (Olmstead, 2002).

Behavior of individuals can relate to their place in the group. Groups can also develop relationships towards other groups in an organization. As groups become more unified they can become critical of other groups and defensive of their own based on their shared attitudes or beliefs (Olmstead, 2002).

Group cohesiveness is a feeling of group pride and solidarity by its members. A smaller sized group is more likely to be cohesive than a larger group. Cohesiveness has been positively correlated to group productivity toward their goals. (Likert, 1961 in Olmstead, 2002). Cohesiveness can be linked to group norms, if the group has strong

norms about productivity and effectiveness it can lead to the group becoming cohesive (Olmstead, 2002).

Olmstead (2002) discusses three factors for effective performance by groups in organizations. First, it is important to develop a group situation that is attractive to its members and elicits pride and solidarity for the group. Secondly the group should establish a group norm of being productive. Third members of the group need to be technically proficient.

Characteristics of an ideal group (Likert, 1961 in Olmstead, 2002) are to have members who possess knowledge and skills, positive attitudes, strong motivation, good working relationships and a positive and supportive atmosphere.

There are certain properties that will define a productive group. They are that the group will have the capacity to learn, to have open and effective communication and group flexibility allowing for the interchangeable role of leader. There will be cohesiveness of group tasks, and the group will possess operational proficiency (Olmstead, 2002).

The group also needs to create an atmosphere that promotes confidence, freedom, and is non-threatening. A healthy working environment involves members meeting in close physical proximity to each other or with the knowledge that the other members are working toward tasks and will come together in the near future.

In an ideal group you want the members to work together and have a strong cohesiveness but the members also need to develop what Olmstead (2002) refers to as “Optimum independence.” In a group success for an individual will also mean progress for the group that they are in.

For “Optimum Independence,” each member will assume responsibility for one’s own actions (Olmstead, 2002). They will possess the willingness to take both positive and negative consequences for one’s own actions, statements and ideas. Individuals in the group need freedom to act. Be able to operate without interference and being open to reach goals in modified ways than originally planned. Show confidence, trust and provide information and open communication between group members and leader (Olmstead, 2002).

To have “Optimum Independence,” in a group each member should have the right of appeal. Be able to safely appeal decisions made by the facilitator or group, or express differences of opinion to an issue no matter how big or small without fear of retaliation. Group members should remain open and listen to the views of others (Olmstead, 2002).

They are four indicators to tell if a group is developing their independence and cooperation. There is spontaneous communication and interaction between the group members. Second, the group members will begin to share the role of leader and the responsibilities of managing the group. Third the members of the group will develop strong feelings about their responsibilities to the group as well as the actions and decisions being made by the group. Finally there will be a relaxed and comfortable feeling by group members in their meetings and in their interactions with one another or with the group leader (Olmstead, 2002). As people are involved in groups they can begin to develop a role that they are comfortable in. Additionally group members may decide to designate a role to them. As roles are defined members in the group may be utilized by the group in different capacities (Olmstead, 2002).

If a group's cohesiveness, cooperation and independence have not developed, insecurity can emerge in a group. Insecurity in groups usually appears as "fear of consequences" or "fear of leader reaction." Fear of consequences can also be a fear of failure (Olmstead, 2002). It is natural that as a task force progresses so does the amount of questions arising from group members. A close, competent and strong group can process these questions and agree on solutions to problems that arise. In an insecure group these questions that arise may cause disagreements, division among group members, or a stoppage of production for the group. The "fear of a leader" reaction is based on the group's cohesiveness. A cohesive group will not have this fear as the members believe they are being judged on their merit. A poorer functioning group can be unclear of expectations and more fearful of consequences of their actions. This can cause anxiety in the group which will again affect the group's productivity (Olmstead, 2002). An effective leader provides a sense of personal security and a sense of worth to each group member. A group member's sense of worth can be seen as the trust and approval by fellow members as well as knowledge of individual role and an understanding of how the group is progressing toward their goal (Olmstead, 2002).

A task force is a specific type of group classified as an operational group (Olmstead, 2002). For a group to be considered a task force it needs to have certain characteristics. First it should be semi-independent but accountable to larger organization, set up in pyramid organizational structure, but organization setup can differ. In a task force there may be numerous committees, both advisory and functional and the upper level is made up of highly skilled, highly qualified individuals. A task force may be any size (Olmstead, 2002).

There are certain characteristics that make each task force distinct. They will usually have a single important goal. The group will design specific objectives to reach that goal, they will distribute responsibility among members, and the group's goal may be to problem-solve or complete a project or both (Olmstead, 2002).

A task force is driven by their goal, maintained by group norms and should share values related to their groups performance (Olmstead, 2002).

It is a difficult task establishing the goals of a task force before you begin but this task is very important action that is needed to begin a project. When establishing goals the task force should follow some guidelines for developing the goals (Randolph & Posner, 1988). They guidelines can be remembered as SMART; specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, and time framed (Randolph & Posner, 1988). The goals should be specific enough that anyone could read and understand what the group is trying to accomplish. The goals should be measurable. Some goals are easier to measure than others but it is important to have measureable goals no matter what you project so that the group members have sense of direction and can see the progress. The goals should be agreed upon by the group members. Agreeing on goals will establish a commitment by the group toward the project. The goals need to be realistic, they should be goals that are able to be accomplished with the resources, time frame and knowledge that is available to the group. Finally the goals should be time-framed. The goals need to be able to be accomplished in the given time frame. The group should know if there is any flexibility in deadlines for the project or its end date (Randolph & Posner, 1988).

When a task force has developed goals the next step is to become more specific about how to accomplish goals by developing objectives. Objectives are tasks or plans

that directly relate to the project goal. One way to develop objectives is to establish checkpoints, activities, relationships and time estimates of how long the objectives will take (Randolph & Posner, 1988).

The use of milestones and events are ways for a group to monitor the progress of the project. Milestones are when you measure your group's actual progress versus predicted progress of the group at certain points. Events are check points in the group's process leading toward the project goals (Randolph & Posner, 1988).

Decision making is a central part of any group activity. In a group process problem-solving is not done by an individual but by the group. In a multi-group organization each sub-group is partially responsible for problem solving. For the final outcome all groups must be considered. There are seven factors that can affect a group or task force's decision making process. They are the working environment, insecurity in the group, group member independence, standards of behavior, communication system, coordination and interpersonal relations (Olmstead, 2002).

There are some requirements for an effective operating group (task force). They will have the capacity to be realistic, by understanding their situation and knowing conditions that will affect the group and the goal. The group will also be able to adapt to solve problems that come up and be flexible to react to changing demands. They will be able to operate efficiently and be competent to complete tasks as they arise in order to accomplish overall goal (Olmstead, 2002).

Standards of behavior in a task force, (group norms) are shared expectations of what group members should do and how they should act. Formal norms are laid out and followed by the group. Informal norms can also develop when different expectations or

behaviors are embraced by the group. Negative informal norms such as expectation of little or mediocre work will set back the group's productivity and progress (Olmstead, 2002).

How a task force can communicate can help to determine how productive they will be toward completing their task. Individual's attitudes and motivation determine both verbal and non-verbal communication with the other group members.

Communication is important in a group because it allows members to pass on information, allows for feedback for ideas and problem-solving, discussing solutions as well as events and the process to achieve goals. It is important that the group develop a system where all members can communicate with one another and the leader is not just communicating with certain individuals. Communicating with the entire group gives all group members a feeling of having ownership in the group and can feel involved and included in all tasks and decisions the group makes (Olmstead, 2002).

Coordination is another factor in how well a task force will function. It is important for a task force to find a balance between formal and informal coordination. It is important also to be careful not to have over or under coordination. If a task force is under coordinated the results may be a duplication of tasks or efforts or group members. Also a group may not utilize all available resources or explore all possible avenues because numerous group members may be doing the same task. A task force that is over coordination can result in the group being very rigid and concerned about need missing any minor detail. This can hinder the process and result in the group not being able to achieve the goals they set out for the group. Coordination and communication of a task force work intrinsic of one another (Olmstead, 2002).

Interpersonal relationships are the final factor in how a task force will function. The mutual support of group members can allow for better communication in the group. Differences over ideas are a natural part of a task force process. Basically the development of ideas as a group is the purpose of a task force. If the ideas could be developed by an individual there would be no need for the group process. If the group can establish good interpersonal relationships it allows the task force to have conversations that look at multiple perspectives and ideas for completing goals. If the relationships are good then the group will base decision on ideas and not on the person who comes up with idea. Differences in opinion should be encouraged and are a fundamental part of the problem-solving process (Olmstead, 2002). Interpersonal relationships can also aid in the process of building commitment by members to their group. By allowing members to have a chance to contribute their own ideas and share the responsibility for making important decisions can make the work more meaningful for group members (Randolph & Posner, 1988).

It is important to remember that members of a task force may also belong to other groups in a community and may have loyalties to these different groups. Some in the task force may also be involved with a church or school, and their loyalty to those groups may be stronger than the loyalty to the task force. It is important to know these relationships and loyalties when evaluating ideas of groups (Olmstead, 2002).

Building excitement in the process of a group project can also be valuable. Rewards allow the group to celebrate their progress or success with one another. It can benefit the group by letting members know that they are important and valuable to the group (Randolph & Posner, 1988).



### *Community Anti-Bullying Projects*

In developing a strategy to address bullying a community group needs to address what others believe are the origins of bullying in the school and in the community with the same intensity (Randall, 1996). Randall (1996) found a common misbelief shared by school faculty, parents, and other people in the community. Randall (1996) titles it the “school of hard knocks,” this is the belief that children gets toughened up from bullying.

The aim of a community approach should be to stop or reduce bullying everywhere that is occurs in the school and in the community. This is the optimal goal for anti-bullying work but Randall (1996) also believes goals should include alternatives for the “bullying” behavior. The project should not only want to reduce or stop the bullying but also focus on how to replace these behaviors with more acceptable ones. The group should have an approach that not only addresses the direct bullying (hit, threaten, and name call) but also the indirect occurrences (rumors and exclusion) as well (Randall, 1996). The group’s aim should be a large goal, so that if or when it is not met it shows that a continued effort is needed to address the problem. Some goals for a community anti-bullying project can be to reduce incidents of bullying, increase community member’s likely hood to report bullying incidents witnessed in the community (Randall, 1996). A group goal can also be to get organized and make the community more aware of the problem of bullying. Other goals can be educating parents and community members about bullying and symptoms to look for of bullies, victims and bystanders. The group can also try to encourage sympathy in the community for children and adults who have or are being bullied and decreasing the popularity or support of bullies and bullying behavior in the community (Randall, 1996).

To see results that last, a long consistent effort is needed. Usually a decrease in bullying is observed when the community initially makes changes, but if changes and effort are not sustained bullying can increase back or beyond its original level (Randall, 1996). Changing the culture of a community can take a lot of time and effort. Parents may be a great starting point to use as agents of change. A steady sustained plan will allow the community to eventually take responsibility and ownership for their goals (Randall, 1996).

Randall (1996) suggests some minimum requirements necessary for a community anti-bullying program (Randall, 1996). The first requirement is that you need individuals to participate and their determination is the most important factor in the program's success. It is also necessary for people involved in the program to devote a sufficient amount of time to the group work. If possible it is helpful to have adequate funding for the project for a minimum of three years (Randall, 1996).

In establishing a community anti-bullying program it is necessary to get support from the most influential organizations or individuals in the community. The group can also benefit from a flexible time table so that all goals can be accomplished and programs implemented. A final requirement for community anti-bullying program is the full commitment from all school personnel (teachers, principals, school board, students and parents) and the support of the local media (Randall, 1996).

When designing a community anti-bullying program you should have two groups that work with one another. A steering group, made up of a variety of people involved in the school and the community, whose task is the overall direction of the project. A second group is the implementation group, they are responsible for seeing the project

through and putting together the task, policies and programs to achieve the project goals. Implementation groups should have the power to make decisions and should keep meeting notes that are made available for public opinion. Members of the steering group should also be on the implementation group and vice versa. These groups should be in frequent contact with one another (Randall, 1996). Randall (1996) recommends a third group which is called a monitoring and evaluation group. They are responsible for the evaluation of progress by the implementation group of the project goals and should report their findings on the group progress in a formal and business like way (Randall, 1996).

#### *Summary*

Getting the community involved in an issues as important as bullying is critical. It takes community organizing, as well as organizing between individuals and groups in the community with school personal and administration (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). By developing a relationship between schools and community it is more likely that a cohesive task force can be started (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). There are many recommendations and strategies when developing the task force (Olmstead, 2002; Randolph & Posner, 1988). It is important in its development and implementation to pay attention to the process of developing good relationships, communication, and cohesiveness (Olmstead, 2002; Randolph & Posner, 1988). Task forces are goal driven and they need to be based on the community and schools input and belief of how the problem developed and how to address it (Randall, 1996). Past efforts of bullying programs focus on school based interventions, a community program is a different approach that is more comprehensive and works with the school to address the issue in as many areas of a child's life as possible (Randall, 1996).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The research questions used to guide this qualitative, case study are: (1) What is the process of organizing and developing a community and school collaborative task-force that was developed in an attempt to address the social problem of bullying? (2) How does the task force function and what are some of the characteristics that affect the task force process? The research method for my study was a qualitative, case study, with the research being collected through a participant-observer method. This researcher engaged with a community task force in attempt to learn about the process of the task force's charge to use a community wide approach to address the problem of bullying through multiple avenues (school programs, parents, school district policies, cyber bullying, teachers, and community programs and members.) My study is based on my involvement with South Hadley's Anti-Bullying Task Force to Promote Civil and Ethical Behavior, and also with a sub-group that I was a member of, the Community Programs Group.

#### *Sample*

For this research project the sample population was not individuals but instead the meetings of the Anti-Bullying task force and once created, the Community Programs group's meetings and interactions. For this study this researcher attended two planning meetings of the Anti-Bullying task force before it was formed and then one meeting of the entire Anti-Bullying task force and seven individual meetings of the Community

Programs group. The planning meetings were each approximately an hour and a half and were held in the library at the high school. The Anti-Bullying meeting for the entire task force was attended by around three hundred people in a meeting that was three hours long. The individual meetings of the Community Programs sub-group were held from February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 to May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 on a bi-weekly schedule. The group met for an hour and a half on Monday nights from 6:30 to 8pm at the high school. The number of individuals at the Community Programs group varied from 30 members at the first meeting to an average of about twelve to fifteen members for the following six meetings. The task force was an open group and so membership could change on a meeting to meeting basis. For the majority of the meetings of the Community Programs group (meetings 3-7) the group was comprised mainly of the same members.

The only inclusion characteristic of the individuals in my study is that they had to be members of the task-force. This was identified by them coming to the task-force meeting, which is voluntary. All participants in my study were involved with the task force prior to my engagement with the group.

The participants in my research project were not required to do anything outside of their participation in the task force. The group was a voluntary commitment and so the participation varied each meeting. Some task force members attended all the sessions that I observed for my research and other members only attended one or two meetings. My goal is to report about the process of the group and not the involvement of specific individuals.

### *Ethics and Safe Guard*

For my research I did not foresee any risks to the participants. As I previously mentioned my involvement was with the task force group, whose member's participation was voluntary. My role in the Community Programs group was as a note taker for the group. Using the participant-observer method of research does not require any interviews or questionnaires and so nothing extra was required of the group members for my research.

The norms developed by the task-force leaders, and announced to all members at the initial meeting, included that the task force is a public group so no individual experiences or names should be discussed at the meetings. All of the information collected in the research remained anonymous.

Involvement by participants as group members for this study gave them the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the community in which they were involved. The participants got to share their ideas and be a part of the process of addressing the issue of bullying.

The benefit of this research was to further collect data about the issue of bullying and design positive interventions that the schools and community can utilize to combat this serious issue. This information should be valuable to help other communities and schools in developing plans to address bullying.

### *Data Collection*

To collect my data I took notes at the meeting on the content being discussed as well as notes from my observations about the process of the group. The notes concerning the content were submitted to the facilitator of my group for approval and then were

submitted to the facilitators of the task-force who made them available to the public by publishing them on the town's website. I did not record data with audio or visual recorder because of the size of the group and the meeting space was too large to make that feasible.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This qualitative participant-observer exploratory study was conducted with the goal of learning about the process of a community and school organized task force being formed after a tragic event involving a high school student. The researcher's focus was not on evaluating the productivity of the task force but instead on trying to learn from the process and to describe the process to help understand and explain this specific, unique experience.

#### *Community Organizing*

Rubin & Rubin (2008) suggest that in community organizing a community can bond and become connected through a willingness to change. The community Anti-Bullying task force that was studied for this project was composed of a group of individuals who all expressed a shared concern to address the problem of bullying in their community. The community was brought together by a common interest. Everyone who attended the group wanted to make a change. The precipitating event that evoked this interest was a tragedy that occurred in the town of South Hadley involving a high school student committing suicide apparently due in part to bullying behaviors. Rubin & Rubin (2008) discuss a type of community organizing where people come together for a common goal which they refer to as a community of interest. In this type of organizing individuals come together based on an issue that is understood and shared by the individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). For this research the bonding issue was bullying.



The community that was organized was comprised of people who believed that this issue was of importance and who wanted to be part of the process of addressing the issue to develop solutions.

The community group studied for this research project could also be defined as an issue community. The group of individuals united as a community based on the fact that they shared a common framing for the problem and common solutions that they were attempting to achieve (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Framing can be used in community organizing to turn a problem for an issue community into a project that the group can take pride in by working to address (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). The leaders of the Anti-Bullying task force used framing to attempt to shift the focus of individuals from a problem, the tragic event that occurred, to a project, an opportunity for the community to come together and address the problem that people believed needed to be addressed.

The majority of the members shared an ascriptive attribute, (Rubin & Rubin, 2008) which was a common residency. In the case of this project, most of the individuals resided in South Hadley. For the specific sub-group studied, the Community Programs group, only one member out of the twelve consistent members resided outside of the community.

In community organizing Rubin & Rubin (2008) suggest that the social glue or commonalities that link members can be used to strengthen the connection of individuals. The common factors such as the pride people had in their community, being residents of the same town, having children that attend school in the community or having a connection that ties them to the South Hadley community, served as the social glue in this study.

Rubin & Rubin (2008) suggest that having social capital within the group would benefit the group in their collaboration and ability to cooperate with one another. Social capital is the density and pattern of connections between the members. The social capital is similar to social glue. The members of the Anti-bullying groups had many connections that overlapped such as working in the community, living in the community, having kids in the school systems, being employed in the schools and being involved in other groups in the same community. For this study all of these connections helped to make the individuals feel somewhat obligated to one another and their community. It motivated them to want to become part of the solution for the issue that was affecting the community. By feeling that they were part of the community it motivated the members to come together and allowed the group to use a collective action approach to address the issues that the Anti-bullying task force was attempting to address.

There are different solutions to addressing a problem in a community organization. For the Anti-Bullying task force the approach was a sectoral solution approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). In this case the planning committee was made up of school administration, teachers and the superintendent. They tried to identify all the areas of the problem and then devise a plan that would allow the task force to address multiple aspects of the problem simultaneously. The planning group decided on different areas that could be addressed in sub-groups, and that members of the community could become part of based on their area of interest. The leaders of the task force also allowed for feedback from the community at the initial meetings. The leaders used a questionnaire to ask for additional feedback and suggestions about any other areas or sub-groups that the community believed should be developed in an attempt to address the problem of

bullying. This allowed an opportunity for the community members to begin taking ownership over the problem.

One model of a community organizing is a social change model (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). This is the type of model that closely represents the way that the Anti-Bullying task force was made up. It was a group that was action focused with the goal of trying to bring about social change. The charge was originally devised by the leaders of the group and then revised after community members suggestions:

ANTI-BULLYING TASK FORCE  
TO PROMOTE CIVIL AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOR  
CHARGE

Revised March 8, 2010

The Anti-Bullying Task Force to Promote Civil and Ethical Behavior is charged with examining and evaluating current district/school policies, programs and procedures in order to promote civil and ethical behavior among all members of the community. The Task Force will research and recommend sustainable programs, policies and procedures that support a safe, caring and peaceful community for students, staff and families.

The task force charge was action focused by aiming to make changes to the current policies and procedures that are implemented in the schools. The goal was to create policies and procedures that would best achieve the result of reducing or eliminating bullying in schools and the community. Bullying has been a social problem that had been minimized and had not received the attention that a problem of such gravity deserves. The task force was making an attempt to bring this problem to the community's attention and to give the community and school personnel an opportunity to address the problem in an attempt to bring about a positive change.

Another type of community organizing model that was followed by the Anti-Bullying task force was system repair (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). As the task force states in their charge they wanted to evaluate the policies and programs that already exist to determine what changes will need to be made. After a careful study of the effectiveness of these current programs and procedures, they would then determine what changes, deletions or additions would be needed to accomplish their goals.

When developing community organizing it is recommended that data gathering be used to help derive solutions to the community issue or problem (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). The Anti-Bullying task force used a survey during the first meeting. It asked the perspective members questions about areas where they believe bullying issues could be addressed, assets or strengths that they brought to the group, and other questions to gather information and ideas that the perspective members of the task force felt would best benefit the work of the task force and the problems they were interested in addressing.

#### *Schools and Communities Working Together*

Gallagher, Bagin & Moore, (2005) recommend that when developing goals for a project that involves schools and communities working together that the schools, school board, and community all be involved in devising the goals. The Anti-Bullying task force involved members from all three of these groups in both their sub-groups and also on the Steering committee. The sub-group that I studied was the Community Programs sub-group, which did not have any members of the school board. The Community Programs group was slightly different from the other sub-groups because of the fact that the work of this group was not aimed at goals that directly involved the school but instead with ways to involve the community in addressing the issue of bullying. The community

group had public officials, parents, school personnel and community members on it. For the work that this group was doing, it was important for them to involve town officials involved because their recommendations and solutions were directed at all citizens of the community which stretches beyond the schools.

There are different types of plans that can be utilized when a school and community are working together. The Anti-Bullying task force used a coordinated plan. A coordinated plan is organized in a way that the school administration, teachers, parents, students and community all work together and support one another in trying to accomplish the goals set out by the group (Gallagher, Bagin & Moore, 2005). All of the Anti-Bullying task force members worked collaboratively in developing ideas and solutions to address the problem of bullying. The Anti-Bullying task force was made up of individuals drawn from the previously mentioned groups (school administration, teachers, parents, students, town administration and community). From my observations of the Community Programs group these individuals with different positions in the town were supportive of one another and assisted each other in an attempt to work as a group to accomplish the tasks they had agreed upon.

When a school and community come together to work on a project or issue Gallagher, Bagin & Moore (2005) suggest that the school administration establish the leaders of the group and also set the time frame for the project. For the Anti-Bullying task force the idea of starting the task force was made by the school administrators and in developing it they suggested that all the sub-groups be lead by school personnel. Also in the planning stage the leaders determined that the groups would meet until the end of

May, 2010, and at that time each sub group would make formal recommendation to the school board about proposed changes or ideas for addressing the issue of bullying.

The Anti-Bullying task force was a project that represented a community wide effort. It was not directed at one specific school but was an attempt to address the problem of bullying as a collective effort from pre-kindergarten all the way through high school. Also by developing a parent group and a community group the areas where they were attempting to address bullying were not only focused in the schools but also extended to work within the larger community in a holistic approach to address the problem.

Gallagher, Bagin & Moore (2005) suggest that when a school and community are working together on a project that all of the work of the group be publicized. In the planning of the project it was decided that one member of each sub-group and steering committee act as a note taker and be responsible for recording the minutes of the group. Those minutes would then be published on the town's education website. For the Community Programs group I volunteered for the role of note taker. The Community Programs group's notes not only were published on the school website but also on a website, created by a group member, for the community group. Additionally all of the minutes as well as proposed ideas were published on the website for public access. From my observations in attending the Anti-Bullying task force the local media was also covering the initial meetings. Probably because of the tragedy that occurred, it seemed that anything that the town was doing that had to do with bullying was covered by the media. As the Anti-Bullying task force meetings moved past the first two weeks the local media was less intense in their coverage of the meetings.

When schools and communities are working together it is recommended that the group be aware that some individuals who join the group may be interested in pushing their own agendas (Gallagher, Bagin & Moore, 2005). In observing the Community Programs group individuals did not appear to be interested in pushing their own agenda. In the last few meetings of the group there were individuals and outside organizations that attended the meetings to offer different opportunities that the group could become involved with, such as fund raising walks and a community memorial event. When these individuals and organizations addressed the group members it was clear to the group members that they were not fellow group members but outsiders who had their own agendas. The Community Programs group was made of individuals who appeared very genuine and committed to the charge of the group and not to any individual agendas.

When schools and communities collaborate, criticism should not be ignored (Gallagher, Bagin & Moore, 2005). The negative criticism that the town and school was receiving in the media as well as directly from community members appeared to be a motivating factor in deciding to create the Anti-Bullying task force. To reiterate an idea from the previous community organizing data section the leaders of the Anti-Bullying task force used this criticism in a positive way. They were able to reframe the problem as an opportunity for the community to stop the blaming and offer them the opportunity to become part of the solution.

Gallagher, Bagin & Moore (2005) discussed different types of critics who can affect the work and confidence of a school and community group and can make members skeptical that the group will be able to accomplish their goals. In the Community Program group no one was acted primarily as a critic. The Community Programs group

was comprised entirely of people who were deeply committed to addressing the issue and were not there to criticize the efforts being made to address the problem. Outside of the task force critics found other opportunities and outlets more appealing to voice their opinions such as the media and the internet.

### *Task Force and Project Planning*

In an organization there are systems of relationships. Members of the organization usually have a lot of contact with a few members, some contact with a larger number of members and little to no contact with the rest of the organization's members (Olmstead, 2002). This was true with the Anti-Bullying task force. Individuals on the task force had the majority of their interactions with fellow members of their sub group.

Members of the Community Programs group had the majority of their interactions with other members of this sub group. A few of the members of the group including one of the co-facilitators was also part of the Steering Committee and so they had contact with more members of the Anti-Bullying task force because of having dual roles in the organization. There were both positive benefits and negatives to this system of relationships. The benefits included the fact that the group was able to become familiar with one another which allowed for relationships to strengthen within the sub-group. Conversely a negative consequence to the system of relationships was that the Community Programs group members were not always aware of what was occurring in the other seven sub-groups. All sub groups met at the same time in different locations. Each of the sub-groups had specific goals that were different enough from each other so that the work the groups were doing would not be redundant. This research project ended before all the sub-groups final reports were submitted I am unable to report if any over-



lapping occurred. It would be the task of the Steering Committee to consolidate the work of each sub-group.

Within an organization, groups can be similar to one another or different (Olmstead, 2002). For the Anti-Bullying task force they were both. They shared a similar overarching goal of addressing the issue of bullying and promoting civil and ethical behavior. How the groups decided what was the best way to accomplish this goal was different depending on the focus of each sub-group. There were seven sub-groups in the Anti-bullying task force: Community Programs, School Discipline Policies, School Procedures, Student Programs, Staff Programs, Parent Programs, Online Behavior.

Olmstead (2002) highlights that as groups become more unified that they can become more critical of one another. This was not the case with the members of the Community Programs group. The structure of group meetings, once every other week, and the goals that the group had developed seemed to structure the group meetings in a way that the group was so focused on working on their tasks that it did not leave time for the group members to become concerned or critical of the work of the other sub-groups. The only time other sub-groups were discussed was when one of the co-facilitators would report to the group about information they had received from the Steering committee about the process or progress of other sub-groups who had reported out at the Steering committee meeting. Toward the end of my time for participating and observing, the Community Programs group mentioned the Parents group and the possibility of collaborating with them or incorporating them into the Community Programs group. Most likely this was discussed because the Parents Group was the most similar to the

Community Programs group in terms of the audience the groups were targeting which was adults. Since the dead line was approaching for the report of the final recommendations by all the sub-groups the Community Programs group had decided to include in the report that they needed to continue to accomplish the group's goals. The suggestion to combine the Parent group with the Community Programs group would offer an opportunity for members of the Parent group to remain involved with the task force if they were interested.

As groups continue to work together it is common for the group to develop what is called group cohesiveness. Group cohesiveness is the feeling of pride and solidarity of the group members (Olmstead, 2002). This occurred over time with the members of the Community Program group. One way the group expressed cohesiveness was in the pride they displayed when discussing the work they were doing. One thing that the group accomplished in their time working together was a code of conduct for the town and the individuals that live in it. The most recent version of the Code of Conduct from the group at the time of this was report is as follows:

I will R.E.S.P.E.C.T. myself and my community by acting with responsibility, courtesy, integrity, and kindness.

Respond with integrity and kindness

Embrace diversity

Stand up courageously for others

Promote a climate of safety

Eliminate hurtful words and rumors

Care for and listen to others with compassion

### Take responsibility for your actions

The group was planning to present the code of conduct to the Steering committee and then intended to go into the community and get the community's support and commitment to this code as well as going to the town government to suggest that they also adapt the code of conduct for the town. All of the members of the sub-group were supportive of these ideas and were proud of the effort and work that the group had done together to develop the code of conduct. They showed pride in their work by having the confidence and desire to show their work to the community and take ownership over what they had accomplished.

A smaller size group is more likely to be cohesive than a larger group (Olmstead, 2002). The Community Program group had an average of twelve consistent members who were a cohesive group. The other sub-groups ranged in size from six to twenty five members. This study indicated that the size of the group was not such an important factor for developing group cohesiveness. Rather the amount of time the group spent together as well as the group members possessing similar effort levels and commitment to the goals of the group were probably reasons for the group developing cohesiveness.

Olmstead (2002) suggests that cohesiveness can lead to production within a group. The research demonstrated that cohesiveness and productivity could be dependent on each other. As the Community Programs group became cohesive it was able to accomplish the tasks that it had set out for itself. As the group accomplished tasks and were productive it fostered group cohesiveness and group members were able to take pride in their work and see the results of the fellow group members working with one another and supporting each other and their ideas.

A factor that may benefit a group's performance is a group situation that is attractive to members and provides a feeling of pride and solidarity among group members (Olmstead, 2002). The Anti-Bullying task force and the Community Program group's situations were attractive to the members because it was an opportunity for members of the community to come together (solidarity) and work toward making changes to make their community better. The members seem to already take pride in the community they belonged to and that seemed to transfer over to them taking pride in the work they were doing to benefit the community.

Olmstead (2002) had suggested characteristics that an ideal group would possess. One is possessing knowledge. The Community Programs group possessed a wealth of knowledge about the community that they belonged to. The members of the group were affiliated with a variety of other groups in the community such as the town recreation department, clergy and town hall. This benefitted the group by the members being able to utilize these contacts when the group was designing the code of conduct and wanted to get community input into the group's ideas. Their knowledge about the community and other organization within it was a valuable resource when the group was brain storming about ways in which they could get their ideas out to the community. Members knew when upcoming community events were being held. They also had knowledge of other community groups that might support the Community Programs group in accomplishing the group's goals.

A second characteristic of an ideal group is a positive attitude (Olmstead, 2002). The members of the Community Programs group appeared to all have very positive attitudes and were motivated to work together to accomplish the group's goals. A

question going into this research project was: What were people's motives for joining the task force? Leading up to the start of the task force the media had been portraying the town in a very negative light and the majority of people from the town who had used the internet or the media to speak about bullying had expressed negative feelings and concerns about what the town was doing or not doing to address the problem of bullying. The individuals in the Community Programs group may have had some of these same feelings or concerns but they did not let them interfere with the work of the group. The attitude of the group was that they were genuinely concerned about the issue of bullying and they wanted to work to address that issue instead of just pointing fingers at the school and its administration.

A final characteristic of an ideal group that the Community Program group demonstrated was that the members created a positive and supportive atmosphere (Olmstead, 2002). The Community Programs group had some characteristics that made it different from the other sub-group because of the fact that their work was not directly related to the school. This difference made the group's goals not as easy to define as some of the other groups. There was no prior policy and procedures community wide pertaining to behavior that the group could review and make recommendations on. The group took on the responsibility of designing a way to address bullying behaviors and attitudes outside of the schools. To do this the group spent time brain storming creative ways to accomplish this goal. While the brain storming was happening the group members were supportive of each other's ideas and when they had disagreements about how to proceed they would not target the individual but instead give their opinion about the idea and reasoning about why they felt a different approach might be more effective.

In my opinion this support allowed the group to take chances and take creative risks in designing a way to make a change in the community.

Group flexibility and interchangeable leadership roles should be present in a group to increase the group's ability to be productive (Olmstead, 2002). The purpose of this research project was not to evaluate the production of the group but to learn about the process. The Community Programs group was flexible and the role of leadership was interchangeable. A good example of the interchangeable leadership role was when I had researched previous community and Anti- Bullying task force efforts and brought them to the Community Program group's third meeting. I took on the role of leading the group and sharing the knowledge and resources I had found with the other group members. During this experience I felt supported by the facilitators and did not observe them having any reservations about allowing me to lead the group and share my ideas. The facilitators encouraged the group members to lead the group at many points in the meetings. Depending on the topic I observed different members leading the group and sharing their knowledge, expertise and experiences. This supportive atmosphere made it possible for the group to remain productive and promoted confidence, freedom of ideas and created a very non-threatening environment.

It is recommended that for a group to be productive the members should not only work together but also should work to achieve "Optimum Independence" (Olmstead, 2002). "Optimum Independence," is when members assume responsibility for their own actions, statements and ideas. After the second group meeting is when the group showed solidarity. During the first two meetings the members were feeling out the group, getting to know one another and seeing how they fit in the group. The group size fluctuated. In

the first meeting approximately 25 people attended, fourteen people attending the second group and twelve members attended the third. At this third meeting the members had been working together for three meetings and as the numbers decreased the members were able to identify those other individuals who had demonstrated a consistent commitment to the group. Once this happen the group members began to have “Optimum Independence” (Olmstead, 2002). Members of the group were making suggestions and expressing individual statements about the goals and direction of the group. In the first two sessions the comments and discussion was focused on the plan of the group but in the third week the plan seemed to be agreed upon by the group and now members were taking ownership of how to accomplish the goals of the group and deciding what their individual contributions could be.

There were two characteristics that differentiate a task force from other types of groups observed in the Anti-Bullying task force. The Anti-Bullying task force was a semi-independent group that was accountable to a larger organization (Randolph & Posner, 1988). The sub-groups were also semi-independent but accountable to the Anti-Bullying task force. All of the recommendations that the task-force was planning to make were going to be reviewed and discussed by the school board. A task-force will have numerous committees (Randolph & Posner, 1988).. The Anti-Bullying task force had seven sub-groups as well as a Steering Committee.

Each task-force is distinct from any other group because of the fact that they have a single important distinctive goal (Randolph & Posner, 1988). The Anti-Bullying task force wanted to address the issue of bullying and promote civil and ethical behavior. The Community Programs group was different from all other groups because of the fact that

this group's had developed specific goals related to the community. The goals were included in the Community Programs group's charge:

The Community Programs Sub-Group of the Anti-Bullying Task Force to Promote Civil and Ethical Behavior is charged with promoting civil and ethical behavior among all members of the community. In so doing, this group will: 1. Research and recommend a universal community code of conduct and a system to implement and promote this code throughout South Hadley, and 2. Recommend ongoing sustainable community programs.

When the Community Programs group was developing their goals the group had to decide if the goals of the group were going to be made up of specific objectives, to problem-solve or to try and complete a project. A group decision was made to try and accomplish the goals of the group by developing specific objectives including,

1. Research and recommend a universal community code of conduct, and a system to implement and promote this code throughout South Hadley.
2. Recommend ongoing sustainable community programs.

The goals were specific objectives that also aimed at completing a project, which was to develop the code of conduct. In task forces, developing goals can be a difficult task but it is a necessary one for the group. The goals give the group direction and purpose. When the group develops their goals Randolph & Posner (1988) recommend that the group follows five specific guidelines. First it should be specific (Randolph & Posner, 1988). For the Community Programs group the goals were specific but were not fully developed when the group's charge was drafted. The group members had ideas



about ways to address the issue of bullying. The code of conduct and developing community programs were the most realistic, attainable ideas that were expressed in the first two meetings. The goals should also be measurable (Randolph & Posner, 1988). As part of the group's charge they included "Promoting civil and ethical behavior among all members of the community." When it was originally developed by the group this was a goal that was difficult to measure. By coming up with the two specific ways to reach this goal using the code of conduct and the development of community programs it allowed the group to measure their progress by using objectives. This allowed the group to have a focus and develop tasks that would help accomplish their goal. The group members were all in agreement about the goals. Because the group member's had the responsibility for deciding what the group's goals were, it allowed for the members to give their input in planning the work of the group. This worked well for this group because different ideas could be heard and used in the designing of the group goals. It gave members a feeling of ownership over the group right from the initial meeting. Randolph & Posner (1988) recommended that when developing group goals the goals be realistic and can be accomplish in the given time frame. The Community Program's group members were made aware in the third meeting, before the charge was finalized, the time frame for the group's to accomplish their goals, which was about three month. With this information the group was able to agree that the goals and objectives they established were realistic and the group members believed could be completed in that time frame.

To help a group to measure it's progress it is recommended that the group use objectives and milestones. For the Community Programs group the members decided that it was important to mention the two main objectives in the group's charge. The

charge clarified the goal of the group and then listed objectives that they believed would accomplish this goal. After these large objectives were established the group then began work on the code of conduct by breaking down what they were trying to accomplish and the tasks necessary to accomplish it. These tasks included finding out current codes of conduct from other community groups, deciding what the members believed was necessary to include in their proposed code of conduct, designing ways to get community input on their work and also ways to get the code of conduct out to the community when they believed it was finished. In the Community Programs group the time frame of the group was rather brief and so milestones were not used as often as tasks and objectives. Milestones are used to measure actual progress against project progress (Randolph & Posner, 1988). During the groups final few meetings that I observed the group worked on their recommendation report. This milestone allowed the group to review their initial charge and see what the group had accomplished in the time frame versus would they believe they were going to accomplish.

The Community Programs group accomplished one of their two primary objectives in their given time frame. When the group reviewed their progress the members expressed pride in their accomplishments and not disappointment for not completing all of their objectives. The group had experienced a sense of accomplishment by completing one objective and was encouraged to continue the work of the task force after the initially planned time frame. The group planned to continue their work toward the group's goal.

Group norms can be developed in a group formally and informally (Olmstead, 2002). For the Anti-Bullying task force and the Community Programs group some

formal group norms were established during the initial meeting. They were as followed and were shown on an over head projector and read by one of the co-facilitators of the Anti-Bullying task force,

Nothing specific about any student - the reminder that this is a public meeting and care needs to be taken not to speak specifically about others, Participate respectfully, Equal opportunity for all members to participate, Conversational Courtesies – avoiding side-bar conversations, Turn off cell phones, Need to hold to time schedule

During the first meeting when the members were separated and attended their initial sub-group meetings these norms were reiterated by the facilitators of the Community Programs group and then the facilitators allowed for the members to give feedback and suggest any further formal norms for the group.

The development of informal norms in the Community Programs group around productivity and interaction were developed and were observed as having a positive impact on the group. The Community Programs group members were very active in doing work and accomplishing tasks related to the groups goals not only at meetings but also during the periods between meetings. One member of the group as previously mentioned had developed an entire web page after the second group meeting as a way for the group to communicate and gave an avenue for communication with anyone in the community who was interested in having input into the work of the Community Program group.

The co-facilitator as well as other members collected numerous codes of conduct from groups throughout the community to help the group in establishing their own recommended code of conduct. The members contact many organizations and individuals in the community to get their input and then brought that information back to the group. An informal norm developed in which members of the group seem to feel responsible for what the group was trying to accomplish and so they committed to not only coming to the meetings every other week but to use some of their time outside of the meetings to help the group make progress and to make the meetings not be the start and end point of the groups work.

Olmstead (2002) and Randolph & Posner (1988) discussed two important factors for a group, communication and interpersonal relationships between group members. These two factors have many similar aspects and are dependent on one another. For this research it was observed that having effective communication allowed for the development of positive interpersonal relationships between group members. Also as the member's interpersonal relationships developed the communication between the members also improved as individual became more comfortable with one another and seemed to speak more freely, take more risks and be creative. This was observed when the group was doing specific tasks such as decision making, problem-solving, and brainstorming.

If single individuals could complete a task themselves or come up with the solution to a problem on their own then there would not be a need for a task force (Olmstead, 2002). As a group a task force will be able to accomplish more or develop

alternative solutions for a task, issue or problem. For these achievements it is necessary for the members to be able to work with each other and be able to communicate.

In the Community Programs group the members developed a system of communication where everyone could communicate with one another in the group and not just to the facilitators. This benefitted the work of the group as members could speak freely to one another and could have equal ownership over the work of the group. The facilitators were excellent at trying to collect as many different perspectives and opinions from the group members when working on a task. This encouragement by the facilitators created an environment where the members could be comfortable in expressing their opinions without any fear of harsh criticism or a personal attack. The members of the Community Programs group were skilled at separating the idea from the individual. The group was able to address a comment and discuss it without focusing on the person who made the comment. This allowed the group to be more creative about making suggestions. By having good interpersonal relationships and communication it allowed for conversation that used multiple perspectives and opinions when problem solving. The group could discuss suggestions and then build off them or offer constructive criticism about how to incorporate these ideas but in a more effective manner to help accomplish the group goals. Differences of opinion and alternative solutions are natural in task force work (Olmstead, 2002) and for the Community Programs group the members utilized all these suggestions to formulate effective plans to accomplish the tasks of the group. By allowing all the members to have input into the direction and objectives of the group, the members appeared to invest in the group and find the work meaningful.

Coordination is another important factor in the effectiveness and productivity of a group (Olmstead, 2002). In the Community Programs group the members used a coordinated effort that allowed them to accomplish some very large objectives in a short amount of time. The group only met on a bi-weekly schedule for an hour and a half. The members utilized that time to review their previous progress and then plan for the tasks that they would try and accomplish. I did not observe the members of the group being under coordinated. The group built strong interpersonal relationships and developed an excellent communication system so work was not duplicated and allowed for all members to give feedback before and after each task the group focused on. The Community Programs group also did not appear to be over coordinated. The group was able to develop a balance between not getting too concerned about the details of everything and also allowing sufficient time and a opportunity for the group to discuss any concerns or ideas that came up for the members.

When individuals come together for work on a task force Olmstead (2002) suggests that the members be aware that members may have loyalties to other groups that may be stronger than their loyalty to the task force. In the Community Programs group the members utilized their loyalties to other groups by using these connections to bring information and knowledge from these connections to the Community Programs group. Many times when the group was discussing an idea the members would refer to their experiences or knowledge of one of these groups. On some occasions this knowledge was used to help support an idea and at other times it could be used to explain how a similar idea may have been used by another group and the outcome it had. Due to the limited amount of time that the Community Programs group had to complete their tasks

this input was valuable to the group because the members did not have to find out first hand that the idea would not work. They could use the knowledge and experiences of the group's members. Also this type of information offered insight into why some things are more effective with working with the community than others. The group then used this information to devise strategies for the group to complete their tasks. A example was when the group was planning to canvas the town to get support and commitment by the community for their code of conduct a member suggest using a tool developed by the school band that mapped out all of the routes around the community. This saved the group time and effort because they could utilize the same routes and not have to map it all out and devise a strategy, which would have been very time consuming.

#### *Community Anti-Bullying Projects*

Randall (1996) suggests that when a community is developing a strategy to address the issue of bullying that the group should invest equally in both the community and the schools. The Anti-Bullying task force addressed the issue by forming seven specialized sub-groups. Out of the seven groups two of them specifically focused on the community, the Community Programs and Online Behavior groups. There was also the Parent Programs group, which could be categorized as both a community and school related group. The other four groups; School Discipline Policies, School Procedures, Student Programs, and Staff Programs were oriented toward the schools. The approach taken by the Anti-Bullying task force appeared to develop a way to address any area that they believed could or had been affected by bullying.

When developing an anti-bullying project a recommended goal should be to eliminate or reduce bullying everywhere that it occurs (Randall, 1996). In the charge for the Anti-Bullying task force it states,

...to promote civil and ethical behavior among all members of the community.

The Task Force will research and recommend sustainable programs, policies and procedures that support a safe, caring and peaceful community for students, staff and families.

This statement does not directly state that they are attempting to eliminate or reduce bullying. The charge of the Anti-Bullying task force is proactive; instead of the focus being on eliminating bullying they instead promote positive behaviors. The message is the same but the reframing of the problem as an attempt to change the culture of the community and schools by inviting the community to be part of bringing about change. Randall (1996) suggests that when devising an anti-bullying project that the group should not only have a goal of reducing or eliminating bullying but also to replace these types of behaviors with alternatives. The Anti-Bullying charge does both. It is indirectly stating the goal of addressing the bullying and also offering a plan of action that promotes civil and ethical behavior and a caring and safe community. This same type of approach was taken in the development of the Community Programs group's proposed code of conduct. They listed seven suggestions about individual behavior and ways of acting toward one another. Out of the seven only one recommendation is a subtractive action,

Eliminate hurtful words and rumors.



Repeated below is all seven of the Community Programs groups recommendations in their code of conduct:

Respond with integrity and kindness

Embrace diversity

Stand up courageously for others

Promote a climate of safety

Eliminate hurtful words and rumors

Care for and listen to others with compassion

Take responsibility for your actions

In addressing bullying Randall's (1996) model encourages that the plan include ways to address both direct and indirect bullying. For my research the focus was on the Community Programs group's work. The focus of the group's solutions seemed to be aimed much more at alternatives and respectful ways for individuals and groups to interact with one another. The actual of issue of direct and indirect bullying may have been addressed in some of the other sub-groups but my research did not involve these other groups.

According to Randall's (1996) model the goals developed for the project should be large enough so that they are not easily accomplished and convey the message that bullying is an issue that cannot be easily accomplished and then not paid the proper attention. The goals of an anti-bullying project should also be designed to have results that last (Randall, 1996). The Community programs group established the goals to have a code of conduct that they hope the community would embrace and they wanted to create ways to post this code of conduct so that it would continue to be spotlighted by the

community. The Community Programs group's second goal involved establishing a sustainable focus in community programs. This goal aimed to continue the effort to address bullying by putting something in place that would become a part of the community and continue to help with the problem of bullying. These two goals do not appear at first to be huge goals but my research showed that any goal that involves an entire community takes time and is not an easy to achieve. Changing the culture of a community requires a lot of time and effort by both the group who is trying to make the change and the community it is working in (Randall, 1996). In the three months that the group worked together they were only able to accomplish one of the group's goals. At the time my research concluded the group was still finishing its plan about the code of conduct. A positive that came out of the group developing the multiple goals is that the group was able to present to the Steering Committee the need for the group's continued work. It represented a good example of the fact that to addressing the issue of bullying a sustained effort is needed.

For an anti-bullying project to succeed the members of the group should be able to devote a sufficient amount of time to the group (Randall, 1996). The commitment of the members of the Community Programs group showed that the members were committed to the group. The group sustained ten to twelve members who attended from the beginning and were at almost all of the groups and if not were in contact with the other members through email and phone to stay connected to the group. Members also reviewed the minutes from the previous meetings in between groups and would respond to them during the time between meetings.

It is recommended that when designing an anti-bullying project the project should have at least two groups, a steering group and an implementation group (Randall, 1996). The Anti-Bullying task force that was observed for this research had both of these groups. The task force had a group titled the Steering Committee that met on alternating weeks from the implementation groups. The Steering Committee was a group that provided a place for the members of the sub-groups to report out about progress. It was also a space where members of the Steering Committee, some of whom were not involved in the sub-groups but were invested in the community, could give input and information to the other members. They used their experience and ties to the community to benefit the work of the task force. The implementation groups or sub groups all had their own agendas that they had developed and worked on during the alternate weeks. The Steering Committee meeting allowed for coordination of the sub-groups so that the groups could share information and avoid two groups duplicating the work of one another. Some of the sub-groups had areas that were similar to other groups. For the Community Programs group, the Parents Programs group was the most closely related. Toward the end of my research the idea had come up to possibly combine groups or invite the members to join the community group to work together and pool their resources and knowledge.

Randall (1996) recommends that when developing an anti-bullying project that the group obtain adequate funding for at least three years and also to get continued support from influential groups and members of the community. At the time this report was written, it was unclear whether the funding would be available for the next three years because of the Anti-Bullying task force still in the beginning stage. Another factor

that was outside of the task force's control was the support of the local media. The media coverage around the issue of bullying in the town was much more concentrated on the tragic event that had occurred and the individuals involved and were not as interested in the work of the task force and their attempt to address the issue.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The Anti-Bullying task force was created in part as a reaction to the tragic incident that involved a student and accusations that bullying behavior played a part in the tragedy. What this researcher found interesting about this research experience was the ability of the community and school system to use the individual incident as a motivating factor for the creation of a community task. The school administration that developed the idea for the task force created a way for the community to become involved and have input on how the schools and community should proceed in the future. The task force was an opportunity to move beyond the individual incident and broaden the scope to incorporate the different areas of the community and schools that are affected by bullying incidents. The Anti-Bullying task force's creation of sub-groups illustrated that bullying behaviors occur in many areas. It also emphasized the point that there is no one individual or resource that can be responsible for dealing with the issue. These seven sub-groups worked in a way that educated the community about different avenues for prevention and intervention opportunities which address a problem that affects a whole community. From my perspective the school system was taking a risk by being transparent and by giving the community the opportunity to criticize all areas of policies, procedures, and programs that they thought were not effective. The Anti-Bullying task force used this review as an opportunity for improvement. The criticism

and feedback allowed the groups to address any problems they saw in the current system and to share multiple perspectives in deciding on how to make improvements.

The Anti-Bullying task force provided an outlet for members of the school's systems and community who were interested in addressing the problem. It wasn't intended to serve as an outlet for finger pointing and casting blame, but rather as a way for members to come together in an attempt to help their community to try and change the culture. Individuals in the Community Programs group were able to look at and discuss their values and beliefs about bullying and ways to build on the strengths they believed the community possessed.

For my research I choose to work with the Community Programs group. This provided my research with a perspective that is not often used when thinking about bullying. It seems that it is easy to classify bullying behavior as an issue that is restricted to the schools and put the ownership of addressing it on the school administration and faculty. The Community Programs group provided an opportunity to think about the problem in the context of an entire community and not just limit it to the schools. There, it was possible to observe school personnel, town officials and community members working together to bring their different perspectives on the issue together in order to address the issue of bullying. The opportunity to observe these interactions allowed this researcher to see how these different perspectives and individual's ideas intersected and how they came up with solutions that the group believed would reach and affect the population as a whole and not just as specific areas or groups.

One limitation of my study, by restricting my observations to the Community Programs group, was that I did not learn about the process of the other sub-groups

working within the Anti-Bullying task force. Because the sub-groups all met simultaneously, I was limited to participation in only one of the seven groups. One way that the Community Programs group decided to address the issue of bullying was by focusing on the adults in the community as being models for appropriate behavior. They believed it was important to consider how adult's behaviors and express attitudes can impact the behavior of children. Other sub-groups could have had other theories about the causes of bullying behaviors and solutions that they believed would help address the issue. By concentrating my research on the single sub-group I was not able to get these other perspectives on the issue. I was also not able to see how the other groups defined the role of the community in addressing the issue of bullying. The Community Programs group's emphasis was on the community but it unclear if other groups considered the impact of the community on the problem of bullying or ways to utilize the community in developing solutions.

The choice of this researcher to join the Community Programs group as a participant observer had an impact on the research. While I tried to maintain my objectivity, I also had a role in my group as a participant. By being actively involved I believe that my presence impacted the work of the group and decision that were made within it. By being a group member I was invested in the work of the group. I believe this affected my observations, because there were probably multiple occasions where I may have been concentrating on the content of the group and may not have been focusing on the process of the group and at other times vice versa. I made the choice not to audio record the group meetings due to the size of the meeting space and the inability of an audio recorder to capture everything that was happening. Also a recorder might have

impacted the group's natural a process. If group members were conscious of the recorder they might have been hesitant to participate. My role as the note taker for the group did provide a natural opportunity for me to take notes during the group processes and then separate process from content before submitting my meeting notes to the group.

For this research I observed the initial stage of the task force. I was able to be a part of the process from the initial meeting until the deadline for the sub-groups recommended reports. This time period of about three months included two pre-planning meetings, one whole group Anti-Bullying task force meeting and seven Community Programs group meetings. This provided a sufficient amount of exposure to develop a balanced and thoughtful account of the process. I was able to observe the group from the point of formation and believe that by the time the group was preparing their final report I had observed and collected enough evidence to provide a fair and accurate description of the process that took place.

One factor of my study that I could not directly address but I believe impacted the research was the influence of the print and news and internet media sources. My study did not focus on the role of the media but I was constantly aware of their involvement. This included seeing reports in the newspapers, on television, and discussions posted on the internet in addition to discussions that occurred in the groups about what members had recently watched or read. In processing my experiences it remains unclear about whether the media effect was positive, negative or neutral to the work and process of the task force. The media concentrated on the individual incident that initially occurred before the task force started and any report about the task force was usually linked to this incident. The task force had established a norm for the work of the groups to address the



issue of bullying without concentrating of individual issues. I believe the media was more concerned with the sensationalized aspects of bullying and the consequences of this behavior, and did not seem to be interested in the work that was being done by the task force.

The media may have influenced the work of the group because residents of the community were constantly reminded about the tragedy that had occurred. These reminders could have served to maintain the momentum for the individuals on the task force or it could have discouraged them. As they worked little was reported about the progress the groups were making.

In reflecting back on my study if I had the opportunity to do it again there are a few aspects I may have changed. The opportunity to become involved with this group for my research developed suddenly. The time frame for the study dictated that I immediately become involved so I would have an opportunity to collect a substantial amount of data. I did not have an opportunity to explore different options and ways to do my research. I believed the opportunity to get involved with one task force from the beginning was valuable. If given another opportunity I feel that becoming involved with multiple groups would allow the research to focus on different components of the experience and how they intersect with one another. Also by becoming involved with multiple groups I would have opportunity to compare the different processes and strategies that were utilized by the different sub-groups. Another change I may have made would be to incorporate interviews into the study so I could try to understand motivational factors behind the group members' participation as well as their interpretations of the process. The interpretation of the process and interactions offered

here are solely based on this researcher's opinions. It would be beneficial to see how the others members interpreted the same experience and what they found to be important parts of the experience.

There are many opportunities for further research on the issue of bullying and the community Anti-Bullying task force. One opportunity could be to follow up with the schools in the community this upcoming year to see if teacher's impressions of the issue have changed and what these changes are based on. Follow up research could also involved tracking the number of incidents involving bullying in the school over a period of time to see if the task force's work affected it. This research may take multiple years if the school changes it procedures of reporting or recording incidents. It would not surprise this researcher if the number of reported bullying incidents increase over the next school year due to the focus on to the issue by both students and staff. An area that I would be interested in researching as a follow up is the process of the task-force. It might be useful to follow the task force for another year. How much did the momentum of the initial incident factor into the ongoing involvement by the members? As the media focus shifts to other matters will the task force be affected? Further research can be done investigating how this community can maintain a strong focus on this issue when other issues of competing importance emerge in the community.

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