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Spectrums of bullying in the everyday experience of school

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Introduction: What is Bullying?

Importance of Bullying Definitions
- How bullying is defined and perceived underpins how it is experienced, recognised and dealt with e.g. anti-bullying policy

Traditional Definition of Bullying
Most definitions of bullying involve the following 3 components pioneered by Olwues (1993):
  - A clear imbalance of power
  - Repetition
  - Intentionality

- Some researchers acknowledge overlap between bullying and other forms of aggression (Cowie and Jennifer 2008).
- 10-20% have been bullied in the past six months (Smith et al 1999)

- Inserted below is a diagram demonstrating this definition of bullying:

Alternative Definitions
- Prevalence of bullying depends on how you measure it e.g. last month or last year (Monks et al 2009)
- Green (2001) argues that all children are affected by bullying whether they are an active participant or not
  - “Bullying is an elusive phenomenon which has defied attempts to define it” (Chan 2009, p. 183)
- Spectrum of bullying from severe to mild e.g. teasing can be perceived as harmless but can also result in suicide (Morita 1996)
- Measuring the prevalence of bullying is limited by the stigma of the term (Myers 2006)

Aim
- Critically explore the concept of bullying by examining children’s everyday experiences and interactions in school with pupils and teachers where bullying may exist within this, starting from children’s perspectives

Discussion
- Bullying is not an isolated, binary phenomenon, as suggested by Olwues (1993)
- Rather, as suggested by a postmodernist approach, there are different modalities of bullying e.g. on an individual and institutional level e.g. teasing, teacher-pupil bullying and institutional bullying (e.g. “bad boy” sub-culture)
- Teachers are not separate from bullying and are circumscribed by polices and procedures in terms of how they interact with children and handle bullying, therefore, their power to be “the social engineer” of change in the classroom, as suggested by Chan (2009) is limited

- Contrast with abstract and lived experiences of bullying—although participants often perceived teasing, ostracism and name-calling as bullying, when it happened to them they usually preferred to use the term “picked on”

- Popularity was cited as the main motivator to bully, however, violent bullying and working class male behaviour e.g. hitting the bully was more often likely to be identified as bullying and the “victim” was then punished for their response

Conclusion
- Rejection of binary definitions of bullying to acknowledge modalities and spectra of bullying
- Children’s daily experiences in school and where bullying exists within this should be examined as opposed to investigating bullying as an isolated phenomenon
- Further Work: How do you devise a threshold of what bullying involves with a definition of bullying that integrates different modalities, perceptions and ‘grey’ areas of bullying in school?