



Entwicklung und Arbeit mit dem No Blame Approach in England

Als Vorbereitung auf seinen Vortrag zur Eröffnung des Kongresses hatten wir George Robinson verschiedene Fragen zugemailt. Zur Erheiterung der Kongressteilnehmenden hat George Frage um Frage wörtlich vorgelesen und dann beantwortet.

Für die Dokumentation hat er seine Antworten zusammen mit Barbara Maines in die schriftliche Form gebracht.

What was the reason for the development of the No Blame Approach?

We first became involved in working with teachers to deal with Bullying in 1990 when Barbara, who at the time was an educational psychologist, was asked by one of her schools if she could organise some work with the young people in an all girl's school where one of the pupils had attempted suicide.

Barbara and I had been colleagues from 1984 when she became the psychologist at the school where I was headteacher. The school was for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties and we found our ideas regarding the best way to deal with behavioural difficulties were very similar. We began to run training sessions for teachers about our approach and in 1988 produced our first publication which was a book and video on positive ways to deal with challenging behaviour.

So when the request was made to Barbara we discussed how we might respond and we decided on a high profile day for all the pupils in the year of the girl who had attempted suicide. We gathered a group of colleagues to help with the day and planned a day of workshops and plenaries where we would explore with the pupils the damage bullying caused and how the other pupils could either support victims or confront bullies about their behaviour.

We recorded the day and produced our first material on bullying (Stamp Out Bullying, out of print)

At the time we didn't have the language but this was the beginnings of what we now call prevention, what can be done in schools by staff and pupils to reduce the incidents of bullying.

It was not until 1991 when a friend of Barbara asked for help in dealing with a specific incident of bullying that we developed the No Blame Approach. The teacher had been told of the bullying by the boys' parents and it was apparent that this bullying had been going on for a long time. Lots of other pupils joined in and others knew it was happening but did nothing about it.

We discussed our response, gave the teacher a seven point plan. We were later told that our approach had worked. We now had a way to intervene so the second strand was developed, reaction and this was the first instance of the No Blame Approach being used.

Where did you get the idea for this specific approach?

As Barbara and I had been working on positive ways to deal with behaviour problems we took what we thought worked best and formed our ideas in the No Blame Approach. This was that looking to the future and finding new solutions which we found worked better than looking to the past, trying to understand the behaviour and punishing children for the misbehaviour. At the time we had not heard of Solution Focussed Approaches which were only used in the UK from 1995, of Pikas and his method of shared concern nor restorative justice. Later we realised that although the philosophy was similar in all these approaches, ours had quite major differences.

How did the approach spread across England?

When we published our training pack in 1992 (Michael's Story, The No Blame Approach to Bullying) we were seen as challenging by some and also innovatory by others. Our ideas challenged those in the field that thought bullies should be punished. From October 1992 we were criticised by a charity called Kidscape and this criticism continues to the present day.

We achieved national coverage in 1993 on a very popular BBC TV programme which at the time had an audience of 13 million people and after this had a lot of press coverage. This led to many request to train others in our approach and we call this a "bottom up approach". The users in the field were ready for effective ways to deal with bullying and our method became more popular and used more widely. This led to more people hearing about the approach and wanting to use it. We did not demonise bullies but thought

that many were nice children behaving in inappropriate ways and they could find better ways to behave.

After this success in the UK we were approached by other practitioners from other countries, the first being colleagues in New Zealand followed by people in Switzerland, Holland, Germany, Canada and Belgium so the approach now has an international basis. The way it has developed in all the countries has been by people who were looking for effective ways to deal with bullying, finding an approach that worked but also fitted with their philosophy about punishments being redundant and to find ways to empower young people to help and support victims.

The following sums up how people felt about the approach, this comes from New Zealand;

"Our community has few shared values and the success of the No Blame Approach in this mix is a testimony to the robust nature of the programme. If for nothing else, the experience of discussing, with a group of involved teenagers, the complex relationships that take place in adolescent groups, and being amazed at their mature, sensitive approach, is worth it. The fact that it works so well is an added bonus".¹

From your point of view what was especially intriguing and what was surprising

We were surprised at the amount of criticism that was directed at us and our approach. The evidence of its effectiveness was growing but this seemed to make the critics even more critical and this ended with Tony Blair, the then British Prime Minister, attacking our methods in Parliament and pressure being put on the Anti Bullying Alliance to stop our contract as South West Coordinators of the same organisation.

What was intriguing was to see a swell of grass root support from around the world, the believers really believe. Another quote from our book put a perspective on the support we received; this was from a TV producer who made a documentary on the No Blame Approach. He attended some of our training for teachers and noted,

"What attracted me most to No Blame was, firstly, that it appeared to work and, secondly, that it required most new practitioners to undergo a kind of conversion. Old prejudices had to be abandoned- it was a new way of seeing things which could change all the parties involved"

¹ Taken from Robinson, G. & Maines, B. (2008) Bullying. A Complete Guide to the Support Group Method. Sage Publications. London.

What was inspiring for you and what moved you as people.

I think what has inspired us has been how people across the world believe in this way of dealing with incidents of bullying. It is also very moving when we hear that children who have been bullied have had their lives changed for the better because somebody believed in our methods.

It is also surprising when we read about our approach as seen by other people who give us new insight into our approach and why it differs from other types of interventions. We read with great interest;

"Unlike the restorative justice and conflict management models, this approach can proceed without fundamental agreement about events and issues. The truth is that the victim is suffering, and in order to stop this suffering, blame does not have to be apportioned".²

What question would you like answering during this convention and what is your special interest

I think rather than what question would we like answering it is more about listening to the experiences of others as all we hear helps us better understand how our approach is used. It also helps us answer question we are asked in the future.

George and Barbara

² From, Sullivan, K., Cleary, M., & Sullivan, G. (2004) *Bullying in Secondary Schools*. Sage Publications. London.