CONFLICT COACHING: A TOOL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Bullying in schools is a growing problem and there are increasing calls to criminalise the behaviour. Despite these calls, there is no evidence to suggest that additional criminalisation will deter bullies any more than existing laws. Alternative solutions are preferable to the increased criminalisation of young people, and a holistic system of conflict management, in which conflict coaching is incorporated provides one such solution. Conflict coaching is a flexible process that has many applications and can teach individuals to manage conflict creatively and positively: its primary goal is to assist individuals to engage in conflict effectively. This paper considers the application of conflict coaching as a tool to deal with bullying in schools, analyses the obstacles that are present when dealing with children and provides solutions of how to overcome them.

I INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine the suitability of the conflict coaching paradigm as a tool for broader societal application, inclusive of young people dealing with conflict at school. The paper examines the applicability of conflict coaching to wider societal contexts, the current approach to conflict resolution in schools and outlines an argument for the inclusion of coaching in schools. The paper provides an analysis of the obstacles that may be present when coaching individuals under the age of 18, and discusses whether conflict coaching can be used as a useful tool to address bullying in schools.

Assumptions and Definitions

For the purpose of this paper it is assumed that conflict coaching is part of a larger system of conflict management and as a practice can be adjusted to various cultural contexts. This paper does not advocate the use of conflict coaching in isolation as a strategy to combat bullying in schools, but as a contingent activity, and as part of a larger system of conflict management.[1] When refer-

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ring to the use of conflict coaching in schools, there is an assumption that schools adhere to the ethical standards required by coaching, and this includes maintaining the confidentiality of the child, so far as the law permits. Where disclosures of serious risk of harm are made, coaching will have to cease and may trigger jurisdictional mandatory reporting requirements.

The terms young person and children are used synonymously in this paper and include any individual between 12 to 18 years of age. Bullying in this paper is broadly defined as repeated behaviour that contributes to the destructive pattern of conflict. This includes attitudes of hatred, distrust and apathy; behaviours of physical and verbal violence; and polarisation. [2]

II THE APPLICABILITY OF CONFLICT COACHING

In the last decade, the literature regarding conflict coaching has been dominated by organisational conflict coaching commentary. Conflict coaching has been identified as a successful system in dealing with organisational disputes, and a body of work has been built around this success. Organisational coaching is a service marketed by a growing number of for-profit and not-for-profit conflict resolution organisations and individual practitioners.[3] Organisations and businesses frequently have expectations that in-house disputes should be addressed by management and increasingly, many high profile companies are taking up opportunities to teach coaching skills in the workplace.[4]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the take-up is due to the frequency and destructive nature of conflicts in the workplace.[5] Executive and peer conflict coaching are an example of the many coaching models that have been developed and refined due to the frequency of workplace conflict.[6]

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[1]   Samantha Hardy and Nadja Alexander, *REAL Conflict Coaching™ Fundamentals*, Conflict Coaching International, (in press) (2012).

[2]   Morton Deutsch, 'Conflicts: Productive and Destructive' in Fred E Jandt (ed.), *Conflict Resolution through Communication.* (Harper and Row 1973).

[3]   Tricia S Jones and Ross Brinkert, *Conflict coaching: Conflict management strategies and skills for the individual,* (Sage Publications 2008) 8.

[4]   Ibid.

[5]   James H Keil, 'Coaching through conflict' (2000) *Dispute Resolution Journal,* 65, (May) 65–69.

[6]   Richard R Kilburg, 'Towards a Conceptual Understanding and Definition of Executive Coaching' (1996) 48 *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research,* 134, 134-144; Michael A Rawlings, 'Peer Conflict Coaching at the Transportation Security Administration' (Paper presented at the Association for Conflict Resolution, Minneapolis, 2006<http:www.mediate.com/articles/

Broadly defined, conflict coaching has many applications and can teach individuals to manage conflict creatively and positively.[7] However as it grows in popularity it should not become limited by mainstream application. Promoters should be cautious of labelling its use primarily for the workplace, for training, or for pre-mediation. To do so would unnecessarily limit the creative possibilities of the construct.

Conflict coaching is at its very essence, an individualised method for helping people to effectively engage in conflict.[8] It was developed as a method to foster in an individual clarity for how a conflict shapes, and it can be used in anticipation of an interpersonal conflict, or to make a thorough assessment of a conflict that has already occurred.[9] The paradigm is not constrained by its definition and it should not become constrained through stereotypical application. It is a prototype that encourages creativity, innovation, and inventiveness.[10] It ought to embody these ideals in its application, and should be embraced broadly in diverse societal contexts. Coaching should not be limited by pre-conceived boundaries.

It is argued that coaching models can, and should, be broadly utilised and available to all people experiencing conflict including those under the age of 18. The skills learnt through the coaching process could be incorporated into a peace education program, as an alternative to traditional discipline mechanisms or,to support restorative justice instruments in schools.

III APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS: AN ARGUMENT FOR INCLUSION OF CONFLICT COACHING

Traditionally, conflict resolution processes in schools have been governed by discipline and student welfare policies. These policies deal with conflict in a quasi-judicial manner. Procedural fairness is purportedly embedded within the system. However, when confronted with students displaying repeated behaviours it is easily overlooked by decision makers. Traditional discipline

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rawlingsM1.cfm >.

[7] Cinny Noble, 'Conflict Coaching – When It Works And When It Doesn't', (Paper presented at LEADR's 8th International ADR Conference, Sydney, 2006, February) <http://www.mediate.com/articles/noblec8.cfm>.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ross Brinkert, 'Conflict Coachin', Conflict Management in Higher Education Report,2 (2), <http://www.campus-adr.org/CMHER/ReportArticles/Edition2_2/Brinkert2_2.html>.

[10] Michael Lang and Alison Taylor, *The Making of A Mediator: Developing Artistry in Practice*, (Jossey Bass, 2005) 15.

processes in schools can encourage power imbalances and unilateral decision-making about appropriate punishments and ways of rectifying human errors.[11] Reliance on this kind of disciplinary action fosters a culture of frustration where underlying conflict remains consistently unaddressed and parties are not provided with the tools to work towards resolution. As a result a conflict can manifest in destructive patterns, which may lead to bullying.

In the mid nineties the Responsible Citizenship Program was piloted in Australian schools in an attempt to deliver an alternative approach to conflict and bullying in schools.[12] The aim was to teach skills relating to empathy, active listening, negotiation and the ability to construct and present reasoned arguments. Similar restorative justice interventions have since been adopted in the US and the UK.[13] In the UK a national peace education program included conflict resolution and peer mediation modules. The program aimed to develop critical thinking, respect for others and cooperative dispute resolution skills in students.[14]

A significant number of Australian schools have now adopted conflict management programs based on principles of restorative justice. These programs have a framework aimed at bringing about behavioural change for the individual while keeping schools and communities safe.[15] In particular, restorative justice conferencing is a practice that has been implemented in many Australian schools. The process involves the presence of teachers, parents and students, and is designed to provide support to both the offender and victim. The conferencing makes it clear to the offender that certain behaviour is not condoned within the school, but it is supportive and respectful of each individual involved. Restorative justice conferencing has been found to be somewhat ef-

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[11] Patricia Marshall, Gary Shaw and Elizabeth Freeman, 'Restorative Practices: Implications For Educational Institutions', (Paper presented at the Third International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices, Minnesota, 2002 August) <http://www.iirp.edu/library/mn02/mn02_marshall.html>.

[12] Brenda Morrison, 'Bullying and Victimisation in Schools: A Restorative Justice Approach'. (Research Paper Number 219, *Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 2002, February).

[13] Catherine Larkin, ' Citizenship Education or Crowd Control: The Crick Report and the Role of Peace Education and Conflict Resolution in the New Citizenship Curriculum.' (Centre for Conflict Resolution, Working Paper 9, 2001), 1- 17 <http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/confres/assets/ccr9.pdf>.

[14] Ibid 2.

[15] Morrison, above n 12, 2.

fective in addressing bullying.[16] However, the process has received mixed reviews and because of this, the uptake of the practice has been slow in schools across Australia.[17] One explanation for the mixed reviews, is that restorative justice is a reactive process that is not triggered until a disciplinary action is required. This is because conferencing generally requires an incident of destructive conflict to occur prior to activation. Hence it can only be utilised on a case-by-case basis. This can be frustrating to schools who wish to embed a holistic approach to dispute resolution. Restorative justice conferencing is not a tool that can easily be implemented into the education curriculum and it is not an effective early intervention strategy to address classroom behaviours. Additionally, because it is an inclusive process it does not provide either participant with the opportunity for individual clarity or independent analysis of the conflict. Nonetheless bullying in schools continues to be on the rise, and there is an increasing push for more early intervention strategies and further criminalisation if these are not successful.[18]

Evidence also suggests that what is needed is broader institutional support, however, a major difficulty around supporting restorative justice systems in schools is the burden on resources.[19] Restorative justice conferencing, like mediation, is a process that requires substantial input from external agencies, or an in-house resource commitment to develop an effective school based program and can only take place where both parties consent to participate in the process. Additionally, to achieve success, the process must involve the presence and participation of a community of support for the offender and the victim.[20] The process also requires a confrontation over the wrongdoing between the victim and offender within this community of support. [21]

Adopting a conflict-coaching model could relieve the resource drain, offer an alternative or complement to mediation and conferencing, and present an in-

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16   Morrison, above n 12, 3.

17   Ibid.

18   Jim Dubreuil & Eamon Mcniff, 'Bullied to Death in America's Schools', ABC News (online) 2010. <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/TheLaw/school-bullying-epidemic-turning-deadly/story?id=11880841>.

19   James Ritchie and Terry O'Connell, *Restorative justice and the contest between the relational and institutional paradigms*, in John Braithwaite and Heather Strang (Eds.), *Restorative Justice and Civil Society,* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001), quoted Morrison, above n 12, 3.

20   John Braithwaite, 'Crime, Shame and Reintegration' (Cambridge University Press2002), quoted in Morrison, above n 12, 2.

21   Morrison, above n 12, 3.

novative process for individual participation. Moreover conflict coaching can be used as an early intervention strategy. A conflict coaching system could support existing conflict resolution programs in schools, and empower individual students to respond to conflict positively, prior to it escalating to destructive behaviours such as bullying.

However deeper institutional support, in the form of a culture shift that supports the process, is likely to also be required for any conflict resolution program to be fully implemented.[22] This could be in the form of a coordinated national peace education curriculum, inclusive of conflict coaching, in Australian schools.

Although elements of peace education are present in the curriculum of many Australian schools, to date, the peace research movement has been strong on research and action, but weak on education and implementation, generally failing to bring findings into schools and universities.[23]

Galtung advocates not only the presence of peace education in schools but also the inclusion of new models of peace education that can function as vehicles of social change in any education program.[24] It is argued that conflict coaching is one such model. Peace education has been described as a process, which helps learners begin to raise questions, and gives students the tools they need to direct their learning.[25] It is an education about how to learn, not what to learn.[26] Conflict coaching embodies this definition by providing participants with the tools to constructively learn and engage in conflict reflectively and with artistry.[27]

IV REAL Conflict Coaching™ Systems in Schools

A model's strengths and weaknesses are related to the system to which it is applied.[28] A particular model means different things when used by different

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22 Ritchie and O'Connell above n 19, 3.

23 Johan Galtung, 'Form and Content of Peace Education, Conceptual Perspectives' in Monisha Bajaj (ed), Encyclopedia of Peace Education, (Teachers College, Columbia University 2008).

24 Ibid.

25 Kevin Kester, 'Education for Peace: Content, Form, and Structure: Mobilizing Youth for Civic Engagement' (2010) 4 (2), *Peace & Conflict Review* 1, 3.

26 Ibid.

27 Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 70.

28 Ross Brinkert,' Conflict Coaching', Conflict Management in Higher Education Report, (2002) 2 (2) <http://www.campus-adr.org/CMHER/ReportArticles/Edition2_2/Brinkert2_2.html>.

people in different contexts.[29] In considering conflict coaching in schools, the writer has assessed the applicability of the REAL Conflict Coaching™ System to be used by children. This model has been selected due to its relatively new development, which means it hasn't been anecdotally labelled as a model intended for the workplace and adults generally.

REAL Conflict Coaching™ is a new initiative of Conflict Coaching International[30] and advocates a conflict-coaching framework based on a philosophy that encourages and supports reflection, engagement, artistry and learning.[31] It is submitted that the flexible REAL Conflict Coaching™ system could easily be applied to the school context, in the same way that it can apply to adults in the workplace. The system follows eight coaching steps starting with goal setting and ending with reflection.

The system is by no means exclusively restricted to adult participation, however there are a number of obstacles that may impede the successful application of the system to individuals under the age of 18. Awareness of possible obstacles will allow a coach to tailor the system to ensure a child friendly process. The key obstacles have been discussed below.

A. Disengagement and Resistance

One of the issues that may be faced by coaches is initial resistance from students and other participants. There is a possibility that many students, having been referred to coaching as a disciplinary mechanism, will be resistant or initially disengaged in the process. This is because denial and resistance are normal responses in the face of change and discipline, and can cause a lot of frustration to those implementing innovations.[32] Implementing change regarding discipline is often met with comparatively high resistance in the high school setting on the individual and collective level.[33]

Resistance presents an obstacle to coaching and persistent resistance may cause the process to fail. However REAL Conflict Coaching™ allows for initial resistance and can compensate for this in its existing framework. It is argued

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[29] Ibid.

[30] http://www.conflictcoachinginternational.com, accessed 10 February 2013

[31] Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 69-70.

[32] Peta Blood & Margaret Thorsborn, 'Overcoming Resistance to Whole-School Uptake of Restorative Practices', (Paper presented at the International Institute of Restorative Practices " The Next Step: Developing Restorative Communities, Part 2" Conference, 2006 October) http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/beth06_blood.pdf

[33] Ibid.

that coaching should not be ruled unsuitable if children are initially unwilling, or are forced to attend as a form of punishment. Whilst not every case will be suitable for coaching, resistance is a common scenario where an employer refers adult employees to coaching. Coaches are trained to work with resistant people, and determine if referrals are appropriate.

It is not unusual for adult coachees to be resistant to the process and to the coach, however, this does not prevent success.[34] Lack of clarity or inconsistency about their goals, anger about being referred, assumptions about the reasons for the referral and other possibilities, have an impact on how coaching is received.[35] It is logical that similar emotions are likely to be expressed by children and even exacerbated because they have been socialised by customary discipline practices which foster retribution and punishment, and traditionally permeate all sanctioning processes.[36] Even when restorative practices are fully adopted in schools, it is hard for students to accept them without suspicion.[37] Initial unwillingness to participate does not prevent coaching for adults, who often embark on the process unwillingly, and become more open as the sessions progress, and should not be a reason for automatically excluding children.[38]

Resistance can in fact be a unique way in which a client chooses to cooperate and should be taken as an indicator for the coach to work creatively to discover why or what is important about resistance to the client.[39] Where coachees resist to the point that they will not willingly engage in the process on any level coaching may not be possible.[40] As with adults, the determination ought to be case by case.

B. Age and Cognitive Capacity

The same intake process for adults prescribed by REAL Conflict Coaching™ is applied to children. However the coach will need to consider whether the young person has the cognitive capacity to participate in the coaching process, and if so, when confidentiality may need to be broken in addition to the param-

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[34]   Noble, above n 7.
[35]   David Karp & Beau Breslin, 'Restorative justice in school communities', (2001) 33, (2), *Youth & Society E Journal*, 249-272.
[36]   Ibid.
[37]   Ibid.
[38]   Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 179.
[39]   Ibid
[40]   Noble, above n 7.

eters prescribed by REAL Conflict Coaching™.

This is because a lack of cognitive capacity could inhibit the coaching process if the young person does not understand how to partake in the process or the implications of partaking. Additionally, a child may disclose sensitive information that requires confidentiality to be breached. Determining whether and how confidentiality should be used for coaching in schools is crucial to implementing the framework. Confidentiality is a key element to maintaining trust and rapport in the coaching process and without it coaching is unlikely to succeed.[41]

To address these issues, a test for determining cognitive capacity and how confidentiality should be maintained should be inserted into the REAL Conflict Coaching™ intake session.

The Gillick competence standard, based on a decision handed down by the House of Lords and approved in Australia, is a test able to fulfil the capacity and confidentiality requirements.[42] The test states that a child has the capacity to consent to a procedure or treatment when she has sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable her to understand fully what is being proposed, including an understanding of the nature and effects of any procedures.[43] Generally where no contrary statutory provision exists the standard is applicable. Importantly, if a young person is deemed to have capacity, she will also receive full rights to confidentiality. Given that none of the steps in REAL involve life-threatening procedures or treatments, the nature and effects of participating in the process are likely to be fairly safe, provided that the coach adheres to ethical standards and obligations.

The insertion of this test into the intake session would overcome issues regarding capacity to participate in the process and assure participants confidentiality. The test is simple enough for coaches to adopt and could be included as part of a suitability assessment into the intake process.

C. Emotional Maturity

A highly emotional adult candidate may not be suitable for coaching.[44] Similarly a highly emotional child candidate may not be suitable. Children have less developed emotional competence and understanding of the impact of emo-

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[41]   Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 179.
[42]   *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority* (1985) 3 All ER 402 HL.
[43]   Gillick above n 42.
[44]   Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 177.

tion on their behaviour, and because of this find it harder to regulate their emotions. [45] This means they may be more likely than adults to display behaviours that are so highly emotional they present a serious obstacle.

However this obstacle is unlikely to interrupt the process provided the coach is trained to deal with such circumstances. The majority of children are able to communicate their feelings and are able to regulate them.[46] As a result of interpreting other people's emotions, a child can begin to take others' perspectives and become empathic.[47] A trained coach is able to identify and constructively manage emotions.[48] However additional techniques may need to be employed to encourage the child to develop awareness about others. Expertise drawing from other conflict management programs aimed at young people could be incorporated to ensure that emotions are managed effectively. If emotions manifest in uncontrollable behaviors the coach may have to cease coaching.

D. Culture and Rapport

Understanding the demographic and developing rapport with children presents significant challenges for coaches familiar with coaching adults. Categorising young people as a sub-culture within society will assist coaches with understanding their client. This sub-culture will require acknowledgement within the REAL Conflict Coaching™ System, as correct interpretation and understanding of it will directly influence the viability of coaching. Cultural factors are an inherent part of conflict and impact on the relationship between the coach and client.[49] Defining youth as a culture will require a coach to develop cultural fluency, to understand the cultural links between learning, perception, communication and conflict.[50] In view of this, the coach will have to pay particular attention to establishing rapport in a culturally sensitive manner, be aware of a range of communication styles, and be prepared to adapt the process to suit the youth culture context.[51]

In building rapport the coach will need to be aware that student clients (especially bullies) are likely to view the process with distrust, hostility and even

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[45] Susanne Denham, *Emotional Development in Young Children* (The Guilford Press, 1998).

[46] Ibid

[47] Denham, above n 45.

[48] Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 204.

[49] Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 205.

[50] Michelle Le Baron, *Bridging Troubles Waters: Conflict Resolution from the Heart* (Jossey-Bass 2002).

[51] Hardy and Alexander, above n 1, 205.

loathing.[52] Due to the patriarchal nature of school discipline processes there is likely to be perceived power imbalances, and an instinctive antipathy to the process.[53] Coaches will have to devote additional resources to overcome these perceptions prior to initiation of any coaching dialogue. A well-trained coach should be able to overcome these perceptions by developing and maintaining rapport. [54] Obvious strategies such as matching communication, using child friendly language and developing the relationship over time are likely to be successful.[55]

V Can Conflict Coaching Address Bullying

An argument can be made for the inclusion of a conflict coaching framework in schools as a component of conflict management and peace education. Additionally it is submitted that the REAL Conflict Coaching™ System requires very little modification in order to present a child friendly system if utilised by well-trained coaches. However the question still remains as to whether conflict coaching can actually assist with the prevention and cessation of bullying in schools.

Amid increasing calls to criminalise bullying the writer argues that further criminalisation will not deter bullies any more than existing laws. Assault, threats, stalking, and harassment are all typical behaviours displayed by bullies in and out of school, which attract criminal sanctions. These laws are currently doing little to protect targets of bullying at school and it is difficult to comprehend how further criminalisation will achieve this objective. Furthermore the writer does not believe that early and additional criminalisation of young people is an ideal or ethical solution to the problem.

There has been traditional caution in advocating conflict coaching as a solution for workplace bullying. Conflict coaching bullies can be risky without good organisational backup and clear policy driven behavioral standards.[56] Coaching the bully is most effective at the early stage, where a bullying policy is enforced and clear expectations for behavioural change are in place. [57] Unfortunately many workplaces do not have prescribed policies, or set standards of behaviour, and are slow in their response to bullying. Unlike workplaces, all

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52 Julie Starr, *The Coaching Manual* (Pearson Education, 3rd ed, 2011).
53 Karp above n 35, 254
54 Starr, above n 52, 63.
55 Hardy and Alexander, above n1 179
56 Hardy and Alexander, above n1, 182-186.
57 Hardy and Alexander, above n1, 185.

schools in Australia are required by their state and territory education departments to have clear anti-bullying policies in place, and students who exhibit bullying behaviour face escalating penalties including suspension, expulsion and even criminal convictions.[58] Because this framework exists, implementing conflict coaching as an early intervention strategy to address bullying behaviour in accordance with school policies and a strong conflict management system will minimise the risks traditionally associated with coaching bullies in the workplace.

The benefits associated with conflict coaching bullies include a shift in the focus from proving whether or not the individual is a bully and the type of punishment to be administered, to a focus on the awareness and understanding of the bully.[59] This shift encourages reflection on why the individual has been labelled as a bully and what leads to this perception. If accepted it can let the bully examine ways in which to deal more effectively with the conflict from a personal perspective, whereas traditional disciplinary processes offer little opportunity for individual reflection.[60] Coaching can also allow bullies to develop skills for working through differences, and avenues to discharge negative feelings.[61]

Coaching a target of bullying behaviour is not generally recommended for bullying situations, as attempts by the target to engage the bully in active problem solving can increase victimisation and retaliation.[62] However coaching can be useful to assist the target to adopt coping strategies. The support of coaching can bring clarity and analysis to the situation, allowing the individual to manage feelings of fear, confusion, anger, and despair that arise when the behaviour occurs.[63]

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[58] To see a copy of Australian state and territory school's anti bullying policies see: http://deewr.gov.au/state-and-territory-anti-bullying-policies, accessed 20 March 2013

[59] Alan Sharland, 'Alan Sharland on bullying and conflict coaching', Compass Morainn Journal, June 14 2011 http://compassmorainn.blogspot.com.au/2011/06/alan-sharland-on-bullying-and-conflict.html

[60] Ibid

[61] Morrison, above n 12, 4.

[62] Hardy and Alexander, above n1, 185.

[63] Ken Rigby, *Bullying in Schools: What To Do About It,* (Australian Council for Education Research Limited, Melbourne 1996), as quoted in Brenda Morrison, 'Bullying and Victimisation in Schools: A Restorative Justice Approach'. (Research Paper Number 219, *Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice,* 2002, February) 3.

Adopting coping strategies for targets is likely to be of benefit in all circumstances, in both early intervention and advanced bullying stages. Additionally coaching can teach life-long conflict management skills for both parties and encourage acceptance that bullying and being bullied are behaviours that can be changed.[64] For this reason early implementation of coaching for both parties, will assist to minimise the potential of a conflict to escalate to bullying.

Beneficial conditions for coaching the bully and the target are present in the school context where there is a strong organisational structure, a holistic approach towards restorative principles and clear expectations towards standards of behaviour. Studies have consistently found that the more conflict resolution techniques permeate the atmosphere and curriculum in schools, the greater the decrease in violence, improvement in classroom management, and enhancement of students' social and emotional development.[65] However, ultimately any attempts to implement conflict coaching at school need to be carefully monitored, and conducted in a contingent manner, with other forms of conflict management. Given the limited evaluation of coaching in general, it is impossible to state whether conflict coaching in schools will successfully decrease incidents of bullying. A rigorous evidence based evaluation of the effectiveness of the REAL Conflict Coaching™ System and its application to children and bullying is required.

VI Conclusion

Conflict coaching is broad in definition and should not be constrained by popular application to workplace conflicts. Rather it should be embraced as a form of artistry that can be applied in schools and to a younger demographic.

Conflict coaching should be included in conflict management programs and considered as an alternative or support to restorative justice programs in schools. Preliminary examination of the REAL Conflict Coaching™ System demonstrates that it is flexible enough to accommodate a youth demographic, and structural changes are not likely to be required. Awareness of possible obstacles will allow a well-trained coach to tailor the system to ensure a child friendly process.

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64 Ibid.

65 Tricia Jones, *Conflict Resolution Education: Goals, Models, Benefits and Implementation* (Temple University 2002), quoted in Jeanne Asherman, *Decreasing Violence Through Conflict Resolution Education In Schools* (January 2002) Mediate.Com: Mediators and Everything Mediation <http://www.mediate.com/articles/asherman.cfm>.

Whilst it is clear that constructive conflict resolution methods for children teach empathy, increased communication skills, co-operation and respect for each other, whether conflict coaching can be used to decrease bullying in schools remains to be evaluated. Nonetheless given the conditions that are present in most educational facilities, an argument for evaluation of the method is made. Certainly conflict coaching is a preferable option to solutions that seek to criminalise young people.