



Bullying in schools

Lessons from Scandinavia

IF WE'RE SERIOUS ABOUT ADDRESSING BULLYING AND OTHER CHANGES TO OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM, WE MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING FROM THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE, AS MIKE COOK EXPLAINS.

There's a quote in Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, from Karen McCown, founder of the Nueva School in Hillsborough, California, and the not-for-profit organisation Six Seconds, that goes like this: 'Learning doesn't happen separate from the children's emotions. To be emotionally qualified is just as important for the process of learning as education in mathematics and reading.'

Inspired by that idea back in 2000, primary school teacher Ulla Janssen began integrating into the classroom at her school in Strängnäs, Sweden, a model that deals with change, with what happens with people and organisations in transition, and with how they can influence the change process by taking responsibility for their emotions and actions. Called the Four Rooms of Change, the model Janssen used was developed by the Swedish psychologist, Claes Janssen, in the late 1960s and early '70s as part of his groundbreaking research on the dynamics of change.

Before I show how Ulla Janssen used this model, let me explain the model itself in a bit more detail. In examining change, Claes Janssen's identified four rooms or psychological states of mind: contentment; self-censorship and denial; confusion and conflict; and inspiration and renewal.

Our experience of change always starts somewhere, typically in a state of contentment, where everything feels fine, where we're relaxed and in control, and in fact have no desire to change anything. That changes when our external environment changes, which can happen very quickly or very slowly.

We might fall through what Janssen refers to as the 'trap door' as the result of a significant event or we might find ourselves gently descending over a period of time into what he calls the 'denial room,' where we may have general sense that something is different or not quite right, but where we can successfully convince ourselves that everything is okay.

We may find ourselves struggling to stay positive or 'putting on a mask' to show others that we are relaxed and in control. Sooner or later, though, when we face the reality of change, we enter what Janssen calls the 'confusion room.' This is where emotions like fear, anger, sadness, self-doubt and inferiority commonly take over.

This is obviously not a good place to be and many of us make an unconscious choice to go back into denial rather than press on with our journey.

By facing our fears and working through the confusion and conflict, however, we can find inspiration and a way forward. In doing that we enter what Janssen calls the 'renewal room.' Suddenly we have sense of 'getting it all together,' we're energised and we experience the desire and find the creative resources to make things happen. Finally, we're ready to complete our journey and step back into the contentment room.

The power of the Four Rooms of Change as a model lies both in its simplicity and in its depth. It applies to us as individuals, but can also apply to groups, communities and even to the broader social systems in which we operate.

And that's where Ulla Janssen's program at her school in Strängnäs comes in. Her goal was to create a common language to enable her Years 2 and 3 students to explore and communicate their own feelings and develop emotional self-awareness, self-management and ultimately empathy for others as a way to enable them to change the ways they dealt with bullying at the school.

Instead of using words like contentment, denial, confusion and renewal, Janssen used four pictures of figures in rooms that had been used by IKEA – this was Sweden, remember – as part of their management development program. She put the four pictures on a magnetic board in the classroom for a couple of days before asking the children about how they thought the figures in the different rooms were feeling, and giving them each a name.

The children agreed on 'contentment,' 'don't want,' 'want' and 'over the moon'

to describe the figures. Each child was then given a magnet and asked to place it in the room that best described how they were feeling at that moment, and the class established a ritual of moving their magnet on a regular basis.

Over time, the children started moving their own magnets without being asked to do so and also – significantly – started paying attention to where the other magnets were. Ulla Janssen then began encouraging the children to talk about what they had learned from the activity.

The results of this experiment have been nothing short of extraordinary. After nine years of working with the Four Rooms of Change in the classrooms of the Strängnäs School, bullying has completely disappeared.

Ulla Janssen is working with parents, teachers and staff at the school to apply the learning in a broader context and facilitate change within the whole school community. Principals from across Sweden and

Scandinavia have begun bringing the tools into their own schools.

If we're serious about creating a major transformation in our own education system here in Australia, we might have something to learn from the Swedish experience. The Four Rooms of Change is a model which is sufficiently simple to support children in the classroom, but at the same time has the depth to challenge the thinking and guide the actions of a school community and perhaps even the education system itself. Now that's what I would call an education revolution.

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REFERENCES

Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam.

Drusilla Copeland and Bengt Lindstrom from Ander & Lindstrom Partners will be running a introductory session on the Four Rooms of Change in Schools in Melbourne on 17 March 2010. Contact info@clarionlearning.com.au for more information.

LINKS:

For more information on the Four Rooms of Change in Schools, visit www.andolin.com/fourrooms/en/four-rooms-in-schools/index.shtml

For Ulla Janssen's report on her program at her school in Strängnäs, visit www.andolin.com/pdf/psychology-in-the-classroom.pdf

For more on Six Seconds, visit www.6seconds.org