PROMOTING SAFETY IN SCHOOLS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND ACTION

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Introduction

It is a very great honour and a pleasure to be invited to address this conference on the extremely important, and often neglected, topic of the role of schools in crime prevention. I would like to thank the organisers for giving me this opportunity to do so. I am here on behalf of the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC), to talk about some of the work which is being done in this area. I am not a teacher, school administrator or policy maker, and we do not assume we know all the answers, so I am here to learn, and I look forward very much to finding out much more about developments in school crime prevention in Australia.

ICPC is an international non-governmental organization based in Montreal, Canada, which was founded in 1994. We are supported by a group of governments – and I am delighted that Australia has recently become a member of our governing Board – as well as international and national organizations dedicated to the promotion and practice of crime prevention. Our mission is to assist governments, regions, cities and communities to reduce crime, violence and insecurity, and promote community safety, through the exchange of information, knowledge and expertise about national strategies, policies, effective and promising practice, as well as problems and solutions. We aim to shift the balance to good, well-planned prevention, away from a reliance on reactive responses to crime.

I have been asked to talk about recent trends around the world concerning school safety, primarily based on the comparative review which we completed last year for the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) (Shaw, 2001). This was a request to look internationally at work on the prevention of violence in schools, and this frames much of what I will be talking about today. The full report is available on the BJA web-site, or in a slightly different edition on the web-sites of ICPC and that of the Canadian National Crime Prevention Centre.[i]

Much of what I will be talking about may be familiar to you, but my role is to help set the scene for the conference, to enable us to step back and survey where we have come from, and what should be happening. Crime prevention is a rapidly developing field, even in relation to schools, and I would like to cover three issues:

i)   what we found when we looked for promising strategies and practices around school violence prevention

ii) some of the more recent developments

iii) and briefly, some of the problems and challenges which need to be faced, in particular the crucial importance of paying attention to implementation issues, and the problems of zero tolerance policies, and risk aversion.

From the conference programme it is clear that many of these trends and developments are reflected in current practice in Australia and will be discussed in much greater detail by other speakers.

I would like to begin with a newspaper story from New Orleans, USA, which crystallises for me many of the problems and limitations of some current responses to school safety - of how not to respond – with an emphasis on exclusion, a focus on tough security measures, and risk reduction.

> **Two Hurt in Teenage Shootout**
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> *New Orleans*: Two teenagers boys shot and wounded each other with the same gun during a fight at their middle school yesterday after a 13-year-old expelled student slipped a weapon to one of them through a fence….Witnesses said the eighth graders had argued before the shootings at the school where students must pas through a metal detector to enter….The boy accused of providing the handgun was arrested….at his home in a nearby housing project, part of an economically mixed neighborhood.…The school recently expelled the boy for fighting….
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> *Associated Press, September, 2000*

International experience – new attention to schools and violence

While there have always been incidents of violence in schools, I would argue that it has become the subject of heightened awareness and attention among governments, schools and the public in recent years. There seem to be three main reasons for this new attention:

- publicity surrounding a series of very violent school-related events,

- changing attitudes to and awareness of behaviours, and

- the consolidation of research and knowledge about their causes and about effective practices.

Media driven concerns

There is probably not a country in the world which cannot point to some recent event concerning violence in schools. It is also very clear that we are now much better informed through the media – television, newspaper, the Internet - about violent events in schools around the world. We learn about school shootings, school-related suicides, or drug and gang fights, almost instantaneously, often very graphically. Our concerns, and reactions, have become media *driven*.

Recent examples include the many school-related shootings in the USA preceding that at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999, when two students shot and killed pupils and teachers in their suburban high school; the death of the head teacher Philip Lawrence in London, England in 1995; the killing of teachers and children in an elementary school in Dunblane Scotland in 1996 by an outsider; the Columbine-inspired killing of a pupil in Tabor, Alberta in 1999, and more recent events in Tasmania, this year in Germany, and in Japan just last week.

Such events have shown that school violence can take place inside or outside the school, in primary, secondary or tertiary schools, in urban, suburban or rural settings, involving pupils, teachers, support staff as victims or perpetrators, as well as known intruders or completed strangers. Such events have led to government action which is often 'event drive'. In earlier decades, school safety was largely concerned with protecting school premises from vandalism using various target-hardening measures, or involved small school-police liaison schemes. By contrast, such highly publicized events have led to new legislation, protocols and directives, and flurries of activity in many countries. They have also resulted, over time, in more awareness of the problems and their causes.

The media spotlight has also distorted reality, and led to over-reaction. We seem to have developed a new-found fear of children and young people. Yet schools remain very safe places – young people are generally at far greater risk outside them than in. For example, in the United States since 1992, less than 1% of all youths killed have been in school or at a school related event.

Changing attitudes

A second factor relates to changing attitudes towards, and an increased awareness of, less traumatic and dramatic school-related events such as bullying, fighting and intimidation. At the beginning of the 1990's it was possible to say that bullying and victimization in the school was almost totally ignored in most countries.

We now know that levels of victimization of children and young people rank among the highest of all age groups. Taxing, 'bullismo', 'le raquet', are now well research terms in Scandinavia, Italy and France among many other countries. International research and exchange and greater media attention, have again resulted in the shifting of attention to their importance. Their short and the long term impacts of bullying on children and adolescents, affecting their academic progress, social relationships in and outside school, staying in school, future job skills, offending, to say nothing of health, stability and suicide and depression, are all now widely recognized.

> As recently as 5 or 6 years ago, bullying was a non-issue in Scottish schools. Now it is well and truly on the agenda.
>
> *Action Against Bullying in Schools* Mellor, 1995

Cumulative integrated knowledge about effective action

This awareness of the important links between victimization and offending is associated with the third 'new' factor. This is the cumulative, integrated knowledge-base about the causes of crime and victimization. Based on a number of longitudinal studies in different countries we now have clear evidence of the risk factors which predict future offending, and those which protect children and young people from such involvement (ICPC, 1999; NCP, 1999). These include factors associated with the family, the environment, the individual, and very importantly, the school. The crucial role of the school in protecting children from becoming involved in offending and victimization, from truanting and exclusion, its climate and ethos, its ability to retain and nurture pupils, has long been known, but is now much more clearly delineated.

Further, there is now accumulating evidence that well-planned, well-targeted interventions *do* reduce those risks. They are also likely to be cost-effective and cost-beneficial. Many early intervention studies show impressive results in terms of improved life circumstances, as well as large cost-benefits in terms of money invested. In one American study, for example, the costs of reducing crime by 10% were calculated as $228 per household if heavier prison sentences were used, compared with $32 per household using incentive programmes for youth to complete school (ICPC, 1999; Waller & Sansfacon, 2001)[ii]. It is this knowledge about effective practice which has driven much of the promising activity around school safety and bullying prevention.

International Trends

Undertaking international reviews is not easy and can be a frustrating activity. There are many language restrictions, as well questions of the availability and accessibility of publications and material. Much of our work has been restricted to countries in the North, and Australia and New Zealand, or to translations and secondary reviews which report on work in other regions and countries.

It is also very difficult to compare patterns and trends across boarders since few countries apart from the USA have collected routine or uniform data. Most of the information and projects on school safety which we located relate to bullying, vandalism and theft in schools, much less often to serious violence, and there are wide-ranging concerns (see below).

What do schools want to be safe from?	
Accidents & injury	Theft
Self harm	Bullying & intimidation
Intrusion	Sexual & racial harrassment & intimidation
Fear of victimization	Violence and aggression
Vandalism	Group mobbing, extortion, taxing, drug/gang activities

There are wide variations in information sources, ranging from education authorities, school boards or teachers associations, to police reports or national surveys. There are wide variations in definitions and reporting systems, and a reluctance on the part of schools, pupils or administrators to reports problems.[iii]

Overall, however, schools in many countries show similar patterns of increases in bullying and aggression over the past ten years or more. There is also evidence, however, that much of that increase reflects the change in attitude towards bullying, and changing reporting practices, as well as an increasing use of formal exclusion and various types of zero tolerance policies. For example, a Swedish study (Estrada, 2001) has shown very clearly how changing reporting practices have accounted for increases in school-based aggression. Comparing school records from the 1980's and 1990's it was found that only serious violent incidents were reported to the police up to the mid 1980's. Schools dealt with the minor incidents internally. Thereafter, all incidents were reported to the police, resulting in a 300% increase in violent incidents noted since 1993. Yet it was found that all this increase was accounted for by minor aggression, not by increases in serious violence.

Overall patterns, therefore, found in a range of countries seem to indicate that:

- Most countries report problems of aggression, minor assaults, and bullying in all types of schools.
- Some countries think that school violence has increased in recent years; others attribute recorded increase to changing attitudes towards violence, changing reporting systems and greater awareness of its existence.
- Frequent and persistent problem behaviours are restricted to a minority of pupils, or are widespread in schools in areas with serious social and economic problems.
- A few countries have serious problems of youth violence and racism that have had an impact on schools.
- Most aggressive and violent behaviours are inflicted by students against their peers, much less often against teachers, and rarely by teachers against students.
- Reported levels of insecurity about school safety would appear to be higher than in the past in many countries.

Some European countries are concerned with group extortion, racial attacks and harassment, gang activity and weapons and drug use, affecting schools especially in the inner city, or suburban areas which are heavily deprived. These are the areas, sometimes referred to as areas of *social exclusion*, characterised by low income and unemployment, poor housing and environmental conditions, rapid population changes, migration and immigration, and a range of health, economic and social problems, including school drop out, crime and victimization.

International practice

Many countries have developed national, state or provincial strategies to respond to the issue of school safety, crime and victimization. There is now funding for project development, training, networking and exchange of expertise, and technical assistance to project development. This is often associated with national crime prevention initiatives. Much of this activity is cross-sectorial, recognizing the multi-dimensional causes of such problems, and the need for a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach which links action by schools, youth and social services, health and housing, employment and police. It promotes integrated action including teachers, pupils, school support staff, parents and others working in partnerships together.

Among the specific programmes and initiatives, there is a focus on comprehensive and 'whole-school' approaches, early intervention and parent support and training, youth mentoring and support, and a growing use of mediation and conflict resolution approaches such as that currently being developed in Australia (Morrison, 2002).

For example, **France** launched a National Plan to combat violence in schools in 1997, and developed school observatories which collate data on a range of indicators concerned with the health and progress of schools and their communities; they selected and trained some 7000 young people, many from areas of high unemployment and immigration, to work as social mediators and school assistants; they increased medical and social work staffing in schools in areas of high risk; they promoted innovative intervention projects and evaluation in the 26 regions most at risk of violence and delinquency, victim support projects in schools, and citizenship and anti-violence education programmes. There has been evidence of reductions in the incidence of violence and delinquency in schools in a number of these regions.[iv]

The **European Union** has been especially active in supporting a major anti-bullying project including the development of research, practice and networking among schools and research teams in 14 countries. Some excellent reports on these projects are available.[v] Much of the anti-bullying work stems from Dan Olweus's pioneering Norwegian project in the 1980's which demonstrated a 50% reduction in bullying using a 'whole-school' approach – ie. using a range of integrated initiatives which involved all sectors of the school community. This work is exemplified in Australia by Ken Rigby's work on bullying (Rigby, 1996, 2001, 2002) as well as in many other countries including New Zealand, Japan, USA, UK, Scotland, Spain and many others.

Denmark, the first country to develop a national crime prevention capacity in the 1970's, has an integrated system of councils in almost all municipal areas of the country (SSP's), which bring together schools, police and social workers to reduce problems of crime and victimization. School-based programmes include work on social-education and conflict resolution, and a series of pilot studies giving special teacher training to improve school climate, conflict resolution and mediation skills. The **Netherlands** has focused on bullying, improved incidence response, safety of premises, social competence training, and capacity building for schools. Amsterdam has been the site of a very well-planned comprehensive initiative involving school safety about which we shall be hearing more in the course of this conference.

In **England and Wales**, concern about social exclusion and youth crime has led to a number of initiatives to reduce school exclusion, truancy and crime, as well as increased investment in early education and support programmes. There is funding for effective practice projects targeted to high risk groups or areas. These include mentoring programmes which work with young people who have dropped out of school to get them back into school, skills training or employment, as well as in elementary schools; there are home-school support projects for 11-17 year-olds providing in-school support workers to prevent school exclusion, provide individual pupil and parent support,

and support and relief to teachers. The Home Office allocated #12 million of its crime reduction budget to the Crime Reduction in Secondary Schools (CRISS) Project. This involves 103 schools across the country initiating projects with targets to reduce bullying, truancy and crime over a two year period. The results of that project are being evaluated locally and nationally.

South Africa also has a major focus on school-related violence. This is a country where levels of school violence are extremely serious, with a high incidence of rape and sexual assault of girls and young women – a third of them perpetrated by teachers – gang activity, guns and violence. The 1999 report *Youth Violence in Schools* sets out the need to promote school competency, support and care, self-esteem and identity, moral grounding, problem-solving skills, as well as the confidence and involvement of the community. There is again a strong focus on tackling the underlying causes of violence, and targeting the schools with the greatest problems, using comprehensive safe schools programmes. Exemplary projects include Tiso Thuto, and CRISP, about which we will be hearing more later in the conference.

The **USA** has experienced some of the worst examples of school violence, and high media attention. There have been strong responses which are reactive and deterrent, but also some excellent practice which takes a longer preventive approach. The Federal government has funded projects on the monitoring of school incidents, research and evaluation, and provided technical assistance and support to schools in project development and implementation. Examples include the Hamilton Fish Institute in Washington, which co-ordinates the development and evaluation of school-based prevention strategies; and the Safe Schools Healthy Students initiative, which funds local education authorities in partnership with public health, police, schools, pupils and parents in the development of violence prevention programmes. Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) have also developed a major series of school-based initiatives.

State initiatives include the work of the Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, which has developed a Safe Communities, Schools Safe project, with technical assistance and support. Model programmes include the Student Assistance Centre developed at East Hartford School, Connecticut, which has reduced the incidence of school exclusions, suspensions and drop out, and combines conflict resolution and peer mediation with a range of outside agency supports from mental health and substance abuse, to job-training and police.

As Gary and Denise Gottfredson and their colleagues recently concluded in their national study of delinquency prevention in US schools (2000 7.1):

> Schools currently employ an astonishingly large number and variety of programmes and activities to reduce or prevent problem behavior.

On the basis of experience in a number of countries, good, effective school safety programmes include the following characteristics:

- Proactive rather than responding to events

- Linking school safety with the needs of victims and victimizers, and to healthy behaviours

- Shifting from physical, situational prevention, or school exclusion, to comprehensive approaches using a range of policies and programmes

- Developing programmes geared to both the general school population and individual pupils and their families

- Using school community partnerships to plan and develop strategies and projects

- Targeting at risk schools with evaluated good practice programmes

- Involving young people themselves in the development of plans and projects.

Overall, the emerging trends suggest that the most promising approaches are those which see the school as part of its community, are comprehensive in that they look at not just violence, aggression or crime, but at healthy behaviours and educational and social benefits. They make growing use of mediation and conflict resolution resolution approaches, and focus on the importance of school climate. They involve a range of strategically planned policies and programmes and consider the needs of pupils, staff, parents and the community *around* the school, and involve them in planning and implementation. Above all, they are about pro-active, planned intervention.

> **The Critical Elements of a Comprehensive Approach to School Safety**
> - Identifying & mobilizing key partners in the school community including staff and pupils, parents, local agencies, community organizations, the private sector
> - Undertaking, in partnership, a careful analysis of local school-related problems
> - Developing local action plans
> - Implementing and evaluating short and long term outcomes
> - Revising and developing projects

So what are the challenges?

Developing school safety projects, reducing crime and violence in and around schools, is not without challenges. This is so in most areas of prevention, and school-based strategies have their own share of general and specific challenges. Three of the most important relate to project implementation and sustainability, and to the use of zero tolerance and the wider implications of a climate which promotes the elimination risk.

Implementation
Perhaps the most important challenge is that of implementation. In spite of an increasing array of model programmes and guidelines, there is always the problem of putting ideas into practice, of trying to sustain them, and repeat or replicate programmes in other settings. Schools have little time to spare, and developing good prevention plans requires leadership, energy, experience, finance and resources. While there is more training and support available than in the past, implementation remains one of the greatest barriers to effective practice.

In their recent national survey of schools in the US (2000) Gary and Denise Gottfredson and their colleagues have emphasised that organizational support for the implementation and integration of programmes in schools broadly predicts the quality of those activities and their likely effectiveness. They suggest that the most important initial question to ask in evaluating such programmes is 'what was done' rather than 'what works'.

Good programme implementation cannot be rushed or hurried, and for funders and policy makers the lesson is likely to be to focus much more on the implementation and adaptation of programmes to specific contexts, rather than rush to show quick outcomes and effectiveness. This also requires them to educate the public not to expect swift results. Programmes which are effective in one setting do not work by themselves – the process is crucial – people are what make programmes work. It also important for everyone to be modest in their expectations – demonstration projects can over-estimate the effectiveness of an intervention, because they *are* demonstrations.

Zero tolerance and pressures to eliminate risk
A second challenge is to resist the pressure or expectation that we can reduce or eliminate all risk. This can lead to the adoption of heavy security measures (such as those illustrated in the example from New Orleans) and a climate which increases insecurity, yet risk can never be eradicated. One of the most extreme examples of the desire to eliminate risk is a recent report following the case of the school caretaker charged with the murder of two 11 year-old school girls in England. A mother reports having a tracking device implanted in the arm of her 11 year-old daughter, on the grounds that this will prevent her abduction (The Guardian, 4.9.02).

Such pressures to eliminate risk are not likely to go away, and may be greater in times of economic insecurity, and now following the events of September 11th.[vi] They can include pressures to resort to greater deterrent and security measures, to install TV cameras and metal detectors, to build fences or higher fences around schools, to hire security guards, to put uniformed police in schools, to expel or exclude pupils seen as disruptive, to show zero tolerance for certain behaviours.

The use of zero tolerance policies is a particularly clear example of a short-term gain with can have serious negative long- and short-term consequences, for the excluded pupils and their families, and for the communities in which they live. They have been used extensively in the US since the mid 1990's and in other countries. This trend is one which is, thankfully, now being questioned more seriously in the US and elsewhere (Kingery, 2001; Ayers, et al 2001). Some countries are also looking at an expanded police role in schools in relation to crime prevention, and this is an area which needs to be very carefully considered and balanced within a comprehensive framework for safe and healthy schools.

Schools are the foremost socializing institution in society after the family. They can provide leadership, but they also require strong support and leadership from governments, to resist such pressures, to help them to educate their communities and local media, by including them in good practice projects which work to promote a healthy school climate and environment. They need support in resisting the pressure to use one traumatic event, or a local crime panic, to drive policies. Countries have been able to achieve extraordinary changes in attitudes and behaviour around smoking and drunk driving in recent years. Change in relation to school safety and prevention is possible, but we have to work persistently to achieve it.

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[i] BJA www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA ; ICPC www.crime-prevention-intl.org ; NCPC Canada www.crime-prevention.org (English, French and Spanish). A short Bulletin version is also available on the latter two web-sites.

[ii] The original study was undertaken by the RAND Corporation - see Greenwood, P.W. et al., *1995 Diverting Children from a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits*. Santa Monica, CA.

[iii] For example, in England and Wales, bids for government funding for a national school crime reduction programme required schools or their educational authorities to demonstrate how serious problems of crime, truancy and school exclusion were in their area. Newspaper reports on the successful applications portrayed them as the worst schools in the country, resulting in the withdrawal of some schools from the project.

[iv] See, for example, the School Observatory established at the University of Bordeaux, now part of an international network of research and a new journal on school violence.

[v] The European Network of Research on Bullying has been co-ordinated by Goldsmiths College, University of London, England, and individual country reports can be found on their web-site www.scre.ac.uk/bully.

[vi] They can also follow changes in government. In France, *Le Monde* (editorial L'école et la sécurité 24.09.02) has reported that the new government will not renew its funding for young people employed as social mediators and school assistants when current funding expires in 2003, in spite of the many benefits and achievements of the programme.