

## Making Inclusion Happen – Podcast: Episode 6

### Bullying and mobile phone use

*With Professor Marilyn Campbell*

**Haley:** Welcome to Making Inclusion Happen, a podcast that opens up conversations about what genuine inclusive education is and is not, and what we can do to make inclusive education a reality. This week, I'm speaking with C4IE member Professor Marilyn Campbell. Professor Campbell's research focuses on bullying and cyberbullying. Welcome Marilyn.

**Marilyn:** Hi Haley.

**Haley:** It's great to have you with us.

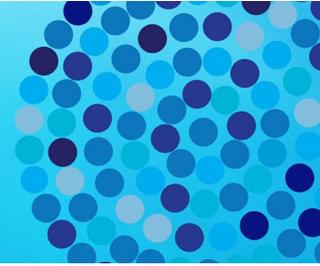
**Marilyn:** Thanks.

**Haley:** This podcast is a place where we think and talk about what we need to do to make inclusion a reality. You've got an extensive body of research focusing on bullying and cyberbullying and education. Can you explain to us a bit about the relationship between bullying and inclusive education?

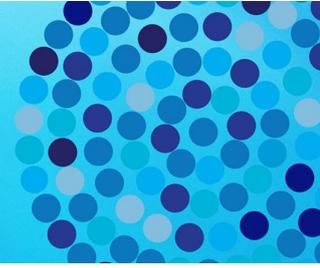
**Marilyn:** Well, it's my understanding that inclusive education is when students can access and fully participate in learning with their same age peers. And one of those kinds of corollaries is to learn in a safe environment. If you are victimised by others by being bullied, you don't feel safe. And as you know, my other body of research is in anxiety disorders. And students who have an anxiety disorder also don't feel safe. So even though you'd think that they were two separate topics, what we can do sometimes is quite similar because we want to create a safe environment so that all students can participate. And while bullying makes students feel unsafe, anxiety, even though it's not somebody else doing it to you, and is more – if it's a disorder – of an imaginary threat, those students still feel unsafe. So you have, on the one hand, a real threat. And then on the other hand, a perceived or imaginary threat, which both prevent students from having the cognitive capacity to learn.

**Haley:** Okay. So, in Australia there's legislation to provide safeguards for all people, but specifically, thinking about students with disability and legal protections around prevention of bullying. So, are the current laws addressing these issues? And if not, what are the possible solutions?

**Marilyn:** I suppose that I question, your interpretation that there are safeguards or laws about preventing any kind of bullying. In fact, you can't necessarily prevent bullying in a way that you can assure students that they will not ever be bullied. Now there are some people who attest to saying, I can bully-proof your child. There are books written on it and some therapists say, I can bully-proof your



child. And they say, well, you've got to make them assertive. And if somebody punches you, you have to be able to defend yourself. If somebody calls you names, you call them names back again. And this being assertive might work – often does – but in a school situation, it's not seen by teachers that that's an appropriate thing to do. If somebody comes up and belts you up because they're bigger and stronger or there are a lot of them, you're not supposed to fight back because otherwise you will be punished in the same way as they do. So, you got to take it. If somebody calls you nasty names, you're not to retaliate. Now, this is a real quandary because yes, we don't want to meet violence with violence. But what we say, first of all, I mean, first of all, 50-60 years ago, we used to say that bullying was actually quite good for you. It was character building. What didn't kill you, made you stronger. It was a childhood rite of passage. Everybody got bullied and you'll be fine. I got bullied as a child and I was fine. But since Olweus and Peter Smith 40 years ago started researching the really negative impacts of bullying, we have seen that it's obviously a very damaging behaviour to those students who have been victimised. So, our first kind of, "this is what you do if you've been bullied," was to ignore it. Ignore it and walk away. Because, don't fight back. Don't stand up to these people who are bullying you. They'll get sick of it if they don't get a reaction. However, that doesn't work. And very slowly that advice has changed. And the advice now is to tell a trusted adult. However, that has repercussions as well. In a study that I was part of in Western Australia for an NHMRC, we looked at what happened to students who told a teacher about the bullying one year after. We found that if the bullying was quite slight, quite minor, the bullying stopped if the teacher was told. But if the bullying was really serious, those kids who told the teacher about that victimisation were victimised even more a year later because of the retribution that was handed out to them by those children who were bullying. So, I'm not quite sure whether this general advice, again, is to tell a trusted adult. We know that kids don't do that. You know, some do – younger kids, girls, often, will tell. But as students become older, they become more selective. They become more fearful that it's not going to work if you tell somebody. And so, I think probably what we really need to do, which is what I'm researching at the moment, is to ask students, what do they want? If they were bullied, what do they want their friends to do? What do they want their parents to do? What do they want the teachers to do? And in a very small pilot study that we did, the main thing that the students said – these are high school students – was, we want it to be confidential. But if you ever tell a teacher, they're going to spread it. And everybody's going to know, the kids are going to know, all the teachers are going to know. They all talk in the classroom. And it's shameful. We already feel shamed that we're being bullied and we will be even more shamed. One of the girls in the focus group said, "I told my mother, and it was so embarrassing because she went to work and she asked one of her colleagues at work, what are you going to do about the bullying? And she told her what happened. And then she asked my uncles at the barbecue, what she was to do." So, I said perhaps she was just getting support for herself. "No, but everybody, everybody knew. All my family knew, all the workers at mum's work knew. I was so embarrassed. I will never tell my parents

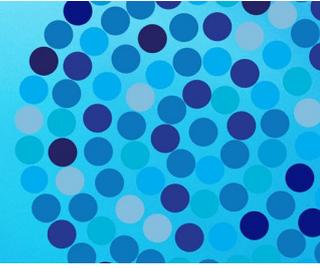


again. So, we think that if the advice we're giving students to tell a trusted adult... maybe the trusted adult isn't doing the right thing.

**Haley:** Mm, maybe the trusted adult needs some training and support to know how to manage that information.

**Marilyn:** That's right. And that is totally off the question that you asked me, which was about legal rights. (Laughs)

I think what we need to think about is, what is the purpose of the law. Now, most people say, well, the purpose of the law is deterrence. It's to make sure that we all drive on the correct side of the road, that we don't murder people, that we don't steal from others because we know we're going to get punished. Which is a second type of the law, is justice, where people who do the wrong thing are punished. We also can think of the law as some kind of moral right. So, in New Zealand they have a law against spanking children, but it's not actually enforced. But it's a kind of morality for society that you really shouldn't really be doing this. Now if we apply this to bullying and not just cyberbullying because as you know, there are four forms of bullying. There's physical bullying, social exclusion bullying, verbal bullying, and cyberbullying. And they all look different from each other, and they've all got different types of manifestations. They have, usually, the similar consequences. And they're all defined as being a behaviour that has the intention to hurt, that is usually repetitive with a power imbalance. That is, the person who's being victimised can't get it to stop. So, if we look at bullying and law, let's look at deterrents for young people. There's laws against underage sex. Does that actually prevent underage sex? Not really. There's laws against graffiti. Do we see graffiti around? Yes. There are laws that keep honest and people who do the right thing honest and good. But probably as a deterrent, we're not going to have a lot of influence. But my major contention, which I've addressed to a federal inquiry and every seminar with legal people as well, is that we don't want to criminalise children. We don't criminalise children for lots of behaviours that we actually criminalise adults for. So, if a five-year-old punches somebody in the face, we teach them that this is not the right way to go, that this is not appropriate behaviour. We don't charge them with assault because we see children as having different stages of development where we are socialising them. If we brought in a law against bullying, then we would be convicting 6-7-8 year-olds for bullying others because they see adults bullying each other. They see bullying on television. They see older kids bullying so they have a go at this behaviour as well. Why would we criminalise this type of behaviour? And not all the other types of behaviours? I think that bullying is so ingrained in our society. It's a really complex social relationship problem. And it is so embedded in our society, in the workplace, at universities, at schools, that I don't think we can say well, criminalise children for doing this. It's about educating children, it's about educating adults. And for me, the major thing that I think, because we haven't made a lot of progress in the last 40 years about reducing bullying to any significant degree. We can a little bit in some schools, in some cases. But we



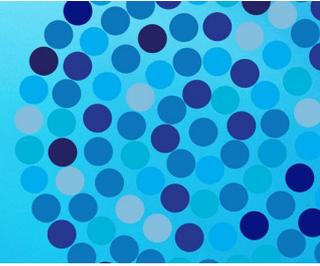
haven't got this magic bullet where we know if we do this, then we can prevent bullying. We don't know that. And that's because it's such a social problem.

**Haley:** It's a very complex problem, but it really does make me think about those examples where there has been some traction, even if they are small, localised examples. Do you have any examples of what teachers or parents or other stakeholders have done to reduce bullying, even if it has been those small steps you described?

**Marilyn:** Well, the only research – that's all we can say is evidence-based – is about randomised, controlled trials of anti-bullying programs. So, what individual teachers do is not research. You might have some qualitative studies on asking certain teachers, “what do you do?” But then, how are you going to measure that across? So, and the same with parents. So, the only evidence base is... programs. And they're randomised control programs. And there's Donna Cross' *Friendly Schools* and *Cyber Friendly Schools*, there's Philip Slee's *the Peace Pack*. There's Christina Salmivalli's *KiVa* in Finland. There are programs in every country that are anti-bullying programs. And they have had the gold standard of randomised controlled trials. And they've found that there's about maybe fifteen to twenty per cent less victimisation in a school or in a year level that has been maintained for a year. It works better in primary schools than high schools. Nothing much works in high schools. But those programs, what Donna Cross has found mainly is that they're not implemented with any fidelity in the schools. That teachers have such an overcrowded curriculum, that they can't fit them in, that on a Wednesday when they were supposed to have the program and they had an excursion or there was sports day, or... They are usually written for schools and therefore they're usually about nine or ten weeks long to fit into one term. But there's no follow-up. Maybe schools do it for one year and, oh well, we've solved that problem. No, they haven't! It's got to be a spiral curriculum. It's got to be embedded in the school curriculum. But then, everybody wants their programs embedded in the school curriculum. If I'm into reading or into writing, or into language development, or anything, I want my programme spiralled into the curriculum. But it's true, we can't do anything with these short-term ten-week programs. And the other interesting thing about those programs is that they don't reduce those children who are bullying as much as the children are who are victimised. So therefore, what you still have is approximately the same percentage of children who are liable to bully, but you have less victims. So, therefore, there's a concentration on those kids who are very vulnerable as well, which isn't what we want either.

**Haley:** No, it's not really getting to the heart of the issue, perhaps.

**Marilyn:** Well, there's unintended consequences in everything that we're doing. And we know how long it takes for children to say please and thank you automatically – not until they're about ten. All the rest of the time, “A nice lady gave you that lolly. What do you say?” And how many times do we have to say it to our kids before they automatically use their manners and say please and thank you? How are we

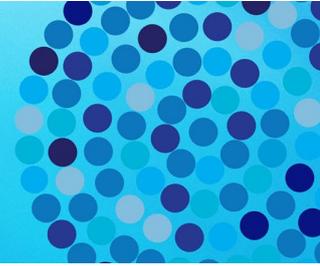


going to get them not to hurt each other? And people – I did make a mistake once, I did say victims once – but if you listen carefully, I've been really trying not to label because this is usually the only behaviour that children do in which they are immediately labelled. So, if a child, a ten-year-old child, takes the pencil from the next-door neighbour without asking, we don't say, "You are a thief. You stole that pencil. You will be a thief and we will expect you to be a thief all the time." We don't label kids for that behaviour. And yet, anybody who bullies somebody else, there's a difference between kids who persistently bully and those who intermittently or sometimes bully. Those kids who intermittently bully often will do it because other kids are doing it. And this is why the first three years of high school, 7, 8, and 9, are the most frequently victimised kids. This is where bullying really peaks. And often those kids might have been victims – oh, I used it again – they might have been victimised at the beginning of the year, but by the end of the year they're not. And we've known in longitudinal (it was only one year again) studies that the kids will often change their roles in bullying. So, it's not as if you are a victim and you will always be a victim or you are a bully and you will always be a bully. All of those roles are fluid as kids learn to get along with each other and learn how to negotiate their social world. And if we took more time, I suppose, not in so-called conflict management because bullying is not the same kind of aggression and conflict. It's a very different behaviour. But if we took more time in teaching kids about how to negotiate those behaviours. But what if you are bullied? What if these people came along, what do we really want to tell these kids as adults? I don't think we've got that answer yet. And that's what my research is really trying to do, is to get an answer because I don't think we can prevent. I think that we're probably looking at supporting victims. We have scarce resources, and we spend most of those supporting kids who are being victimised. And yes, they need support, but that's not going to stop those kids who are bullying.

**Haley:** Mobile phones and other technology are often a hot topic at school. Just last night, my own Grade Seven son told me that the kids are putting together a petition that they can use their mobile phones in the playground. And just an interesting conversation went from there. So, based on the research that you've done and the projects you've been part of what are your thoughts about mobile phones and technology at school?

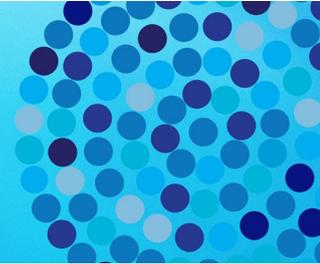
**Marilyn:** Again, unbelievably complicated. And we don't really have any research that has been done. There are two or three economists in the last four or five years – which I think is very interesting that economists would study this – who have correlated the restriction of mobile phones in some schools as opposed to other schools and looked at that country's, like PISA scores or whatever, the NAPLAN scores, whatever that is. And found that they have a benefit of the mobile phones being banned, of the academic performance going up 0.6 of a standard deviation.

Now when the Minister, I told that to him, he went straight to the media and said they have a 6% increase. So, 0.6 of one standard deviation is a very technical statistical way of explaining it. It's actually



bugger-all! But of course, Minister wanted to have some kind of evidence to back his opinion about the ban. And so that's what he said. Otherwise, there's been no research. Because of COVID, schools have not been interested at all about looking at the mobile phone issue. So, this was mainly 2018-2019. And we were on a roll about getting papers published and putting in for grants and things, and then of course that all stopped because of COVID. Because one, you can't research in schools, and schools haven't been thinking that it's a problem because they've had to go to technology and had to pivot and learn and teach through technology.

And at the moment in New South Wales a group of parents, or group of mothers, have said well, we really think, because in New South Wales, they said they would ban, mobile phones in primary school, but not in high school. And so, they're now saying no, no, we have to ban them in high school as well. And these are uninformed opinions. We don't know, we don't know whether it's better for kids not to have mobile phones. Is it better that they're not allowed to bring them into the school grounds at all? Is it better that they're allowed in the school grounds but not to use them in classroom? Is it better if they use them in breaks? I mean, at one inquiry at COAG that I spoke at, one of the ministers said, "Oh, it was lovely. They didn't have any mobile phones and the noise in the playground was wonderful." So, I told the group of children if you want to keep your mobile phones, make sure you make a lot of noise in the playground. Because adults like you (I don't know why, but) adults like you to make noise in the playground. And they said, "Oh, but they're not communicating!" I said, yes, they are, they're communicating on their phones. "Oh, but that's not the same as face to face." I said, why isn't it the same? Just because you don't communicate on your mobile phone in that way, doesn't mean that it's not okay for kids to do that. And I said, well, if that's the way that they should be talking to each other than you must ban reading. Because reading is a very solitary activity. You are not making any noise if you're reading, you're not communicating with your classmates while you are reading. And at least with the mobile phone you usually are communicating. And look at the dreadful things that are in books. I mean, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I mean, you just can't have those kinds of things in the playground. I just don't think that anybody has... Maybe banning mobile phones altogether is a great thing for kids' social and emotional learning and academic learning. But maybe this would hold some unintended consequences. Maybe if they can't use their mobile phone all day, maybe they stay up all night and do it. Maybe it's harder for parents to limit what they do on their mobile phones. We don't know. There's absolutely no research that has done any kind of really rigorous, putting schools into, this is the way that you ban, but there are many types of bans that you can have and we've got to look at all of those nuances. And it's almost like there's this digital divide that's getting worse. The more kids use digital devices, which the parents have bought for them, which the parents have paid for and then say, I don't want you to use them. I find that as adults, we're not thinking through about bullying. We're not thinking through about mobile phones. We do things, and then we think of the ethics and the intended consequences afterwards. We don't think of them beforehand. And truly, just Mum



saying, well, that's fine. You don't want your kid to use a mobile phone at school, don't let them have it. That's fine. Of course, they can use other kids' ones, but why would you want to ban everybody else's kids? That's your parental responsibility. They have no evidence that they are detrimental. People who say ah well, social media is really bad for kids. There are so many studies which show yes, it is bad for some kids and it's really good for others. It depends on what you do on your mobile phone.

**Haley:** What other ways can school teams support students who experience exam anxiety and how can that contribute to genuine inclusion for those students?

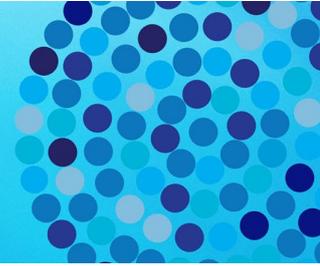
**Marilyn:** I think it's really difficult for schools to cope with kids with anxiety. Anxious people make other people anxious around them. You have an angry person and you tend to feel a bit angry yourself, but not as much. Because anxious people are really difficult to help. And it makes those people who want to help them feel anxious about helping them. A simple thing is, if a child or an adult just says I'm really worried about this, I'm scared about this. What's the answer, usually? "Oh, don't worry about that. It'll be all right. You'll be fine." Which is the worst thing that you can say! But that's endemic in our society. That's what people say. So, kids learn if they say, "Oh I'm really worried about this": don't worry. It's like saying, don't burp or don't yell or don't do all the other things that are inappropriate in our society and we tell them, don't worry. And they go, "I must be doing something wrong. Oh, yeah. I thought I was the wrong type of person. Yeah. I know I'm really different. I know I see things really differently and really get scared about things that other kids aren't scared about and I'm not supposed to. I really, I really must be a bad person." So, when we tell anyone, don't worry about something, it makes them worry more. So if we could stop that, that would be good for a start.

**Haley:** So, what are some sentence starters, Marilyn, if we're trying to replace, as a grown-up, if we're trying to replace that statement of, "don't worry", what are some better alternatives?

**Marilyn:** "I understand that you're feeling scared." It's acknowledging the feeling as you would acknowledge anybody's feelings. I mean, that's when kids get bullied and they tell the teacher as well, the reaction, usually, because schools are places of punishment, is "Bring them to me. Who did it? What did you do? You'll be in trouble now."

**Haley:** So the confidentiality that you spoke about before then, kids become so exposed when it's that kind of reaction.

**Marilyn:** Yes, and they think that the behaviour will stop if they punish. They don't really have a good understanding that punishment does not usually stop somebody bullying. It can, in some instances, but in general, especially for a student who is a very successful person who bullies and gets a lot of reward and a lot of social status. And they're often very socially skilled kids who often can be prefects and leaders in the school that the teachers think are absolutely wonderful, are very skilful at doing that. So, it's much better, if a child tells you, "I'm being bullied", then you acknowledge that. You say, "That must



be awful for you. You must be really scared just to tell me. I'm just so honoured that you would even think to tell me. How can I help you?"

**Haley:** So the Centre for Inclusive Education aims to produce high-quality impactful research with the aim of improving educational experiences and outcomes for all kids, but particularly those who experienced marginalisation. So, basically the plan is to change the world. How does your research contribute to that?

**Marilyn:** Good luck!

**Haley:** Well, you have a well-established career of high impact research, Marilyn. How does your research contribute to that goal?

**Marilyn:** I think my research gets me invited to talk to people. I have a lot of media exposure where I'm able to get my message out about what the research says, about how we should be reacting – as little as we know, but at least we have some things that we could do better. I get asked to present to parliamentary inquiries where people are grappling with these big issues. I've been invited a few times to UNESCO to help people who are decision-makers in this field to understand an Australian perspective. So, I think my research allows me in some small way to perhaps, influence schools and teachers. What I'd really like is to be able to influence pre-service teachers so that different ways of handling anxious kids in the classroom, things like the have-a-go classroom. Even in my tutorials at uni, I say, this is a have-a-go classroom: "I just made a mistake. I look stupid in front of you. I want you to do the same. You, if you don't know something, say you don't know. It's okay. It's okay to make mistakes. That's how we all learn." And if I'm not modelling that in the way that I'm teaching them, and I say, you need to do this in your classroom. One of the first things that you need to say is, "This is a have-a-go classroom, have a go at it." So what if you don't get it right. If you already know it and you do get it right, then you're not learning anything. And if all teachers could do that, and that mistakes could be okay. And that people don't laugh at you when you make a mistake. And they still do – I can go into a grade one classroom and write, K-A-T on the board. And I will guarantee all the kids will laugh at me. And I go, "But I made a mistake." Oh, you're not supposed to make a mistake. Yes I am, everybody makes mistakes. But that's not what the kids learn in school. You only have to have the right answer.

**Haley:** It's been a fascinating conversation, Marilyn. I really appreciate you coming to join us on the podcast. So, thank you for your time. We look forward to speaking with you about other topics in the future.

**Marilyn:** My pleasure, Haley.