

A Pure Concept of Mobbing Gives the Best Results for Treatment

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ABSTRACT The author presents a method for the treatment of mobbing (defined as group violence among schoolchildren) and discusses social/psychological needs discovered while teaching this method.

The waxing and waning of the Scandinavian — and especially Swedish — public interest in the phenomenon of mobbing is of likely interest to the rest of the world for two reasons: (1) it reflects some free-floating anxiety in a society which tries to combine the best of collectivistic and individualistic ideals; (2) it reveals the hesitancy of teachers in such a society to treat decisively groups which are recognized as assaulting individual victims. The best way to understand the cultural and psychological dynamics of the above is to follow attempts to treat mobbing in practice. Before we can do this, though, we must first discuss the use of the word mobbing itself.

Some investigators differentiate between 'mobbing' and 'bullying' while others do not

'Bullying' is a well-known concept in English derived from the word 'bully', designating a top dog who exerts oppressive, mostly physically violent behaviour on one or more persons. The noun *bullying* or the verb *to bully* may designate *both* of the following relationships:

- (a) A single bully attacking an individual or group.
- (b) A gang of bullies (sometimes with a

leader, sometimes without a leader) attacking an individual or group.

The word *mobbing*, however, designates only the second relationship — in accordance with its original definition. Furthermore, because of practical considerations as will be explained later in this article, the word mobbing should be used only in this sense. That is to say, *mobbing designates group violence*.

It is possible that the word 'mobbing' has been in use in social-psychological contexts for several centuries; however, the best-known instance of it in modern times is in the writings of Konrad Lorenz who used it to designate an attack by a group of animals on an intruder (e.g. a flock of small birds attacking a crow or squirrel who plunders their nest). The word is still used in this way in the study of animal behaviour: mobbing is an attack *by a group* on a victim (or on an intruder who becomes a victim).

This concept was transferred from the animal to the human sphere by the Swedish surgeon Peter-Paul Heinemann, in several articles in the late 1960s and in a book in Swedish in 1972, which immediately became a bestseller and was translated into other Scandinavian languages (Heinemann, 1972). However, the destiny of popular words is to

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become overused. Children and even adults started to use the word 'mobbing' to designate all kinds of attacking, even those where only *one* person (the bully or alleged bully) attacked the victim (or alleged victim). It also arose that a behavioural scientist, Dan Olweus, started to use the word differently from Heinemann's original definition. At about the same time as Heinemann was writing about mobbing, Olweus was carrying out investigations on 'Whipping-boys and Bullies' — a very appropriate title which he himself used of his work. It dealt with the subject without distinguishing between bullying carried out by a single person and bullying carried out by a group. When the study was finished, Olweus was caught by the temptation to furnish his book with a subtitle which contained the new word mobbing: 'Research on Mobbing in Schools' (Olweus, 1973).

Again, in his later Swedish and Norwegian investigations giving figures on teachers' and students' estimations of violence amongst schoolchildren, Olweus labelled his investigation with the word mobbing without differentiating between the violence exerted by a single bully and that exerted by a group.

Now it is the case in Scandinavia that some scientists use the term 'mobbing' in Heinemann's original sense (that is to designate group violence only), while others, like Olweus, use the word as a synonym for 'bullying', indicating both group violence and individual violence.

The reason why the word 'mobbing' should be reserved for group violence

In a way, it would be convenient to say that no matter how a word is used, the only important thing is that the user describes his use of it. However, in the case of mobbing there is an important reason for reserving the new word mobbing for *group* violence — at least in social science — letting other kinds of violence be designated by other well-established words like 'fight', 'conflict', 'controversy', 'harassment', and so on — as well as by the word 'bullying'.

The reason for reserving the word 'mobbing' for *group violence only* is that group violence

has important characteristics which become decisive in *treatment*.

First of all, when one starts to treat mobbing, one meets up with the fact that the thoughts and feelings of a group are simpler than those of any of its individual members. All the members of a group strive towards a 'common psychological denominator' which is at the core of group dynamics.

Because of the relative simplicity of the 'collective mind', the behaviour of a group is predictable, and can thus be directed by a therapist who can combine a knowledge of this predictability with a certain amount of initiative and will. The most decisive and predictable factor in a mobbing group is that its members as individuals are themselves scared of their common denominator: they are caught up with the idea of tormenting a victim.

From this we can clearly derive the first important step for treatment: to re-individualize the group members through separate talks where their inherent fears and reservations towards their own mobbing behaviour are made conscious and an immediate escape from the noxious habit of mobbing is offered.

The background of the Common Concern method (CCm) for treatment

I have not, however, derived the above-mentioned guideline merely from deductive reasoning. I discovered the mobber's own deep desires to get rid of mobbing while curing the first cases in 1974. The situation at the time was that Heinemann's alarming publications had elicited much talk in Sweden about mobbing, nearly every contribution to the topic leading to an expression of the desire that 'something should be done about it'. The National Parent Association and private developers produced materials for discussion and for the mobilization of attitudes against mobbing. However, not much was done to deal with those actual cases of mobbing which had already developed to such a point that the outrage of a concerned public had no effect on the mobbers.

The first vague attempts made by school psychologists to treat mobbing failed. Accord-

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ing to my view, these failures were the result of the fact that the therapy was carried out with the entire mobbing group present. My first attempts to treat the individual group members in a series of separate talks following certain principles met with immediate success. The reasons for it were described in a book (Pikas, 1975) and the method which I used I today identify as the 'Suggestive Command method' (SCm). The reason for this name is that the therapeutic effect depends on the suggestions which the therapist gives to the individual. This method I still consider applicable in cases where the authority of the therapist is strong; in other words, in cases where the children are young (no older than about 12 years).

Later I developed a new method which can apparently be used with all cases of mobbing. It is called the Common Concern method (CCm) for the treatment of mobbing, described in a book published in Swedish (Pikas, 1987). This book also describes the dynamics of mobbing as they are revealed in the treatment process; analyses various methods for prevention; describes several case histories of treatment; and relates my experiences in teaching the method to schoolteachers, indicating the most common failures among beginners.

It is not possible to give a summary of all the aspects of mobbing discovered during the treatment of numerous cases and elaborated in a book of 320 pages. What I consider most useful to the reader is a simple summary of the basic guidelines of the CCm.

The CCm for individual mobbers

According to my method, therapeutic talks should begin with those students who are suspected of being mobbers. These individual talks, with three to six suspected mobbers, should be carried out in a consecutive series, with 10–20 minutes allotted for each talk — i.e. 60–90 minutes in all. Immediately after this series is completed, we talk with the victim. After about a week the talks are repeated either with the individuals or with those involved assembled as a group. The group talks may or may not include the victim, depending on the circumstances revealed during the first talks.

The reason for beginning with those suspected of mobbing is to protect the victim from being accused by the mobbers of having 'told on' them. Also, in preventive work, no enquiries about mobbing should be made among students. As soon as there is some evidence, usually obtained by adult observers, that mobbing may occur, the combined process of investigation and therapy begins.

The psychological process of therapy is summarized in Figure 1. The vertical axis ranges from 'Communication on equal terms between the therapist and the student suspected of mobbing' to 'Strong experiences of common concern about tormenting the victim'.

The therapeutic dialogue can be summarized by five points on the scale, characterized by the following statements by the therapist:

1. 'I would like to talk to you because I've heard that you've been mean towards Kent.'
2. 'What do you know about it?'
3. 'All right, we've talked about it long enough.'
4. 'What to do? . . . What do you suggest?'
5. 'That's good. We shall meet again in a week: then you can tell me how you've been getting on.'

The most important step in the method is that between the second and the third point. Beginners often believe that at the second point the suspected mobber would answer with 'Nothing' (or a similar expression). In fact, most mobbers want to talk about the situation. The task for the therapist, then, is to reinforce the mobber's answers with comments and further questions in such a way that the dialogue works towards the predetermined goal: *the situation of the victim is something to be concerned about.*

Though the whole purpose of the talk is to arrive at a common feeling, the therapist should never express verbally the notion that 'we share a common problem', this has to be conveyed through implication and non-verbal signals. The therapist's success depends on his/her own empathy with Kent's torment as well as on a constructive and active expectation that during the talks the (former) mobber will eventually come to feel the same empathy.

Practically all school psychologists understand immediately that the therapeutic situ-

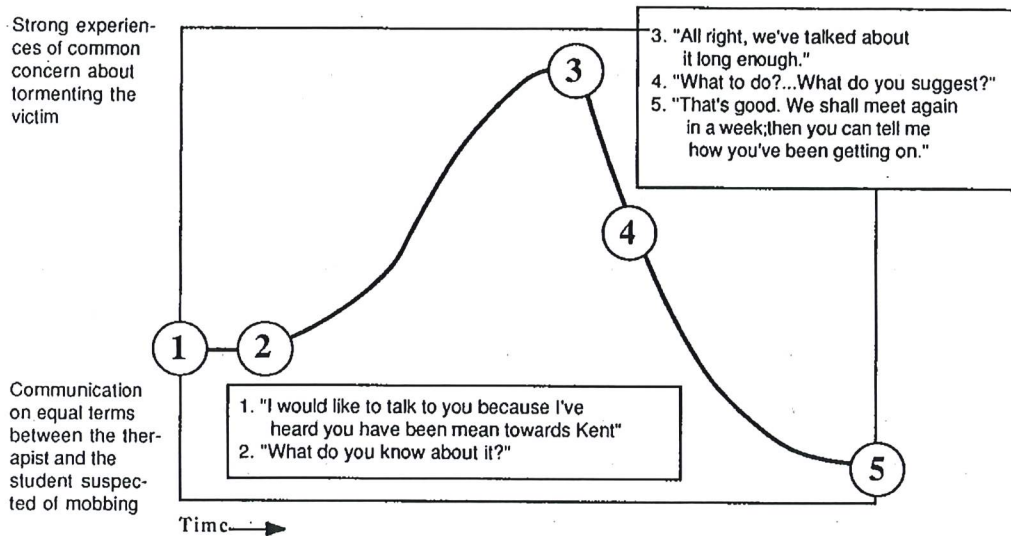


Figure 1 The curve of emotional contact according to the Common Concern method (CCm).

ation here is quite removed from an interrogation intended to uncover or state the guilt of a suspected mobber. Many schoolteachers, however, need to work more with their own thoughts and feelings in order to discover in practice how to express the guiding theme of common concern for the victim. This need for extra work on the part of teachers does not of course mean that teachers have less capacity of empathy; rather, it results from habits which they have developed in resolving cases of mischief where the guilt of the offender has to be rapidly and safely found and reprimands administered.

For some teachers, the road to the feeling of common concern is easy and direct, for others it requires more effort. The interesting thing is that working towards the goals of common concern brings about a general improvement in the teacher's ability to communicate with his/her students in other situations as well.

However, a good therapist is also prepared for those occasions where, despite his/her well-balanced nonverbal signals (do not overdo the friendliness!) the mobber may answer: 'I don't know anything!'. In this case, the therapist should not try to put forward the facts (or possible facts) in order to convince the subject of his participation in mobbing. This would lead to a dispute which the therapist would certainly win with regard to the truth — but still more certainly lose with regard to the development of a partnership between thera-

pist and subject necessary for the victim's rehabilitation.

When it happens that the mobber denies knowledge of the case, one must, so to speak, take 'two steps back' and start to talk in a relaxed manner about the social environment of the class, and at length come closer to the victim's situation. Beginners should then watch for even the slightest signs of admission on the part of the mobber that the situation of the victim is not good, and reinforce such an admission delicately. This requires time and practice, but any aspiring therapist prepared to make a serious effort to learn how will find specific examples in Pikas (1987).

We have so far implied that the person who is mobbed is an innocent victim (in accordance with Heinemann's description, repeated later in numerous newspaper articles). In our method, though, this innocence should be considered no more than a first hypothesis, which we try to verify in our talks with the mobber without pushing too hard. If, however, the suspected mobber says that the alleged victim himself is a bully and gives spontaneous examples of this, we should be prepared to test such a statement by the mobber as a second hypothesis.

In this point a beginner often asks: 'How does one know what the truth is?' To which I respond in my courses with: 'Tell me first, what shall we *do* with the truth in this case?'

Sooner or later we arrive at the common

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conclusion that if one does not intend to punish but merely to cure the mobbing, then it is not necessary to know the truth behind who is guilty if that truth is difficult to uncover. What we are attempting is to reach with the former mobber a common experience of concern for the present state of affairs. Even if the subject is without guilt, the therapist would expect that as a decent human being he/she would be worried about the situation as such.

As soon as the therapist and the suspected mobber have encountered the problem together, the time has come for the therapist to leave off examining the situation further and introduce the way towards a constructive outcome.

It happens at points 3 and 4. Often those at 4 make the turning point ('What to do? . . . what do you suggest?'). Sometimes if talking about the situation has been too taxing, the therapist needs to say the lines in point 3 ('All right, we've talked about it long enough') in order to create the optimal reception for the decisive lines in point 4. The previous talks have served as a preparation for this: what can we as partners do together?

Here the creative activity starts. Our tension curve slides down towards the level 'communication on equal terms'.

Beginners are often astonished to find that mobbers (or alleged mobbers) so often have adequate suggestions about improving the situation of the victim or, if not, at least promise to stop mobbing. The explanation for this is evident. Participation in mobbing has created an emotional arousal, but instead of this leading to punishment, the emotional arousal is given a constructive outlet.

But still, the new relationship between the therapist and the former mobber needs to be reinforced, so the therapist uses the line given in point 5.

After this talk, the 'partners' say goodbye and the next student suspected of being a mobber is asked to enter. When the therapeutic discussions with a selected group of suspected mobbers are finished, then it is time to talk with the victim (or the alleged victim).

Talks with the victim

The tension curve of the emotional contact with the victim is quite different from that of

the suspected mobbers. As shown in Figure 2, the meeting starts from the point 'on equal terms'. That is, the therapist says simply: 'How are you?'

When the student has the main characteristics of the classic innocent victim, the curve remains largely 'within the victim's playground'. If, however, the victim turns out to be a teaser, or even a bully, the talks are on the therapist's 'playground'.

The classic victim

First we follow the therapy with the classic victim and call him, for the sake of brevity, 'Kent'.

In the beginning, the therapist is just supportive, reinforcing everything Kent has to say. Actually, I and my collaborators have hardly ever met a victim who is reluctant to talk. The victims talk with relief and even pleasure. We have never met a victim in regular therapy who is scared that the alleged mobbers will seek revenge for his having 'ratted' on them. When the method was still in the development stage we made special investigations in order to discover the reasons for the victim's openness towards the therapist. We found that the former mobbers, when they returned to the classroom, had non-verbally transmitted their relief to the others and had in this way quite delicately and unconsciously announced to the victim that a change had occurred in their relationship.

Certainly, it could be that Kent has a weakling's behaviour *because* of the mobbing, but also the opposite may be valid: his fear for the fellows was the origin for his being mobbed. The main problem for the therapist now is: should I continue my supportive meetings with Kent alone or can I use the group of former mobbers as a therapy group for Kent acting around him without my absence?

Our curves in Figure 2 are not normative as in Figure 1; they are just typical examples of therapies which have occurred. We first follow Kent's therapy.

After the introductory session the therapist becomes convinced that the victim is really a classic one and starts a supportive therapy (which is, in reality, longer than that indicated on the curve).

At point 2 the therapist starts to introduce

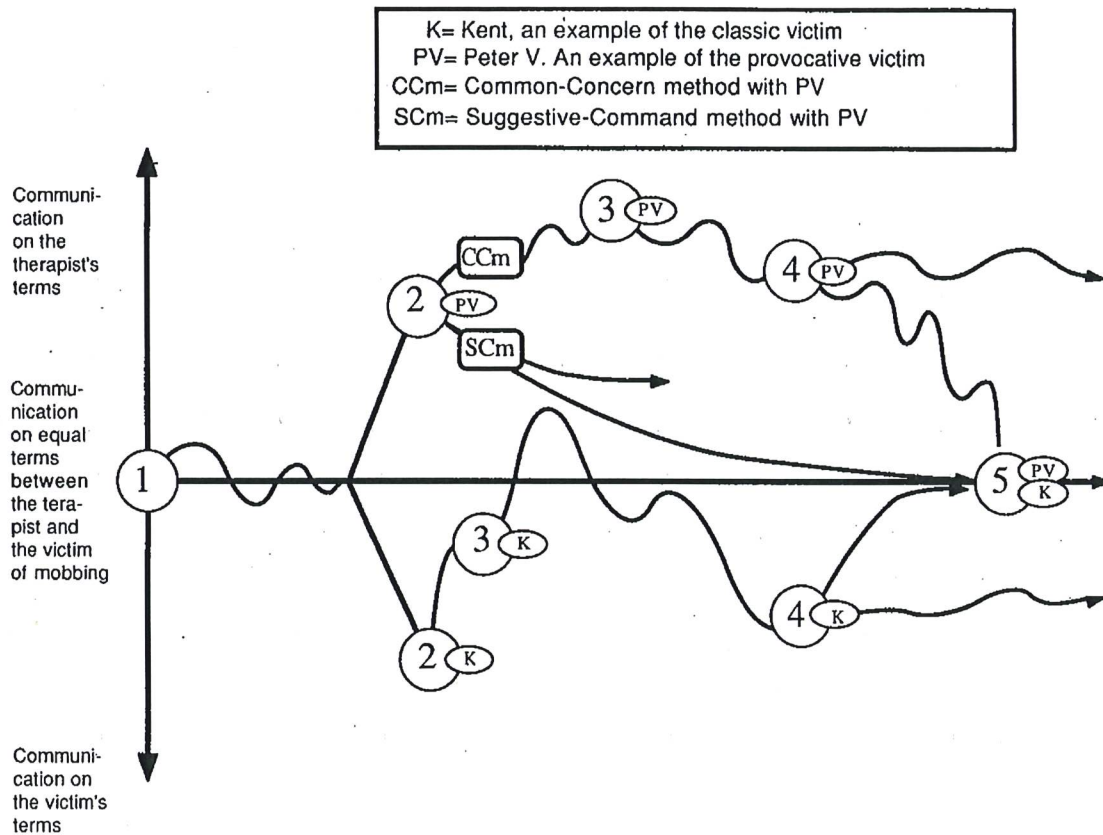


Figure 2 The classic victim and the provocative victim

Kent to the idea that he himself could do a lot to improve his situation.

At point 3 the therapist introduces the objective fact that a part of Kent's problem is that the others are disturbed by his unclean clothes, and he convinces Kent that washing is necessary. In this part of the therapy, the therapist brings the interaction 'into his playground'. Later, the discussion returns again to Kent's 'playground'. At point 4, the therapist has to decide whether he should continue the therapy only with Kent or whether he/she should go on to point 5, and have a meeting between Kent and the former mobbers.

A meeting with both the former victim and the former mobbers is the final goal of our method. Before we turn to that I explain the upper part of Figure 2.

After the initial exploring session, the therapist discovers that the picture he has got from talks with the alleged mobbers is true: this person he is talking with is certainly a victim, but a provocative one. We call the provocative victim 'Peter V'.

The therapist now follows somewhat the

same line as when he was talking with the mobbers: he seeks to share with Peter V the feeling that the situation is not good, and sooner or later they arrive at that conclusion. At this point, the realization that the group's pursuit of him is partly dependent on his own behaviour also begins to appear in Peter V. At point 2 the therapist has to decide whether (1) he should tell Peter V *straightaway* that if he himself stops provoking the others, the others will stop provoking him, or whether (2) he should implant this idea in Peter V during a *longer* session.

In the case of the former alternative, we follow a variant of the Suggestive Command method (SCm), which is possible only when the therapist's authority is strong. As with CCm the objective with SCm is to reach point 5: a meeting with the former mobbers.

Let us, however, continue along the milder CCm-road. The therapist continues to gain Peter V's confidence and begins to learn about his way of thinking. At point 3, the therapist discovers that Peter V is willing to discuss the topic 'different ways to become popular'. This

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gives the therapist a good opportunity to introduce the idea that Peter V wants very much to become popular with 'the guys', but is going about it the wrong way. The therapist and Peter V now discuss more acceptable ways of reaching a more genuine popularity than that which Peter V has previously enjoyed.

At point 4 the therapist and Peter V reach the problem which prepares for the final point: can the mobbers accept Peter V's new way of approaching them? Can they change their prejudices and give Peter V another chance?

Certainly this would be something to find out through discussion. But such a discussion has to be prepared. The therapist says that he is going to meet the former mobbers, most probably as a group; if they are prepared to meet Peter V in a positive spirit, he will let him know.

The final group talks

There should be no exception to the rule that the therapist returns to meet the mobbers once again after about a week and talk about their success with and/or failure to help the victim. It is, however, dependent on the therapist's own intuitive decision whether these meetings should be carried out with individuals or in groups. Statistically speaking, when the victim is Peter V, the provocative victim, it is almost always necessary to arrange group meetings. We now deal with this case.

It rarely occurs that the talks with individuals have led to an outcome so successful that the mobbers and the victim can meet together in a group after only a week. More often the therapist first meets the group of mobbers without the victim.

This meeting starts with the therapist's question: 'How has the week gone?'

The therapist then merely listens to what the former mobbers have to say. Normally, they begin with some rather superficial remarks about their contacts with the victim. Later, they enter into a phase where the blame put on the absent Peter V dominates. One should not immediately counter this with criticisms. Eventually, when everyone's difficulties have been aired, ask clearly the well-known questions: 'What shall we do? What do you suggest?'

If the former mobbers still dwell on the blaming phase after this, listen awhile and then repeat the questions, still more probingly. I have sometimes had to repeat them with increasing emphasis four times before I received a direct response.

The general answer to these questions is that we can neither 'cure' nor 'convert' Peter V without having a decent and constructive meeting with him. Hence, what we should do is to prepare a meeting in such a way as to give constructiveness the best chance: 'How shall we prepare ourselves?' you ask the group.

Sooner or later you will propose the following plan. First, each of the former mobbers in turn will express, in sincere and positive terms, his opinion about Peter V, who just listens. Then the therapist, as mediator, asks Peter V what he has to say about what he has just heard. It is likely that his answers will also be positive, in which case we have a good start. Of course, all the participants in the meeting eventually get the chance to air their problems with each other, but if we make a good start, we more easily find the ways of living together.

I have never met with any objections from former mobbers to such a plan. What we now have to do is to bring Peter V into the meeting.

It is best not to ask the (former) victim to participate in such a way that he has a chance to say 'No'. One should start instead in a more suggestive way, such as:

— 'I have something very interesting to tell you . . . I've been just talking with Jeff, Bob and Chris and they had some good things to say about you! Can you believe it? Let's go and listen. You don't need to say anything.'

It requires a certain amount of enthusiasm and suggestiveness from the therapist to elicit enough curiosity in the former victim that he/she is willing to come and see with his/her own eyes and hear with his/her own ears what the former mobbers have to say. I have never failed in coaxing the former victim to the meeting because I have relied upon the natural curiosity of young people.

How well the meeting between the former victim and his/her former mobbers works out depends on how well we have prepared it in advance. Certainly, unexpected reproaches may occur from both sides: this means only

that the session will take more time. Under the guidance of the therapist the parties involved will find a way of getting on together sooner or later.

Needless to say, the therapist is there first and foremost to facilitate communication. He/she should strictly avoid playing the role of judge, prosecutor or solicitor, and instead maintain the position of an active mediator by giving as many positive, mainly non-verbal, suggestions as possible and by ensuring that the students speak in a proper order: 'Oh, that was well put . . . Jeff, what do you say when you hear such a nice remark from Peter V? . . . Did you notice, Peter, what Chris was offering you just now?' And so on.

When the parties involved have finally reconciled themselves, reinforce their good feelings about what they have decided. But before you end the meeting, be sure to bring up the following problem: 'What shall we do if somebody cannot keep the promises he's made?'

Most often the students suggest a penalty for failure to comply. Tell them that this is not the best way because it encourages them to monitor each other's mistakes — at which point the accusations and conflicts resurface again: 'Do you know what is meant by "tolerance"?''

Let the students explain the concept, and then present your conclusion: we must learn to tolerate each other's mistakes: 'You, Chris, Jeff and Bob must "let Peter V live", and you, Peter, must allow the others to make their mistakes.'

It has been my experience that kids understand this very well and will remember what it means to 'let the other side live'.

Here, the mobbing therapy ends. To be sure that progress is made, the therapist tells the students that he/she will come back in a week or a month and see how they are doing.

Discovering the mechanisms governing interest in mobbing problems

There are two different ways for teachers to fight mobbing: one is to promote attitudes against mobbing in general; the other is to intrude therapeutically in actual cases. The

first is easier but does not work when mobbing groups are well developed; the promotion of anti-mobbing attitudes does not reach those mobbers who have already developed a group cohesiveness.

It is quite evident that in training teachers to become mobbing therapists there is a threshold between those teachers who dare to engage the mobbers in close talks about their mobbing activities and those who do not. A rough estimate based on experience in this field would put the number of those teachers who at the same time care and dare at around 10–15 percent. Once a teacher who belongs to this group has taken the first step towards starting treatment of mobbing he/she encounters few failures.

Those who have lifted the burden of mobbing from a victim find in their work a deep feeling of satisfaction. They discover that this experience is more genuine than the one you get by talking about 'this horrible mobbing problem which society must do something about'. The feeling that one has helped a real victim has a more lasting quality than those feelings one may get from courses on self-realization.

According to my experience, the best way of dissolving already existing mobbing groups is found when a small group of teachers at a school form a study-and-action group. They read and discuss such literature which contains the know-how of mobbing therapy (and not merely talks about the mechanisms and the occurrence of mobbing). Quite soon they should begin to treat simple cases relating their experiences and results in seminars. It is of great advantage if the teachers work in cooperation with a school psychologist whom they know can take over treatment if a particular case turns out to be a personal problem of the mobber perhaps involving mental disturbance.

Those teachers who cannot treat actual cases of mobbing often seek to discourage mobbing through campaigns for the whole school and by lectures showing movies and arranging stage plays designed to promote anti-mobbing attitudes. This may have a good effect, but only as long as the teacher limits his/her lecture to, say, one- or two-lesson periods. A more lengthy discussion might

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suggest to the students that the teacher is afraid of dealing with actual cases of mobbing. If mobbers exist in the class, they would then, against the best intentions of the teacher be encouraged to regard their first attempts at mobbing as a rather exciting activity.

It is rather evident that a teacher who can create reliable attitudes against mobbing is a teacher who can send his/her audience signals that he/she is a person who is capable of treating actual cases of mobbing. Certainly, these signals must be trustworthy and the best way to obtain trustworthiness is to treat actual cases.

During my years of conducting courses in mobbing therapy, I have experienced a great number of people coming to the courses not in order to learn how to treat actual cases of mobbing but because they are interested in the phenomenon of mobbing in general. As my time is limited and the expressed need for such courses great, I have thus begun to require that before I agree to lead a course, the participants must themselves have organized a study group and, preferably, already begun with the treatment of cases. Such a requirement seems to 'diminish' the incidence of real cases.

In all this work I have observed that there is an immense need in Scandinavian, and especially Swedish, society for dealing with mobbing on the verbal and emotional level — a need which is *not proportional to the willingness of that society to deal with those cases which actually occur.*

Scandinavian society is susceptible to figures which maintain that 10–25 percent of its students are victims of mobbing, though it is difficult to find a teacher who can believe that three to six students out of his class of thirty are such victims. These high figures are provided by social scientists who serve 'the public interest' by administering questionnaires to students and teachers in which the definition of 'mobbing' is widened beyond the scope of group violence to include nearly all kinds of repeated negative activities which school kids employ against one another, including one individual's harassment of another.

Furthermore, scientists as 'servants of the public' present the big quantitative polling

results which actually deal with the students' and teachers' *perception* of harassment as if they were proof of the real *occurrence* of mobbing.

The public, served by journalists, do not want to bother themselves with analyses of what is actually meant by the concept of 'mobbing' nor how the questions are put to the students. For those who derive excitement from worrying about mobbing, such 'scientific data' are nourishing.

The genuineness of one's feelings is tested by one's readiness to act purposefully. When a group-centred school or society is offered a means of treating mobbing as it really occurs, its first reaction is to lose interest in the problem. I have noticed quite often that journalists who can serve their readers' emotions with high figures and stories about terrible cases of mobbing are not quite so interested to supply their readers with information about *methods for curing actual cases of mobbing.*

Those who report high figures of mobbing frequency prefer 'consciousness-raising campaigns' for the whole school as a means to fight mobbing. At the end of such campaigns they report happily a 50 percent decrease in perceived mobbing as measured by the questionnaire technique (Olweus, 1988). I wonder though about the alleged remaining 50 percent of mobbing cases. Was this high remaining part a reflection of constant free-floating anxiety in a society highly sensitive to group dynamics, or was this indicating that the serious mobbing cases have not been encountered by the teachers' attempts to create attitudes against mobbing?

When I began treating mobbing groups developing my method, I discovered practically a 100 percent effect, and the students treating the cases discovered to their astonishment that this was also the rate for their treatment of cases of mobbing. First, we made very careful follow-up studies. As nearly all of them demonstrated lasting effects I have not taken care to convince the public by quantitative evidence; about fifty cases of actual treatment have been analysed in the research reports of my students more deeply than would have been possible if using questionnaire-techniques. Everywhere in Sweden I have met

school psychologists who know my books and use the method described here. I have not had the opportunity to investigate teachers' use of the method because insufficient time has gone by since the publication of my last book (Pikas, 1987) in which teachers are also addressed. The only report of failure I have received is from a school psychologist who, years ago, used the older Suggestive-Command method without realizing that a certain amount of authority combined with friendliness was needed for its success.

Derivation from a superior system

My philosophy behind mobbing therapy is derived from the goal to learn to communicate in order to resolve conflicts. Its theoretical principles are expressed in the academic discipline of Communication Education for Conflict Resolution which I have been teaching at Uppsala University. Operationally this involves two programmes: one constructed for students containing exercises for dealing with situations where 'conflict is in the air', and the other for teachers who have 'difficulties with discipline problems'. In implementing these programmes I have discovered a general factor which also lies behind the teacher's potential willingness to become involved in mobbing therapy.

This factor can be described as a person's discovery of the great adventure of communicating constructively with 'the other side' when conflicts are 'in the air'. 'The other side' takes many forms: students who do not follow

the teacher's demand for discipline; a spouse in a marriage; a political opponent — or kids mobbing a schoolmate.

It is not important from which direction a teacher begins to develop his/her capacity to approach the other side constructively. To start meeting with the mobbers is one of the possible starting-points. I have observed a personal growth in practically all involved teachers — a growth which affects not only their teaching, but also their competence and willingness to deal constructively with people in general.

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