

WE'RE NOT GONNA TAKE IT: A STUDENT DRIVEN ANTI-BULLYING APPROACH

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Bullying is a serious problem in schools today. Most programs that deal with bullying are adult-driven and dependent. Inspired by the students in one middle school, the authors ask if student-driven anti-bullying programs exist and are effective. The scope and consequences of bullying is reported. Research-based responses to bullying are explored and arguments that support more fully incorporating students into these anti-bullying campaigns is presented. Rationale and strategies for student-driven bullying programs are provided and implications for research discussed.

Introduction

Bullying is a pervasive and serious problem in today's schools. Recently, an attempt was made by one of the authors to work with a middle school to address bullying in a somewhat unique way. Teachers and administrators at the school were contemplating a variety of different prevention programs and were having difficulty meeting the developmental needs of their culturally diverse population. The author shared with them the importance of the

student's perspective and involvement in dealing with such a complex student-experienced problem. The school was informed that in this approach, students would be asked how they saw bullying and what they would do to address it. The students would then be given the time and opportunity to carry out their ideas. The school felt that this type of an approach would be more consistent with the needs of their students. After discussing logistical details, the program was begun.

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A diverse group of interested students were gathered and formed a "bullying committee." The author then facilitated a student discussion on bullying and harassment. Students quickly described bullying and harassment as rampant and very harmful in their school. With ease, they identified where and when bullying occurred and described different types of bullying. When informed that their help was desired and essential in addressing bullying in their school, they became energized. They broke into subgroups and devised presentations and ideas to generate awareness and action among the student body. The students' presentations were based upon what they would need to learn about bullying and harassment and how they would best learn the information. Ideas ranged from skits, to video tapes depicting what bullying is and how to deal with it, to games to facilitate awareness. Each group visited two classrooms per day for three weeks. Following many weeks of successful classroom visits, these newly empowered students created a poster titled, "We're not gonna take it any more". The banner was hung in the cafeteria as a reminder of the school commitment to eliminate bullying and harassment.

The student enthusiasm and initial success of this effort inspired the authors to research similar attempts to address bullying. Specifically, we wanted to investigate the degree to which students are involved in anti-bullying programs and the effectiveness such programs. This article: (a) outlines the scope and consequences of bullying, (b) examines what the research indicates as to the effectiveness of various anti-bullying efforts,

(c) provides rationale and strategies for implementing a student-driven anti-bullying program, and (d) discusses how further research might be done to empirically assess such programs.

The Scope and Consequences of Bullying

Bullying is broad in scope. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) found approximately 25% of 4th – 6th grade students reporting being bullied in the prior three months. They also reported rural schools having roughly 77% of 7th – 12th grade students reported having been the victim of school bullying (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The results of a survey by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Nansel et al., 2001) identified over 3 million victims and over 3.5 million bullies between grades 6 – 10 nationwide. Additional research indicates that bullying is a global problem, citing studies in numerous other countries that find bullying a problematic and widespread phenomenon (Hazler, 2000; Hazler & Carney, 2002). Unfortunately, some research has found instances of bullying to be on the rise (Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2003).

While it is important to recognize the scope of bullying, the consequences of this behavior are the true cause for alarm. According to Rigby (2003), victims of bullying were more likely to report somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach aches. A survey of Australian secondary school students found a significant association between those who are victimized and higher likelihood of poorer health, including things like feeling ill and losing sleep (Slee, 1994). Although these physi-

cal consequences are concerning, most of the harm caused by bullying is emotional in nature (Temlow, Fonagy & Saccow, 2001). A study of the effects of bullying on psychiatric symptoms found victims and perpetrators to both suffer mental health consequences years after the bullying occurred (Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000). Other common effects of bullying on victims include chronic anxiety and depressive reactions (Rigby, 2003), increased school absenteeism (Rigby, 2002; Slee, 1994), lowered self-esteem (Rigby, 2002), feelings of loneliness and increased risks of suicide (Fox, Elliott, Kerlikowske, Newman, & Christeson, 2003; Roberts & Coursol, 1996). Victimization from bullying has even more recently been linked as a contributing factor in high profile school violence incidents (Hazler, 2000; Murline, 1999). Bullies also experience consequences as they are more likely to have conduct problems and to develop a dislike for school (Nansel et al., 2001). Research demonstrates that childhood bullies are more likely to bring weapons to school (Nansel et al., 2001) as well. Finally, those who bully have an increased chance of appearing in court for delinquency (Rigby, 2003).

Bystanders, whom often comprise the largest number of students, are also affected. Witnesses of bullying are frequently left feeling afraid and not wanting to get involved for fear of a possible loss of status or retaliation from the bully (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). A study of bullying incidents on playgrounds found observers present in 88% of bullying situations but intervening in only 19% (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Slee

(1994) reported 49.4% of students surveyed felt it was "none of their business" in indicating why they would not help a fellow student who is being bullied, and 20.6% of students reported fearing retaliation as inhibiting their defending a victim. Interestingly, Temlow, Fonagy, and Saccow, 2001 suggest some children may experience a vicarious thrill when watching the event take place, which may encourage the bully further. With the impact it has on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, bullying can no longer be overlooked as just an inevitable part of childhood development.

Current Anti-Bullying Efforts

So what are schools doing to address bullying? One sometimes tempting but overly simplistic approach used is to only get tougher on the bullying. Zero tolerance policies have grown in popularity and, used alone, have shown little evidence of increasing school safety (Skiba, 2000; Fox, et al., 2003). Skiba (2000) also found that, compared with research on security measures in schools, there is more available research support for preventative programs such as conflict resolution. While consistent limits and enforcement appear essential to effective anti-bullying campaigns (Olweus, 2003), over-reliance on zero tolerance policies seems unlikely to work. In addition, narrowly focusing on helping only victims may as become a recipe for failure as, according to Roberts and Morotti (2000), the needs of the bully are also important to address in effective anti-bullying efforts.

More effective anti-bullying efforts tend to be comprehensive in addressing the

problem at many levels (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997; Olweus, 1994; Skiba, 2000). One such program has been shown to reduce bully/victim problems by 50% after 8-20 months in action (Olweus, 2003). This program has been implemented and studied in Norwegian schools for over 20 years and according to its author, its success is built on creating school environments characterized by: "(a) warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults; (b) firm limits on unacceptable behavior; (c) consistent application of nonpunitive, nonphysical sanctions for unacceptable behavior or violation of rules; and (d) adults who act as authorities and positive role models (p. 15)." Other similar anti-bullying approaches include student and faculty education, increased awareness of the problem of bullying, and adult involvement (Harris & Petrie, 2003), as well as counseling for individual victims and bullies (Peterson & Rigby, 1999).

While many of the advocated anti-bullying programs used in schools have a student component, typically the majority of the effort is teacher-directed (Peterson & Rigby, 1999) and requires the most action from adults (e.g. teachers and parents) (Salmivalli, 2001). Indeed, the programs found in a review of the literature were developed and administered primarily by adults. Programs may have adults speak to students about how to deal with bullies, how to speak up for help, and how to help each other. While it is clear that the severity of this issue should prompt adults to become active, many reasons exist supporting the idea that accessing student problem-solving and leadership might further enhance anti-bullying programs.

A Rationale for Student-Driven Approaches

The first argument for a student-driven program is that bullying is primarily a student-experienced problem. It is the students who are the perpetrators, victims, and the bystanders. Even the most determined school faculty may not be able to stop bullying alone as research indicates that bullying is more likely to occur when there is minimal to no adult supervision (Rigby, 2002). Indeed, one study found incidents of bullying more common on the playground, where less supervision is common, than incidents in the school building (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Atlas and Pepler (1998) also point out that school classrooms are not immune either. These authors concluded that, "(a) bullying is pervasive in the classroom, (b) teachers are generally unaware of bullying, and (c) the peer group is reluctant to intervene to stop bullying (Atlas & Pepler, 1998)." While increased adult supervision has been shown to reduce bullying incidents (Olweus, 1994), it is unlikely that students can be fully supervised all of the time or in all of the places in which bullying occurs.

A second argument for increasing student involvement lies in the frequent differences of adults and children over the causes and commonness of bullying. Leff, Patterson, Kupersmidt, and Power (1999) found that teachers' identification of bullies and victims only matched student identification about half of the time. The authors of this study indicated that this discrepancy may be due to students seeing their peers in many situations while teachers (especially in upper grades) may only see a group of students once per day in the

classroom. At home, children are also more likely to acknowledge issues as contributing to their treatment of their peers. Parents are less likely to report incidences that may encourage bullying behavior, where as the child may provide a clearer picture of the home situation (Stevens, DeBourdeaudhuij, & VanOost, 2002).

Bullying can also occur in subtle ways, making it more challenging for adults to understand. It has been argued that students who do not exhibit behavioral problems in class may go unnoticed as bullies (Leff, Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Power, 1999). Some students may be savvy enough to behave when the teacher is looking, only to harass and bully others when unsupervised. This point is also important with female students whom have been found to bully in the less obvious ways of spreading rumors and exclusion (Lagerspetz & Bjorkvist, 1994; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). Because female bullies are generally more verbally and socially abusive than their more physical male counterparts (Temlow, Fonagy & Saccow, 2001), many adults view their behavior as less threatening and damaging and consequently overlook or dismiss these behaviors. Involving students can give a more accurate picture in anti-bullying efforts.

A third reason for student involvement is found in the increasing recognition that bullying occurs within a group context with different students taking on different roles. Passive participant roles such as the *reinforcer* or the *assistant* to the bully have been examined (Salmivalli, 1999). The assistant or reinforcer often encourages the bully to continue their aberrant behavior.

In a study of Finnish 6th and 8th grade students less than 20% of students comprised the *bully* and *victim* categories for both grades, while approximately 25% of students comprised the *assistant* or *reinforcer* roles in both grades. Another role to consider in bullying is the defender. The defender aids the victim. Sutton and Smith (1999) found that less than 20% of the students acted in the *defender* role for both grades. Temlow, Fonagy & Saccow (2001) also described the differences in power dynamics among bystanders. In their study, Temlow et al found that 10% to 20% of children from third to ninth grades experienced a vicarious thrill as an onlooker. A smaller percentage of children are often present, whom the authors considered vicarious victims because they are too intimidated to intervene. O'Connell, Pepler, and Craig (1999) found 75% of an onlooker's time during a bullying incident was spent reinforcing the harasser's actions.

Salmivalli (1999) stated that this "peer group power" is an important way to help stop bullying. If a larger percentage of bystanders experience a thrill from observing one student oppress another, then perhaps that group of students could be swayed to counter the bullying behaviors in a group of like-minded peers. As Garrett (2003) remarked, "Once the 60 percent of children who are neither bullies nor victims adopt the attitude that bullying is an unacceptable behavior, schools are well on their way to having a successful bullying program (p. 127)." By empowering bystanders to avoid reinforcing the bully, they can tip the scales of the social dynamics that maintain this destructive cycle.

Developing student trust in adult involvement is also vital and another important reason student leadership is critical in dealing with bullying. Many students feel that school faculty do not care nor intervene enough in bullying incidents. One study found that teachers intervene in fewer than 5% of bullying situations (Craig & Pepler, 1999). Garrett (2003) reported that 71% of teachers versus 25% of students say that teachers almost always step in during a bullying incident, indicating a large disparity between the perceptions of students and teachers when looking at teacher intervention. In addition, only 10% of secondary students surveyed by Slee (1994) indicated that they would talk with a teacher if being harassed. Many bully interventions involve students coming forward and reporting or stepping in and helping a fellow peer. If students do not trust the adults requesting these courageous acts, they are less likely to respond.

These feelings that adults don't care or won't understand may be reduced when students are involved to campaign against bullying. Students and teachers can then be seen as collaborators in the process to solve the problem, not just as adults going through the motions. In their efforts to address bullying in an Australian secondary school, Peterson and Rigby (1999) utilized student-helpers and found modest results after evaluating the campaign's effect on students. The authors also commented, "Anti-bullying activities directed and undertaken by students themselves received most approval from peers." A study by Salmivalli (2001) found peer-led anti-bullying efforts reduced the self and peer reported incidents of bullying among

female students, although less impact was seen with male students. Supporting peer leadership seems likely to enhance student trust that the adults are serious, care, and will back up student efforts to stop bullying.

Finally, schools are about education. Bandura points out (Woolfolk, 2001) that "enactive learning", or learning by doing, is a primary way in which individuals acquire knowledge (p. 323). By involving students in the solution of the issue of bullying from a young age, they can learn social skills necessary to address similarly complex issues as future adult citizens. Giving students the opportunity to address this issue can spark student creativity and energy and the skills to deal with similar problems like sexual harassment and racism as adults.

School bullying exists in the realm of the child's world. If students are incorporated and truly treated as an essential source of the solution to this problem, more effective results may be found.

The Three "A's" of Student Driven Intervention

The authors developed three categories to aid schools in the development of student-driven anti-bullying campaigns. The underlying principle of this model is that student ideas and leadership must be a primary consideration. The adults who work with the students must resist the temptation to tell the students how they should solve the problem or what they should do. Tapping student energy and excitement requires a trust that the students can develop creative and useful solutions in dealing with bullying.

Awareness. Awareness involves generating awareness on two levels. The first involves developing awareness and support among faculty and administrators. One way to get this started is to conduct an anonymous survey to assess the prevalence of bullying in the school. Harris and Petrie (2003) recommend that teachers also be included in the survey process as teachers and students often perceive bullying differently. Survey results can provide concrete data helpful in gaining faculty support. It also can provide a baseline as to the extent of bullying prior to anti-bullying efforts that can be compared after an intervention. Additionally, it is essential to establish bullying as a problem so that the faculty recognizes the need for a meaningful effort to deal with bullying. This will help support the need for student time, staff support, and physical resources. In the case example at the beginning of the article, the author was first offered the option of only using a 20 minute home-room time to engage students in anti-bullying activities. As faculty and administrators became more aware of the extent of the problem, they also became more aware of the need to trade time and resources for a solution. The author worked with teachers and administrators to advocate for a more realistic amount of time in order to give students a true opportunity to succeed.

The next level of awareness involves the students. Once faculty are on board, the students can then be addressed. Hazler and Carney (2002) argue that effective support requires emotional awareness and empathic understanding. In their article, the authors suggest activities that help stu-

dents personally connect with the impact of violent acts, thus prompting them to commit to change. Additionally, letting students know that their help is essential to stopping bullying is a starting point to empower action. As stated earlier, bystanders have a great potential to aid in stopping bullying. If they become more fully aware of the negative impact of bullying, and that their actions can either support or reduce bullying, they can greatly change the bullying dynamics in the school.

Special care must be given anytime students are asked to put themselves on the line to help address a school problem. As pointed out by Cowie (1999), "attempts to mobilize the strength of young people to resolve their own difficulties through peer-led interventions can meet with unexpected hostility or sabotage from adults and even from other members of the peer group." If faculty support for student efforts is lacking, well-intentioned students may feel vulnerable when they try to intervene and help. Adults facilitating student led anti-bullying efforts must be aware of the risks students face in addressing bullying. This awareness can prompt strategic planning to minimize such potential hazards. Such planning should include in-service training on facilitating a student driven campaign and support for teachers who agree to help. In the next section we will discuss specific ways to enhance student empathy, empower student action, and reduce the risk felt by students wanting to help in anti-bullying campaigns.

Avenues. In order to implement student led efforts, strategic planning must take place. This means considering the how,

where, when, and for how long, of student anti-bullying efforts. School time is precious. Thoughtful planning can ensure that consistent time and sufficient support is provided, thus helping students feel like the adults seriously care about their ideas and actions. Rushed or disjointed efforts, on the other hand, can have a negative effect. Walker and Avis (1999) described several important reasons why peer-led efforts fail in schools, including lack of investment in the student efforts, unclear objectives, and lack of support and training for the student-leaders.

The size of the groups and the type of adult facilitation are also essential in planning avenues to address bullying. Students who have been victimized by bullying often feel less confident and more anxious (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). This may make it difficult for them to speak up or fully participate in discussions involving bullying and may be especially true in an environment where those who bully are present and where the facilitator lacks the skills or awareness to provide a safe atmosphere for sharing. To counter such negative dynamics, small group venues may be ideal. Such groups could be devised similar to counseling support groups, in which 5-7 students meet regularly with facilitation by an adult skilled in leading groups. This time should be separate from the time needed to plan student presentation. School counselors and trained teachers might serve as such effective helpers. These adult leaders must be able to facilitate a safe discussion in which students create the ideas and strategies.

Once the time, setting, and facilitators

are ready to go, student leadership can begin. Facilitators may begin by recruiting volunteer students. Assemblies, classroom presentations, and announcements could all be utilized to spread the word and excitement in the opportunity for students to become active in addressing bullying. Faculty should be involved in screening potential members. A variety of students should be included; not just those involved in student leadership. In the example given at the beginning of this article, the group of students included those from a variety of school cliques and racial backgrounds. One peer led anti-bullying campaign (Salmivalli, 2001) had a school wide meeting with dramatic skits performed by students and music played by the band as ways to generate interest.

Those students who wish to join the anti-bullying could be invited to a planning meeting in which ideas, groups, and committees could be formed. This meeting could involve brainstorming and discussion of how the group could address bullying. In one Australian secondary school, volunteer students engaged in a variety of efforts to counter bullying such as by helping victims, speaking out at school gatherings, developing posters, and performing skits on bullying (Peterson & Rigby, 1999). Peer mediation and conflict resolution are also popular student approaches that could help minimize bullying. Representative students may also be invited to faculty meetings on bullying or to help audit current policies the school has on harassment and bullying. As in the authors efforts discussed in the introduction, students may decide to develop

presentations, games, and skits to take to the classrooms. Facilitators might then take such student ideas and organize small action groups to help students meet the various goals.

Assimilation. School personnel and students alike are most likely familiar with temporary programs and initiatives that never seem to get off the ground. For lasting change in the way bullying is viewed and addressed to occur, a climate of respect and acceptance is necessary. An on-going commitment to students and their ideas is critical. Those who develop anti-bullying programs must think about how these efforts can continue each year. Rotating students at different grade levels is one such method that aids in bringing new members in as the old members move on.

It has been recognized that continuous evaluation and effort is essential to effective bullying prevention (Skiba & Fontanini, 2000). Annual program evaluations and meetings prior to each school year could be important ways to assess and address the school's anti-bullying effort. The adult facilitators must consistently work to generate student excitement and involvement from year to year. Student ideas can again play a critical role in this planning phase for the long term sustainability of their efforts.

Conclusion

Bullying is a school problem with serious and far-reaching consequences. The energy and effort exercised by the students who decided "we're not gonna take it" indicates the large potential of students to be key players in addressing bullying. Anti-

bullying efforts would benefit from getting the full involvement of students and, indeed many research-supported arguments exist for involving student leadership in developing anti-bullying programs. The three components of awareness, avenues, and assimilation described in this article provide a framework to help involve students and better ensure success in dealing with bullying.

Our review of the literature revealed bullying prevention programs to most commonly rely on adults as the primary members of this social effort. Little research was found that dealt directly with student-developed models of bully prevention and their outcomes. This indicates both a potential area of enhancement of current bullying programs and a subject worthy of empirical research.

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