Teacher Practices to Reduce Bullying in the Everyday Classroom

By

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Abstract

Recent research into bullying prevention has highlighted the role of a positive school social climate in the reduction of bullying behaviour. While teachers’ positions in the classroom make them a natural fit to change this social climate, little research has been done to specifically examine their roles in bullying prevention. The primary purpose of this study is to elucidate the best practices teachers can utilize within the classroom environment in order to deal with and prevent bullying. Using an interview format, this study examines teachers from schools with extensive institutional anti-bullying programs or core ethical values in order to answer this question. The study concludes that teachers can have a significant impact towards the reduction of bullying within the school community. Key findings note that the incorporation of emotional intelligence within the everyday curriculum, confident and authoritative intervention, and promoting inclusiveness are practical strategies teachers can use to reduce and deal with bullying effectively. Lastly, the study touches on some reasons for teacher apathy towards bullying and notes that a support from administration and meaningful relationships with students are some ways in which this apathy can be prevented.
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people whose time, effort, and patience made this study possible. I would like to thank Dr. Arlo Kempf for his positive encouragement, timely feedback, and for the consistent reminder that numbers under 10 need to be spelled out in letters (or is it ten and under?). Thank you to the participants of this study whose sensitivity and passion for bullying prevention has undoubtedly helped the lives of so many of their students. And thank you to my classmates of the past two years whose friendship, kindness, and humour I will not soon forget.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

The word “bullying” has become a lightning rod for attention, opinion, and debate in recent times, both in the realm of education and also in the media at-large. High-profile bullying cases such as Amanda Todd, a suicide victim in response to cyber-bullying, and the arrest of eight teenage girls in London, Ontario for the physical, emotional, and cyber-bullying of another student (CBC News, 2012) have helped bring the issue of bullying to the forefront of our collective consciousness. But questions remain as to how much is being done at an institutional level to prevent bullying, and as to what the nature of these responses are. For example, immediately following Amanda Todd’s death, the Government of Canada called for a national anti-bullying strategy and Amanda’s hometown was quick to pass an anti-bullying bylaw (Hopper, 2013). These reactionary measures are often common after a high profile case, but recent research into anti-bullying measures indicates that a more balanced approach of prevention is necessary, incorporating both preventative and reactive strategies (Oneil, Kellner, Green & Elias, 2008).

A number of different approaches have been taken by schools in order to combat bullying. Generally, approaches seek to tackle the problem of bullying from one of four perspectives: social interactions, psychology, physical health, and government policy and intervention (Brank, Hoetger & Hazen, 2012). Counter to popular belief, bullying research has shown that having a high quality friendship alone does not act as a protective factor towards being a bullying victim (Bollmer, Milich, Harris & Moras, 2005), indicating that while social development is undoubtedly important in children’s growth, a focus on it alone is not enough to
adequately deal with bullying. Furthermore, giving clinical diagnoses to victims of bullying is seen to be ineffective in the process of treatment of a victim (Oneil et al., 2012), indicating that a clinical-medical model is not effective in dealing with bullying. Further methods found to be ineffective included denying contact between victims and bullies, and a zero-tolerance approach towards bullies (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).

One would think that with the prominent role that teachers play in the classroom, their awareness of classroom dynamics, and their potential to form deep and meaningful relationships with their students, more research would examine the specific roles that teachers can play in anti-bullying strategies. Yet teachers are rarely asked for their perspective on bullying issues (Nordhal, Poole, Stanton, Walden & Beran, 2008). Research on teacher roles in anti-bullying programs incorporate a very small fraction of anti-bullying research in general, and little research has been done on educating teachers specifically in bullying prevention. This is unfortunate because in a comparison of anti-bullying strategies aimed at either students, teachers, or the school community at-large, the one aimed at educating teachers was found to be the most effective (Marshall, 2012). Furthermore, many teachers self-report that the greatest obstacle preventing them from dealing effectively with bullying is a lack of a set procedure to deal with the situation. It is both staff education and the establishment of clear reporting procedures which were the factors that needed the most improvement in school bullying prevention programs (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Thus, research supports the notion that teachers are the front line of defence in the battle to reduce bullying.
Purpose of the Study

I chose to become a teacher not because I was in love with any one subject, but because I wanted a profession that allowed me the opportunity to see people grow and develop, and to have a positive impact in that development. There is an inherent vulnerability to being a child, and I believe that a good teacher, no matter what subject he or she teaches, understands and protects that vulnerability. It is from this approach that I seek to shed light on the abilities of teachers to combat bullying. Bullying is something that can wreak physical, emotional, and social havoc on the being of a child or adolescent, yet too often it is considered to be a natural part of growing up. The first purpose of this study is the reduction of teacher apathy towards bullying.

Schools are more complicated and more intricate than they were in the past, and the teacher-student relationship is only one of many in a school environment. Principals, guidance councillors, and psychologists play a prominent role in dealing with a bullying incident, and often a teacher’s role can become vague and undefined, lost in the administrative shuffle. The second purpose of this study is to illustrate a clear and purposeful path that teachers can use to reduce and deal with bullying effectively in their class.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this paper is to elucidate the best practices and strategies that teachers can utilize within the classroom environment in order to deal with and prevent bullying.

The sub-questions to be addressed are as follows:

- What factors motivate or prevent a teacher from dealing with bullying?
- What practical strategies and external resources are available for a teacher to seek when dealing with a bullying issue?
- How can we prevent apathy from developing within teachers when it comes to bullying?

**Background of the Researcher**

It is a sad reality of working in the teaching profession that over time there is the possibility that we become desensitized to certain issues. In Grade 10, I witnessed this desensitization on display during one particularly poignant bullying incident. Throughout the year, three boys in the class verbally abused another girl. One day, their insults were particularly malicious. What began as simple teasing evolved into harassment of the girl’s weight and physical appearance. But what struck me most powerfully about this incident was not the number of bystanders in the class (myself included), but that the teacher in the room was just as much a bystander as the rest of the students.

My goal in the retelling of this story is not to demonize the teacher. He was known as a good teacher, someone passionate about the subject that he taught. But in a school where academics were valued highly, with a schedule that had teachers instructing up to eight different groups of classes throughout the week, a very harmful and emotionally damaging incident for a young girl was forgotten in the busy shuffle. But the event did make me question who is responsible for an incident like this: is it the bullies, the victim, and/or the only adult in the classroom?

Another incident much later in my life showed me the power that teachers have in dealing with a bullying situation. As a volunteer in a grade eight class, I coached the middle school boy’s basketball team. I noticed that one boy continually bullied another. When I
approached the bully and asked him why he was bullying the other boys, his answer surprised me. He said that last year the older boys on the team had bullied him, and that he felt that it was in his right to “pay it forward” and bully someone else. I sympathized with the boy, and explained to him that it was wrong what the boys from last year did to him. But in no way did that give him the right to bully someone else. I believe that it was the sympathy and compassion I showed not only to the victim, but to the bully that helped diffuse that situation. But it also illustrated the power that I had in that situation to help both victim and bully. I did not punish the bully harshly or recruit a principal or guidance councillor. Because I was aware of the team dynamic and because I had an established positive relationship with both the victim and the bully I was able to deal with the situation effectively. It illustrated to me the power of personal relationships and the trust in a teacher that students can have in order to deal with bullying.

My passion for teaching stems not out of a love for a particular subject but from the desire to see children develop positive life skills and values, and to do so in a safe environment. I hope that my research creates awareness for the role that teachers can play in the battle against bullying. Furthermore, I hope that it can illustrate concrete steps which teachers can take in their everyday classroom in order to make it easier for teachers to prevent and deal with bullying.

Overview

This paper consists of five main sections: Introduction, Literature review, Methods and Procedure, Findings, and Discussion. Chapter One includes background information on bullying prevention, the rationale for examining teacher roles in bullying prevention, and my personal experience with this topic. Chapter Two contains a detailed examination of relevant literature on this topic. Chapter Three provides the methods and procedure of this study, including
information about the participants and a description of the interview process. Chapter Four contains the main research findings and themes. And Chapter Five contains a discussion of the research findings in connection to existing literature, as well as recommendations for further research. References and Appendices follow.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

While much of the research examining bullying prevention is divided on whether such programs are effective, there does appear to be some consensus among the literature as to what defines bullying. There are three main aspects to bullying behaviour: the intent to harm, the repeated nature of the harmful acts, and the power imbalance between bullies and victims (Merrell & Isava, 2008). Olweus (1996) supports this definition by emphasizing the repeated nature of the negative actions and imbalance of power between the two parties involved. He also mentions that many bullying incidents occur without provocation.

An analysis of the existing literature illustrates a much lesser degree of consensus on the topic of bullying prevention programs. Many bullying prevention programs produce only modest outcomes, making it hard to justify the cost and effort of implementation (Merrell & Isava, 2008). In contrast, an examination of school principals in Ontario finds that “investment of time, effort, and money in school-based anti-bullying initiatives can yield valuable returns by helping to create school environments that are safer and more peaceful for children” (Smith, Cousins & Stewart, 2005). Further confusing the issue is that much of the data gathered in studies examining bullying prevention programs relies on indirect data such as teacher and student self-reports. As a result, there is much information on how students and teachers think they will react in a given situation, but little information on their actual behaviour after these programs have taken place (Merrell & Isava, 2008).

While the goal of this research study is to examine teacher practices in the everyday classroom that can lead to a reduction of bullying, little research has actually been done in this area (Marshall, 2012). However, there are trends within the research that paint an optimistic
picture when it comes to what can be done to prevent and deal with bullying in schools. The goal of this literature review is to clarify the major themes that represent effective ways in which schools deal with bullying. Lastly, using the research examined in this literature review, I will seek to provide a justification as to why further research into practices that teachers can use in the everyday classroom is necessary.

There are four major themes found within bullying prevention research on effective prevention and intervention techniques. These trends within the literature paint an optimistic picture in the battle against school-wide bullying and incorporate teachers as important parts of bullying prevention. These themes are:

- Creating a positive school environment as prevention
- Immediate, clear, and consistent intervention strategies
- Teachers as effective catalysts for bullying prevention
- Barriers to effective bullying prevention

**Creating a Positive School Environment as Prevention**

The research is clear that a major part of bullying prevention does not stem from specific techniques or strategies, but from establishing a school environment that is positive and supports students. Effective prevention and intervention strategies create a sense of accountability among all members of a school in creating and implementing an effective approach to dealing with harassment, intimidation, and bullying (Oneil et al., 2012). The creation of a positive school environment does not happen overnight, and it may be that one of the reasons that much of the research on bullying prevention programs has found these programs to be ineffective is because they are only looking at immediate, short terms changes in behaviour. However, positive impacts
of bullying programs do not occur over a short term period (three months), but take a longer time to take effect (one to five years). These programs need time to penetrate a school culture and influence attitudes and behaviours (Smith et al., 2005).

Much of the research around effective bullying prevention centres on Jon Olweus, one of the few researchers to implement an effective anti-bullying program. Olweus, a pioneer of anti-bullying research in Norway, emphasizes the importance of creating a school environment characterized by warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults (Olweus, 1996). He indicates that the overall value system of the school needs to incorporate caring, respect, and responsibility. The interesting outcome of Olweus’ program is that not only does it see a 50 percent reduction in bullying behaviour, but there is also a noted reduction in other anti-social behaviours among students, such as drinking, fighting, and vandalism. Furthermore, there is a noted increase in pro-social behaviours such as increased discipline, and a more positive attitude towards schoolwork and peer relationships (Olweus, 1996). This suggests that bullying behaviour does not exist in isolation, and that there is a link between the occurrence of bullying and the general frequency of both positive and negative behaviours in the school environment. Combating these negative behaviours, and promoting positive ones may be a more effective way to deal with bullying than measures meant to target bullies and victims directly.

With research supporting the importance of establishing a positive social and emotional environment within the greater school culture in order to combat bullying, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that teachers can play a main role in leading this change. While research on bullying prevention has signalled the involvement of the school staff in general, incorporating teachers, principals, guidance councillors, and psychologists, there is little research exclusively examining teachers’ roles. It is reasonable to think that teachers play a large role in affecting the atmosphere
in a school, both because they make up a large number of the staff body and because of the close contact they have with large groups of students. It seems logical that future research should examine how teachers can affect this school climate.

Immediate, Individualized, and Consistent Intervention Strategies

Bullying intervention, as opposed to bullying prevention, refers to the strategies and procedures that a school has in place in order to deal with a bullying incident that has already occurred. The foundation of an effective bullying intervention strategy is to provide immediate support to the victim. The literature on bullying intervention emphasizes the support of early intervention (Feinberg, 2003) and that each bullying incident should be treated with urgency and sensitivity (Oneil et al., 2012). Furthermore, Olweus (1994) states that providing support and protection for victims is essential. This notion that the victim should be treated with compassion and sensitivity by the school community is one that is consistent throughout the research on bullying intervention. The goal of this immediate and sensitive response is that the victim is not made to feel as if he or she bears the responsibility to respond to the bullying incident (Oneil et al., 2012).

The importance of meeting the individual needs of the victim is also emphasized throughout the literature (Feinberg, 2003). Support for the victim necessitates that school administrators schedule follow-up meetings with victims to assess the social and emotional well-being of the student, as well as express the support of the school community. Maintaining open lines of communication between teachers, parents, students, and administrators is also essential (Oneil et al., 2012).
In comparison to actions taken towards the victim, there is less agreement within the literature on actions taken towards the bully. There is some, although not much, research supporting peer mediation and conflict resolution between the bully and the victim, although other research denies this approach (Oneil et al., 2012). Oneil et al. (2012) emphasize that a bullying incident is not a debate between two people of equal power and therefore should not be handled by having the two parties talk it out. Other strategies emphasize a zero tolerance approach, emphasizing that the bully has lost people’s trust and will be guilty in future incidents even if he or she is in the vicinity of another bullying event. However, this approach has been criticized for being ineffective. Joseph (2000) states that “the difficulty in laying accountability at the feet of the bully is that it pretty much guarantees that there will be repeat incidents. Bullies are in that business for the power they perceive themselves to have and the attention that is given to them.”

Lastly, the research on bullying intervention is consistent that the establishment of a bullying response team, composed of different members of the staff body, is integral to effective intervention (Feinberg, 2003). In addition, Feinberg (2003) states that “the goal of bullying intervention is to create a culture in which adults stop bullying immediately.” Consistent throughout the research is the notion that increased adult supervision leads to a reduction in bullying and a more immediate response to bullying incidents (Olweus, 1994). Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that teachers can play a crucial role in effective bullying intervention. Yet little research has examined teacher roles specifically, both from a supervision and intervention standpoint. Teachers’ positions in the classroom make them a natural fit to be the first ones on hand to intervene in a bullying situation, and my hope is that my research can contribute to opening up new pathways to how teachers may do so.
Teachers as Effective Catalysts for Bullying Prevention

While little research in bullying prevention has focused specifically on the role of teachers, there is some evidence that teachers play a crucial role in the battle to prevent bullying. The focus of this research begins by noting that teacher apathy towards bullying is a contributing factor in its occurrence. In one study, twenty-five percent of teachers report that they see nothing wrong with bullying and consequently fail to intervene (Cohn & Canter, 2003). Thus, the failure of teachers to respond to a bullying situation conveys the message to students that they condone this behaviour (Feinberg, 2003). While there is limited research examining specific programs aimed at teacher education in the reduction of bullying, there is some evidence for the effectiveness of these programs. Marshall (2012) examines the effectiveness of three different bullying prevention programs, each aimed at different parts of the school environment. She finds that between an education program aimed at the community at-large, current teachers, and pre-service teachers, the one aimed at current teachers is the most effective in reducing bullying. Another study examining prevention programs aimed at teacher education was also found to be effective, and concluded that teachers have the ability to change the social climate of a school (Bell, Raczynski, & Horne, 2010). It is important to highlight the connection between this study’s finding of teachers’ effect on the overall social climate of the school, and Olweus’ (1994) early research which emphasized the importance of changing the overall social climate to reduce bullying behaviour. This connection between teachers’ roles, overall social climate, and reduction of bullying paints an optimistic picture that teachers can make a difference in bullying research, but the lack of studies on teachers’ roles specifically indicate that more research in this area is necessary.
Unfortunately, there are few other studies that examine the specific roles of teachers in bullying prevention however there is a bevy of literature that highlights the role that school staff play in this regard. It is reasonable to group teachers under this umbrella. Part of Olweus’ (1994) anti-bullying strategy is a focus on the effectiveness of non-mental health professionals in the reduction of bullying behaviour. His philosophy highlights the importance of using the existing social environment of the school to protect against bullying, and indicates that teachers can act as agents of change in the social environment. ONeil et al. (2012) further point out the need for consistency amongst the staff body of a school, both in understanding what constitutes a bullying act and in conveying to the school community at-large that the staff body has a vital interest in understanding and addressing the bullying situation. Teachers can play a vital role in both aspects, and it is my hope that my own research can contribute to the understanding of the important role teachers play in the battle to reduce bullying.

**Barriers to Effective Bullying Prevention**

The last theme that is apparent in the process of this literature review is that there are a number of barriers that do exist that prevent effective bullying programs from taking place. However, the more information accumulated about these barriers, the sooner we can overcome them. Teachers themselves perceive a number of barriers to dealing with bullying effectively (Marshall, 2012), and this perceived helplessness can lead to a lack of action. Furthermore, a school’s large size can impede a staff’s belief that creating ongoing connections with students can lead to a reduction in bullying (Coyle, 2008). Another challenge to effective bullying prevention lies in the fact that much of bullying usually occurs outside the view of supervisors, which often leads to a ‘he said’, she said scenario where no definitive resolution can be reached
(Joseph, 2000). However, this would indicate that Olweus’ (1994) focus on increasing adult supervision is an effective measure for reducing bullying. Lastly, there are a number of barriers that prevent effective bullying intervention from a cultural standpoint. The local community’s lack of openness to change and diversity, and intolerance to diverse groups of people are found to impede the implementation of an effective anti-bullying program (Coyle, 2008).

Conclusion

This literature review analyzes multiple sources in the field of bullying prevention, some of which stem from research based articles, and others which recount first hand experiences in the classroom. The most intriguing aspect of research on bullying prevention lies not in any one solution but in the more general establishment of a school environment that espouses warmth, caring, and mutual respect. My own opinion coincides with this approach, and my hope is to focus my research on how teachers can contribute to this positive school climate.

The research paints an optimistic picture of how to deal effectively with bullying. A positive school climate and timely and personalized support for victims have been shown to be effective. However, not enough is known on what roles teachers can play specifically. This study explores the question: What are the best practices and strategies that teachers can utilize within the classroom environment in order to prevent and deal with bullying?
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The basis of this study is an examination of the practices teachers can use in the everyday classroom to prevent and intervene with bullying. Based upon themes found within the literature, this study investigates both preventative and intervening measures teachers can use.

In this study, an in-depth analysis of the existing literature on bullying is used to formulate the main research question and the subsequent interview questions. Practicing teachers are included as participants to engage in interviews with the researcher.

Results of the interviews are discussed using themes from the literature as the basis of the analysis. Any new themes or ideas are highlighted as well. Lastly this study discusses the limitations and implications for future bullying prevention research.

Instruments of Data Collection

This study utilizes an informal interview process as its main source of data collection. The goal of the interview questions is to delve into the experiences and knowledge of the participants in order to maximize the information gained (Turner, 2010) on the topic of bullying. The interview questions are constructed with the goal of being open-ended, neutral, and clear (Turner, 2010). Furthermore, the interview questions are imbued with a degree of flexibility (Turner, 2010) to allow for the participants to share personal experiences and reflections which they may feel are critical to the subject matter, even if they do not relate directly to the question being asked. Some examples of interview questions are as follows:

- What are some factors within a widespread school culture and climate that can promote bullying
Teacher Practices to Reduce Bullying in the Everyday Classroom

- As a teacher, how do you create an environment in your classroom where a victim feels safe coming forward?
- What are some factors that may prevent a teacher from dealing with bullying?

A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Participants

This study interviews three experienced teachers who are currently practicing in schools around the Greater Toronto Area. Based upon knowledge obtained through the literature review, there is a reciprocal relationship between a school’s overall social climate and the effectiveness of an anti-bullying program. Therefore, schools that maintain a specific anti-bullying philosophy or integrated core values which reflected a positive social climate have been incorporated into this study. As this study reflects a best practices approach, I feel this approach to identifying schools is appropriate in order to best identify the practices and strategies that are effective in the prevention and intervention of bullying. By examining schools committed to stopping bullying and creating a positive social environment in both philosophy and practice, and inquiring into the practices of experienced teachers, I hope to illuminate the practical strategies that teachers can incorporate into their everyday classrooms in order to best prevent and intervene with bullying.

Data Collection

This study used face-to-face interviews as its primary source of data collection. I conducted the interviews in person, and each was audio-recorded. The interviews were then transcribed and maintained within a password locked laptop. Participants’ names and schools were known only to me and my research supervisor. I used charts and tables in order to record
important pieces of data with the purpose of later being able to crystallize these points into emerging themes.

**Data Analysis**

The process of analyzing and coding the interviews of this research study began with a review of the literature. The goal of this review was to familiarize myself with the themes brought to light from previous research on bullying prevention/intervention, as well as to review major findings by some of the premier studies on bullying. Once I felt I had a good grounding in prior research, I reread the research questions in order to gain an understanding of which questions sought to connect with themes found within the literature review. The following table exemplifies which research questions are embedded within the specific interview questions as well as their connection to themes deduced from the literature:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Theme from Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are factors that prevent a teacher from dealing with bullying?</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11</td>
<td>- Teachers as effective catalysts for bullying prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Safe school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Clear intervention strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What external resources are available for a teacher to seek when dealing with bullying?</td>
<td>7, 14, 15</td>
<td>Barriers to effective bullying prevention (lack of PD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can we prevent teacher apathy from occurring when dealing with bullying?</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, 12, 13</td>
<td>Barriers to effective bullying prevention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step was to read through the transcript of the each interview. As I did this, I realized that different themes were appearing in different questions; that there was some overlap and crossing that I had not foreseen as I had structured the interview questions. Thus, my goal
became to initially code the data based solely upon the interview responses, group those codes into themes, and then compare the themes from the interview to those found within the literature review. The following table illustrate the themes deduced solely from the interview data, with the codes and the associated colours used to mark each code within the transcribed interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Authoritative Intervention</th>
<th>Safe Community</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum teaches empathy (Light blue)</td>
<td>Authoritative Stance (Light green)</td>
<td>Bullying interferes with academic learning (yellow)</td>
<td>Teacher exhaustion/parenting (Maroon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtle bullying (grey)</td>
<td>Language of empowerment (dark purple)</td>
<td>Bullying worst in middle school years (Red)</td>
<td>Little formal PD (underline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying will happen (dark green)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe environment incorporating parents (light purple)</td>
<td>Resources for teachers (underline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Break up cliques/exclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, I sought to connect the themes found from the interview to themes found within the literature. There appears to be strong consistency between the themes induced from the interviews of this study and those found in the literature review. These consistencies will be addressed in chapters four and five.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

This study follows the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program, within the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Each participant in this study is given an informed consent form at its onset. The consent form and the topic in general were discussed ahead of time with the participants to ensure the purpose of the study is transparent. Any questions that the participants may have had were welcomed and responded to as best as
possible. Participants remain anonymous throughout the process and completion of the study. Participants were told ahead of time that their participation is voluntary, and that they have the right to opt out of the study at any time. They were also free to refrain from answering individual questions during the interview. A copy of the transcribed interview was sent to each participant as a check for validity. All participants were given the opportunity to request a copy of the final project once completed.

All data collected during this study has been treated with the utmost respect, sensitivity, and privacy. Raw data was only shared between me, my research supervisor, and the participant. Recorded and transcribed interviews are stored on my personal laptop, which is password protected. A copy of the informed consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

Limitations

Anti-bullying programs vary largely in structure and incorporate many different members of the community and school body. Due to the time constraints of this study, I chose to focus on the difference that teachers could make in the classroom, a somewhat narrow perspective when it comes to anti-bullying research. But this is not meant to ignore other perspectives to which anti-bullying research can take. Furthermore, this study incorporates the viewpoints and experiences of three teachers, a small sample size especially when one considers the vast number of different teaching styles, classroom management techniques, and in-class practices that teachers can apply to anti-bullying and inclusive learning in general. A more in-depth analysis of the limitations of this study is discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The findings for this study are gathered from interviews with three different teachers. All participants have direct experience both in preventing and intervening with bullying situations. As well, all participants have undertaken different forms of professional development in anti-bullying strategies and practices. This study aims to answer the following research question: What are the best practices and strategies teachers can use within the classroom to prevent and intervene with bullying? As I review participants’ responses, a number of co-occurring themes become apparent. These are used to help answer the main research question.

The first participant in this study, Jane, is a middle school teacher at an alternative public school in Toronto. Her school is one with a specific anti-bullying philosophy, and she has 17 years of experiences developing specific anti-bullying curriculum and strategies. As well, she has facilitated a number of anti-bullying seminars for both teachers and students at other schools around Toronto.

The second participant, Sarah, is a teacher at a private elementary school in downtown Toronto. She currently teaches a Grade Two core classroom, specializing in Science, Social Studies, and Language. While Sarah’s school does not have a specific anti-bullying philosophy, she has attended a number of professional development workshops on teaching empathy, as well as conflict resolution in the classroom. She continues to be a part of a research team looking into ways to celebrate diversity and create inclusivity in a school community, and has developed professional development seminars for fellow staff members addressing these topics.

The third participant, Ben, is a Physical and Health Education teacher at a private high school in North York. With over a decade of experience teaching Phys. Ed. as well as coaching
competitive athletics, he has many experiences dealing with bullying in both the classroom and physical education environment. He has attended a number of professional development seminars on ways to identify and intervene with bullying at the high school level. Furthermore, he continues to work alongside guidance councillors at his school orchestrating a program that links incoming Grade Nine students with a staff member that they can confide in as they begin the transition into high school.

**Themes**

There are a vast number of philosophies, strategies, myths, and ideas about bullying that appear during the interviews. After analyzing the data, the following themes are found to be the most significant when trying to understand the best practices and strategies teachers can utilize to deal with bullying:

- Understanding the myths and truths behind bullying
- Teaching empathy and emotional intelligence as part of the everyday curriculum
- Taking an authoritative stance
- Creating a safe and inclusive school environment
- The challenges and dangers posed by technology and social media
- The characteristics of teachers that prevent bullying

*Understanding the myths and truths behind bullying*

Bullying is a complex phenomenon dependent upon a number of different psychological, social, and environmental factors. While the participants in this study have diverse experiences with bullying and generate a number of different practical strategies, they all agree that in order
to deal with bullying effectively a teacher must first understand some of the misconceptions of bullying in general. There is a consensus among the interviewees that understanding the truth behind these misconceptions is the first step in dealing effectively with bullying.

The first key idea the participants identified is that bullying is a reality of a school environment. The participants each express a number of personal experiences dealing with bullying, at different ages, times, and places within the school setting. When asked the question what factors promote bullying in a school environment, all three participants struggle to name specific factors, but recognize that bullying is an inevitable reality of being in a school environment. Jane is adamant that bullying flourishes on its own. She speaks to the misconception that because her school has an anti-bullying philosophy, no bullying takes place there. She states that “everybody needs to realize that it flourishes all on its own. It’s just a reality. There is no school anywhere, private, public, that can say there’s no bullying. Here there is the concept that we have no bullying, which in not true.” Furthermore, Sarah and Ben speak to the difficulty of identifying specific factors that actually caused bullying. Sarah highlights the busy demands of teachers, but states that bullying “is going to happen, it will happen regardless.” Ben notes the difficulties of students transitioning into Grade Nine, but looks at bullying as a reality of the teaching profession when he states: “So in my opinion, do I think it happens? 100% it happens.”

The second misconception which the participants of this study sought to identify is the notion that there is a distinction between academic learning and the social/emotional climate of a classroom. All three participants state explicitly that successful academic learning cannot take place if there is a bullying incident going on and their students do not feel safe. Sarah, in reference to her Grade Two class, illustrates the connection between academic learning and
social cohesion when she states: “I think that what I have realized is that if you try and push the academics, the social stuff gets in the way. But if you deal with the social stuff, then the academics are so easy to get through because you have a class who is cooperating and working together nicely.” Jane highlights the social bullying experienced by students in middle school, and notes the distraction that this can cause when she explains that students cannot focus if “they are sitting in class and noticing that the two girls behind them are laughing.” Ben further touches upon the connection between the academic and the social by emphasizing the importance of risk taking within a class. He clarifies that this can only take place when a student feels emotionally safe enough to step out of their comfort zone and make an effort.

The last idea which all participants sought to elucidate on the phenomenon of bullying is that bullying usually occurs because of a lack of empathy. Jane, quoting Debra Pepler’s research, explains that the bully is not someone who themselves is being bullied at home, but rather someone who lacks the empathy and emotional understanding to realize the harm their actions are causing. Sarah explains that many of her students need to be explicitly taught when their actions are causing harm to others, and emphasizes to her students that bullying behaviour is a repeated and dangerous action that causes harm to other people. In addition, Ben highlights this lack of empathy when he describes an ongoing battle he had with a group of boys in his class: “It was a constant, ongoing battle with four or five kids where they couldn’t get over their immaturity, they couldn’t get over making fun of kids who weren’t successful.” Thus, understanding the relationship between bullying behaviour and a lack of empathy is integral in order to deal with bullying effectively.
**Teaching empathy and emotional intelligence as part of the everyday curriculum**

Stemming from the notion that many bullying incidents occur because of a lack of empathy, the participants in this study emphasize the importance of incorporating the explicit teaching of empathy and emotional intelligence into the everyday curriculum of the classroom. When prompted with the question of what are some specific strategies that you use in your classroom to both prevent and intervene with a bullying situation, many of the participants’ responses centre around activities that focus on emotional development. Jane explains that providing her middle school students with opportunities to share their emotions and explore their inner selves through classroom activities helps reduce bullying. She states: “One of the things we feel strongly about is that it is much harder to bully someone that you know, someone that you understand their vulnerabilities.” She uses drama and art activities such as “My Inner Garden” and “Shadow Masks” to allow students to explore the hidden parts of themselves and to share these vulnerabilities with the rest of the class.

At the primary level, Sarah’s activities take on a different form, but the underlying goal is the same: to develop empathy and emotional intelligence in her students in order to prevent bullying. She emphasizes active listening strategies and constructive communication to her students, in order to help them understand the consequences of their actions. She uses activities such as “-I-messages-”, where students must fill in the blank using different emotions in order to convey to a fellow student how they feel when they are being bullied.

At the high school level, Ben also tries to develop the emotional intelligence of his students. He uses prompts and guiding questions at the beginning of each year to allow his students to formulate their own ideas and qualities that contribute to a safe and inclusive atmosphere. He asks questions such as “How do we make a new student feel comfortable?” or
“How does a leader make a person who has never played a sport before succeed?” in order to promote empathy and emotional intelligence in his classroom.

Furthermore, teaching a language of empowerment to students is another means by which participants in this study seek to develop the emotional intelligence of their students. When I pose the question to Jane of how to create a classroom in which a victim of bullying feels safe coming forward, I was quickly corrected that “victim” is not a word they use at her school. They refer to victims as “the bullied” and to bystanders as “witnesses” as they feel that this promotes a sense of empowerment that is more in line with adult laws governing the witnessing of a crime. Jane illustrates the ideology behind this distinction in language when she states: “Because if you are a bystander you’re standing by, which is really what we don’t want them to do. If you are a witness as an adult to a crime you are empowered by the law, compelled by the law to actually report. And that’s the same here too. So if you witness bullying then it is your duty to report or you are part of the issue. You’re part of the problem.”

Sarah also focuses on teaching her students a language of empowerment, but she does so in the context of allowing them to understand power relationships. Her teaching strategies focus on giving students prompts such as “It seems like you are really powerful in this situation. Do you agree? Why are you powerful in this situation?” in order to allow them to recognize when the power in a relationship is being abused.

Lastly, Ben uses a language of empowerment by challenging students in his classes to be leaders. He stresses open communication between members of his class, and allows students to construct their own positive environment by asking questions such as “What is a good Phys. Ed class”, “What is a good Phys. Ed atmosphere?” and “What is a safe atmosphere?” The participants of this study agree that teaching empathy and emotional intelligence as part of the...
everyday curriculum of the classroom is an effective way to prevent or minimize bullying behaviour. Yet all three teachers recognize that bullying will still happen in the best of scenarios, and teachers must also be prepared to step in and intervene when it does.

_Taking an Authoritative Stance_

All three participants are in agreement that bullying is prevented when students recognize that the adult in charge does not tolerate it. In fact, merely the presence of a teacher can reduce bullying behaviour. When asked the question what are some factors within a school-wide culture and climate that can reduce bullying, both Jane and Sarah are direct in stating that the simple presence of a teacher can prevent bullying. Jane points out that one of the ironies of the bullying phenomenon is that “it happens much less in the classroom than anywhere else because there is a teacher sitting there watching. And particularly, if there is a teacher who has made it very clear that this isn’t going to be tolerated.” Sarah emphasizes that it is not simply the presence of the teacher that reduces bullying, but his or her involvement in the class and with their students. She makes an effort to spend time with her students at recess as well as in the classroom in order to build a sense of trust and respect. In addition, Ben discusses his role as both teacher and coach to increase his presence around the school community. Because of the close relationship he has with some of his basketball players, he is able to communicate with a bully from the standpoint of coach and diffuse a bullying situation.

Yet, the participants are unanimous that simply being present is not enough to prevent and deal with bullying. Taking on an authoritative stance means that students must understand that their teachers are willing to step in and stop bullying from happening. Sarah explains that teachers’ lack of caring, and students not feeling safe to talk to teachers when they need to, can
promote bullying within a school. Ben discusses the notion that teachers have to be comfortable and confident enough to pull students aside when they are being bullies. He emphasizes using positive communication in order to convey to a bully that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated. Jane also emphasizes that the authoritative stance of the teacher must be communicated through an understanding that the bullying behaviour will not be tolerated. Both Jane and Ben emphasize that the bully must be made to recognize that their actions are hurting people, and that this will not be tolerated within the school community. As Jane summarizes “it is a clear recognition on the part of the students that the people in charge will not let this happen, we will do everything possible to make sure this doesn’t happen.”

Creating a safe environment

As I outline earlier, much of the research on bullying prevention centres upon the notion that creating a safe, warm, and inclusive school environment is integral to prevention. The results of this study are consistent with and indeed extend this notion, as many of the participants responses focus on methods that promote a sense of acceptance and interconnectedness among students and staff within a school community.

All three participants believe that promoting inclusion and making an effort to break up existing social cliques is integral to stopping the bullying process. When prompted for some practical strategies she uses to deal with bullying, Jane mentions that sometimes promoting inclusion is as simple as how a teacher sets up the physical environment of the school. She refers to the dangers of the lunchroom as a source of exclusion, and ensures that her lunchroom is set up with long tables so many students can sit together. Furthermore, she uses a strategy entitled “Placemats” to periodically randomize where her students must sit in the lunchroom, in order to
break up existing social cliques. Sarah also recognizes the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment. She cites that part of the reason her school has been successful in preventing bullying is because of its small size and a culture where “everybody knows everybody”. While Ben has dealt with a different social environment in the context of a high school, he too makes note of the idea that promoting inclusion and breaking up social cliques is a means to preventing bullying. In his experience, the beginning of Grade Nine is an opportunity to promote inclusiveness, and he discusses the need for schools to have social events that allow everyone to enjoy and contribute.

Two participants speak directly to incorporating parents as part of creating a safe environment. Both Jane and Sarah are adamant that there needs to be communication and dialogue between teachers and parents if bullying is going to be dealt with effectively. Jane speaks to the difficulties that many parents have when discussing bullying with their child’s teacher. She notes that the teacher must do their utmost to build a sense of trust with parents and ensure them that if they come to her with a bullying incident, it will not get worse. Sarah has also worked diligently to create a sense of trust and open dialogue with the parents of her students. She recognizes that having communication with her parent body allows her to deal with bullying incidents that she may have missed during the school day. This is illustrated when she states: “I also have a lot of communication with the parents, so if it doesn’t come to me it probably goes home, and they are sure to email me instantly about it.” On the other hand, Ben feels less of a need to reach out to parents, and more of a need to communicate directly to his students that the environment he is trying to create is a safe and inclusive one. He stresses to his students that “I’m here to help you, not just on Wednesdays but everyday at lunch. Email me. Whatever you
can.” Encouraging both parents and students to collaborate on building a safe school environment is something I found to be valued by the participants of this study.

Lastly, all three participants state a need for the staff members of the school community to have a sense of support and communication with each other if they are to deal with bullying effectively. When asked why teachers may become apathetic towards bullying, the participants of this study feel that it was a lack of such support that led to teacher exhaustion and burnout, and a lack of motivation to deal with bullying. They feel that having this support and a means to reflect and communicate with fellow staff members and administration helps to create the safe and caring community that is necessary for the prevention of bullying. While all participants note the importance of staff support, each school has a unique way of implementing it. Jane discusses a means by which teachers at her school could collaborate positively to discuss a bullying issue. As opposed to just venting their anger, teachers are encouraged to take on the role of speaker, observer, and listener in the hopes of finding a solution to the problem. Sarah also notes that having the support of her administration helps create an environment where she is motivated to deal with bullying. Her school is one where the staff feel connected on a personal level, and support each other both in their professional and personal lives. As she put it “If a teacher feels like it’s on them, they are one person, and there is nothing they can do. If there’s a team, and you are part of a team, then no, it’s a lot harder to become apathetic.” Lastly, Ben also is aware of the importance of the staff body working together to prevent bullying. He notes the advantage of having two vice-principals as well as an involved guidance department as a means to educate teachers on bullying and promote awareness throughout the school. No matter the different strategies and systems of support, all participants cherish the personal relationships they have with both staff and students. They reflect upon the idea that when teachers feel supported and
connected to the rest of the school community, they are much less likely to become apathetic towards bullying.

The challenges and dangers posed by technology and social media

When posed with the question of whether advancements in technology and social media have changed the nature of bullying, all three participants agree that preventing and dealing with bullying has been irrevocably altered by these advancements. Jane notes the confusion in school philosophy when issues between her students started to crop up on social media. She explains the initial confusion within her school-wide anti-bullying approach: “This happened at home, at night, so what is our mandate? The board wrestled with that for quite a while.” However, she is clear that educators must now be prepared to deal with bullying issues that take place on social media, even if those incidents occur outside of normal school hours. It took time for her school to clarify their philosophy on cyber-bullying, but they have now come to a consensus that “if it is between our students who met at our school it is our mandate. It doesn’t matter if it happens at 12 O’clock at night.” Ben also recognizes the difficulties of dealing with bullying that happens online, and notes that cyber-bullying has made bullying much easier. As he states: “You don’t have to stick your neck out there to bully these days. It’s not face to face confrontation.” He tries to remain current with the different media his students use for online communication but notes the difficulties in such as approach as “the amount of outlets is endless.” On the other hand, in Grade Two Sarah’s students do not have much first hand contact with social media, although she remains aware of the difficulties that teachers have with monitoring their students’ behaviour online. As she states, the primary paradox that teachers have in monitoring their students’ online behaviour is that teachers want nothing more than to avoid their students on social media as to
protect their own privacy and professionalism. Therefore it becomes difficult to monitor their actions on sites such as Facebook. I found a consensus among the teachers interviewed that technology and social media have changed the nature of bullying. Cyber-bullying provides a number of challenges that teachers must become aware of if they are to deal with bullying effectively.

**Characteristics of teachers that prevent bullying**

When asked the question of what character traits make for an effective bullying preventer, two traits are consistently found within the participants’ responses; that of getting to know ones students and being an active listener. Sarah explains how she prioritizes getting to know her students, in order that she may understand what is normal behaviour for them and what is not. In this way, she becomes aware of bullying behaviour in her class by recognizing changes in her students’ behaviour. Ben echoes this notion when he explains that “if you see a student who is acting a little off, you can recognize it right away.” Both teachers emphasize that a positive relationship between teacher and student allows students to feel comfortable confiding in a teacher if they are being bullied. Jane uses a more formalized strategy to get to know her students. As discussed earlier, she gives her students’ opportunities to express their inner selves through drama and art activities, as well as running dialogue circles where students are encouraged to speak about their past experiences with bullying.

The trait of active listening also appears many times in the responses of the participants. Sarah highlights that it is important for students not to feel like they are being “brushed off” when they come to talk to a teacher about their problems. She conveys a sense of empathy and compassion to her students, making sure they understand that the problems they bring up are
important to her as well. She is mindful of the busy schedules of teachers, and makes sure to set aside time after class where she can privately converse with her students. Ben also prides himself on listening to the problems of his students. The following illustrates the attitude he has towards communicating with his students: “Right away I also tell them that no matter what you need me for, my door is always open in a sense of where you don’t have to come talk to me about anything Phys. Ed related... it is sort of just an open door policy.” Jane also provides opportunities for her students to confide in her and discuss bullying. Once a month she guides a writing activity with her students, prompting them with the question: “What does the face of bullying look like at this school?” In this way she provides her students with a means to confide in her privately, and is better able to respond to any bullying issues that may arise in student responses.

The teachers interviewed as part of this study paint an optimistic picture when it comes to the impact teachers can make in preventing and intervening with bullying. Participants recount a number of practical classroom strategies that focus on the teaching of empathy and emotional intelligence, taking an authoritative stance, and creating a safe and inclusive environment. In addition, teachers reflect on some of the key issues surrounding bullying, such as misconceptions surrounding bullying, teacher apathy, and the effects of technology and social media.

As I noted previously, teachers had difficulty identifying specific factors that promote bullying in a school environment. Each participant in this study recognizes the reality of bullying, but conveys a confidence in their philosophical approaches and practical strategies. As a result, I fail to find a picture of bullying “gone wrong”, or of a school environment where bullying is out of control. Bullying being the pervasive issue that it is, it is also important to
develop an awareness of the factors that allow it to flourish. The impact of this will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Teachers play a prominent role in any school environment. Over the course of a school year teachers do much more than simply teach curriculum. They have the ability to observe and learn about the social dynamics of a classroom, to develop relationships with the children under their tutelage, and to create an environment where their students feel safe to flourish not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well. In this capacity, and in these areas in particular, teachers can play a major role in the fight against bullying. The purpose of this study is to highlight effective practices and strategies that teachers can use within the classroom in order to deal with and prevent bullying. I deduce a number of sub-questions in order to identify specific factors which may influence a teacher’s role in bullying prevention. The sub questions are as follows:

- What are some factors that motivate or prevent a teacher from dealing with bullying?
- What practical strategies and external resources are available for a teacher to seek when dealing with a bullying issue?
- How can we prevent apathy from developing within teachers when it comes to dealing with bullying?

Based on primary analysis of qualitative data, and secondary analysis of relevant literature, this chapter illustrates ways in which teachers can play a meaningful and influential role in preventing and dealing with bullying in a school environment. Based on the findings discussed in Chapter 4, this discussion will centre on ways in which teachers can incorporate emotional intelligence, authoritative intervention, and creating a safe and inclusive environment into building a comprehensive anti-bullying atmosphere in their classrooms. By understanding trends within technology and social media, and by understanding the personality traits of teachers that
help prevent bullying, this study further explores the potential of teachers as being the primary catalysts for bullying prevention. By examining convergent and divergent themes from the data collected in this study, as well as themes found within the Literature Review, this study clarifies the best practices and strategies that teachers can use to prevent bullying and provide a succinct explanation for teachers as effective catalysts for bullying prevention and intervention.

There are a number of convergent and divergent themes that become apparent when the results of this study are compared to previous anti-bullying research. The similarities and differences of these themes shall be discussed for the goal of understanding how teachers can be catalysts for bullying prevention within the school environment.

Creating a safe and inclusive school environment

The theme of creating a safe and inclusive school environment as a way to reduce bullying is one theme that appears repeatedly in both the literature review and the interviews conducted as part of this study. The notion of a school characterized by warmth, inclusiveness, and involvement from parents is one espoused strongly by Norwegian anti-bullying pioneer Jon Olweus (1996). This idea is further emphasized by the participants of this study, who clarify that a warm relationship with students, open communication with parents, and an attempt to promote inclusivity amongst social groups is a major way in which bullying can be prevented within a school environment. Olweus (1996) further explains that in order to create this safe environment, a school needs an overall mission statement or philosophy that promotes these values. This notion of the over-arching philosophy, or guiding principles, is further exemplified by two of the participants in this study. Jane’s school seeks to convey the notion that “If you come to us, it will not get worse” in order to create a sense of safety to her students when confronting bullying. And Sarah’s school promotes the value of “Respect” to both staff and students alike. Lastly, both the
existing research and the findings of this study convey the importance of a school staff that is involved and accountable in preventing bullying and creating a safe environment. As Oneil et al. (2012) states: “effective prevention and intervention strategies create a sense of accountability among all members of a school.” Consistent with this principle is Ben’s observations that a school must promote a sense of responsibility in its teachers through professional development, in order that they can deal with bullying effectively. Overall, there is strong consistency between previous anti-bullying research and this study that creating a safe and inclusive school environment is an effective way to reduce bullying.

**Immediate, individualized, and consistent intervention strategies**

Research into bullying intervention strategies has focused on the importance of providing early, immediate, and sensitive support to the victim (Feinberg, 2003). Consistent with themes found within this study, communication between staff members as well as the victim’s parents is integral for effective intervention (Oneil et al., 2012). Jane, in regards to this topic, discusses the difficulties of running PTA meetings centred on bullying. She notes that it is an extremely sensitive and hurtful topic to parents as well, with most parents afraid to bring it up. However, she continues to reach out to the parents of those bullied in her class, believing that when it is brought out into the open the issue will not get worse. Yet the strongest link between research into bullying intervention and the findings of this study relate to the theme of authoritative intervention. As Feinberg (2003) states: “The goal of bullying intervention is to create a culture in which adults stop bullying immediately.” This reflects the findings of this study, in which participants noted that teachers must be willing and able to step in and deal with a bullying situation. All three participants are adamant that bullying is less likely to occur if the students are confident that their teachers will prevent it. Both Ben and Jane emphasize the fast, strict, and
clear message that teachers must convey when intervening with a bullying situation. Both teachers stress a sequence of graduated consequences and a clear message that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated when addressing the student perpetrating the bullying act. This reflects ideas within the existing literature, which emphasize a zero tolerance approach and severe consequences for any future bullying incident perpetrated by the bully (O’Neil et al., 2012).

Perhaps most importantly, the research on bullying intervention expresses the idea that the underlying goal of intervention is to convey to the victim that he or she does not bear the responsibility to respond to the bullying incident (O’Neil et al., 2012). Tragic incidents in recent years, such as the shooting at Columbine High School, illustrate all too severely what can occur when those who are picked on, marginalized, and bullied are made to feel as if they are alone and unsupported. Thus the sensitivity and support conveyed to those who are bullied become an integral part of the intervention process. The teachers interviewed in this study use seemingly simple language that can make a world of difference when conveying their support for the victim. Ben, when noticing that his student’s behaviour seems “a little off”, asks him “what’s up? What’s going on?” in order to gently dig deeper to expose a bigger issue. And Sarah, by telling her students that “this is really important to me, can we talk about it in 10 minutes once everybody’s gone to work” ensures that her students feel like they are being heard and their problems are being taken seriously and sensitively. Thus, there is very strong consistency between the theme of immediate, individualized, and consistent intervention strategies found within existing anti-bullying research and the theme of authoritative intervention found within this study.
Teachers as effective catalysts for bullying prevention

The literature paints an optimistic picture when looking at the issue of how teachers can reduce bullying. Many studies have concluded that teachers have the ability to change the social climate of a school (Bell, Raczyński, & Horne, 2010). Olweus (1994) also emphasized the importance of using the existing social environment of the school to protect against bullying, and stated that teachers can act as agents of change. The research supports the notion that teachers can act as catalysts for bullying prevention. Therefore, it is surprising that there is little research discussing the actual methods and strategies teachers can utilize to prevent bullying. In contrast to this, the participants of this study are able to generate a number of specific practices and strategies they use to prevent bullying. They not only articulate the belief that teachers can act as catalysts for bullying prevention, but are also able to explain how they used a number of classroom strategies to achieve this goal. However, it is important to note when examining the divergences between the literature review and findings of this study that many of the classroom strategies presented by the participants fall under the realm of inclusive learning and emotional intelligence. While the participants of this study feel strongly that these are an integral part of an anti-bullying program, a possible explanation for why the existing literature did not generate strategies such as these is possibly because they are seen to incorporate broader educational principles than just anti-bullying. However, participants in this study speak to the importance of including both emotional intelligence and inclusive learning strategies, specifically, into a school’s anti bullying program.

Barriers to effective bullying prevention

There are a number of similarities between the literature review and the findings of this study with regard to barriers to bullying prevention. First, I note that the size of a school affects
the ways bullying takes place. Typically, the bigger the school, the harder it is to stop bullying from taking place. In addition, a large school size can taint the staff’s belief that creating connections with students can reduce bullying (Coyle, 2008). This is reflective of observations made by Sarah, in which she stated that her school’s small size and the close personal relationships amongst the staff successfully impeded bullying. She clarifies the link between a small school size and the ease of creating a caring community when she says “every teacher knows every kid in every grade. It’s every teacher dealing with every student out on the field, out at recess, in the hallways. So I think that helps a lot (in preventing bullying).” Thus, we see the challenges that arise when larger schools, where teachers are less familiar with their students, try and prevent bullying from occurring.

There also appears to be a consensus within the literature review and the findings of this study that bullying is complicated by the fact that much of it takes place outside of the classroom, and is harder to track. Joseph (2000) mentions that because of this, many bullying situations are left with no definitive resolution. Echoing this notion is Jane, who speaks to the fact that bullying happens less within the classroom than anywhere else, and is further complicated by the multitude of forms it can take. As she observes “bullying outside the classroom is much more overt, and often it’s as simple as exclusion... and then it can get as high as essentially targeting certain people.” Thus, she confirms the difficulties teachers face in trying to confront bullying issues that happen outside the classroom, in numerous different forms ranging from the obviously overt to the slyly covert.

Lastly, the relationship between a school’s openness to diversity and their anti-bullying strategy is an important connection to discuss. Coyle (2008) finds that a community’s intolerance to diverse groups of people impeded the implementation of an effective anti-bullying program.
Similarly, Sarah states that her research into bullying has taught her that there is a close relationship between bullying prevention and embracing diversity. As she recognized, bullies tend to pick on differences. Thus, if there is a culture within the school where differences are valued, it will discourage bullying behaviour. Her statement that “usually bullies pick on differences and if we are celebrating differences rather than being scared of differences, then I think there will be a lot less conflict and a lot less bullying” truly emphasizes the inverse relationship between bullying behaviour and accepting diversity.

**Analysis and Interpretation of Findings**

The results of this study emphasize that teachers can have a meaningful impact on the prevention and intervention of bullying within a school community. There are a number of motivating factors, practical strategies, and barriers generated by the participants in this study, and what became apparent is that bullying prevention needs to be a comprehensive, empathetic, team-oriented approach that is taken on everyday by members of the school community.

When considering teachers’ proximity to students and their ability to influence young lives, it is not surprising that teachers can act as primary bullying preventers. What is surprising about the strategies discussed in this study is how many fall outside the realm of directly dealing with bullying, and seemed to focus on the development of empathy, and creating a safe and caring school community. This again is consistent with Olweus’ (1996) research, which sought to promote a vast range of pro-social behaviours when implementing an anti-bullying program. Pro-social behaviours, defined as behaviours such as increased adherence to discipline, a more positive attitude towards schoolwork, and more positive peer relationships are an integral aspect of Olweus’ anti-bullying program. These behaviours can stem from many of the strategies
discussed in this study centred on emotional intelligence, empathy, and the creating of a safe and inclusive environment. It is also surprising to see the importance of the personal relationships teachers maintain with both fellow staff members and students in combating bullying. Teachers experiencing isolation, feeling exhausted, and not having the opportunity to make meaningful connections with their students are cited as some of the main reasons teachers become apathetic towards bullying. This study highlights the importance of staff interconnectedness, and the feeling that they are part of a tight-knit community as an important motivating factor in dealing with bullying. Again, we see an important factor not directly under the anti-bullying umbrella of strategies, but one necessary for effective bullying prevention.

Continuing along this theme, I noted earlier the apparent lack of specific strategies used to prevent bullying generated from the literature review. When conducting the literature review, I chose to target strategies solely focused on the phenomenon of bullying. I did not include pro-social strategies that might have fallen outside the realm of specifically dealing with bullying. After analyzing the interviews, I suggest a plausible explanation for the lack of findings in the literature review is that many of the strategies used by teachers fall outside the realm of straightforward bullying prevention. These strategies are part of a larger picture, of teaching empathy and promoting inclusion within their classrooms. However, teachers recognize that in doing this they are doing their utmost to prevent bullying as well.

In addition, it is interesting to note the minimal role arbitrary rules played in the strategies generated both in the literature review and the findings of this study. The teachers in this study appear to spend less time outlining “what not to do” in absolute terms, and more time teaching what to do. They spend less time berating bullying and bad behaviour in a harsh tone, and instead seem to focus on empathy and understanding. Their approach to bullying is centred on
placing the bully in the shoes of the victim, in the hope they may come to understand the pain their actions are causing.

It seems that teachers can play an integral role in preventing bullying. What this study suggests is that along with an understanding of straightforward bullying prevention, teachers need to recognize the link between emotional intelligence, empathy, and building a safe and inclusive classroom. Thus, it appears that preventing bullying has as much to do with teaching students sensitively and empathically “what to do” as much as it is about forbidding what they “should not do”.

**Implications**

This study suggests a number of possible implications for future practice. First, bullying behaviour cannot be understood simply by looking at the relationship between the bully and the victim, but must be examined amongst the greater social climate of the school. It is reasonable to assert that teachers should be aware of this social climate, and make an effort to contribute positively to it.

Second, the significance of teaching empathy and emotional intelligence as a consistent part of the curriculum is emphasized repeatedly in this study. It is plausible that a greater valuing of the teaching of empathy and emotional intelligence can lead to a reduction of bullying, and teachers should be aware of the link between the two.

Third, teachers need to recognize the strength of relationships in combating bullying. Teacher apathy towards bullying can be insidious, but positive relationships and open communication between staff, and a feeling of trust between students and teachers appear to successfully motivate teachers to deal with bullying.
Lastly, pre-service teacher education seems to lack specifically in anti-bullying education. Yet this study highlights the links between anti-bullying and other important topics in pre-service education such as anti-discriminatory education (in relation to power relationships and a language of empowerment), inclusive education, and emotional intelligence. There are a number of key overlapping ideas within these topics and anti-bullying education, and the opportunity exists for more explicit connections to be made. Jon Olweus and Howard Gardner are two researchers that appear consistently in connection to these topics, and possible ways in which their research can be incorporated into pre-service education should be explored. Both the literature review and the interviews examined in thus study make mention of the idea that teachers feeling ill-equipped to deal with bullying is one reason why it can persist. Giving teachers the educational foundation for recognizing and dealing with this complex and sensitive issue is the first step in reducing it.

**Recommendations**

The findings of this study emphasize a multi-faceted approach to the intervention and prevention of bullying. While specific methods differ at the elementary, middle, and high school level, teachers do have the potential to make an impact. The teaching of empathy and emotional intelligence, the willingness to take an authoritative stance, and the ability to create a safe and inclusive environment are broad ways in which teachers can do so.

Teachers need to have both the practical knowledge and intrinsic motivation to deal with bullying. With respect to their practical knowledge it is recommended that teachers familiarize themselves with the connection between teaching empathy and anti-bullying strategies. Pre-service and in-service professional development programs should focus on giving teachers the
tools, resources, and strategies to do so. Furthermore, the potential exists for connections to be made between the teaching of empathy and other subjects within the curriculum, such as language and writing, drama, and art. With older students, these activities can ask students to explore complex emotions and their hidden vulnerabilities. Activities such as “Exploring your Inner Monster” allow students to explore hidden parts of themselves through art and the painting of acrylic masks. At the primary level, activities like “I-messages” give students a template for communicating positively with each other and learning to express more complex emotions.

Yet it is not enough that teachers have the practical knowledge to deal with bullying. Bullying is a sensitive and emotionally charged issue, and teachers must have the confidence and motivation to deal with bullying. Therefore, based on the research schools should put in place structures of support to help teachers deal with bullying. Research teams, listening circles, and open communication with the guidance department and administration are possible systems of support with which schools can provide teachers. At Ben’s school, the guidance department runs a program where incoming grade nine students are paired with a counsellor. Each counsellor meets with a given student at certain times throughout the year to see how that student is adjusting to the transition. In this way the program provides an outlet for students to communicate with an adult in the school community and a means to discuss bullying privately. Any issues can be relayed from the guidance department to the teachers. In order for teachers to maintain the confidence and motivation to deal with bullying they must feel supported and connected to the rest of the school community. Teachers need to feel competent and comfortable integrating these strategies into the fabric of everyday school life as well as the more academic curriculum.
Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study that should temper any conclusions. First, due to the constraints of the program in which this project was conducted, only a small sample size was possible. A greater sample size would have allowed for a number of different participants, and perhaps more importantly, a greater variation of school communities under study.

Second, the breadth of this study, and the range of questions and ideas being explored in relation to bullying make it hard to draw any conclusions on specific issues within the discussion on bullying. While the study is successful in elucidating practices and strategies that teachers can use in the classroom, it seems somewhat self-evident to conclude that teachers can make an impact in the battle to stop bullying. And perhaps the meaningful impact that this study may leave is not so much “if” teachers can make an impact, but “how” they can make an impact. However, while the research and interview questions were targeted at a wide range of bullying issues and topics, I am left to wonder whether targeting a more specific issue could have resulted in a more meaningful contribution to existing research. A consideration of whether examining a more specific issue in relation to bullying, such as cyber-bullying or emotional intelligence, may contribute something more unique and impactful is worth considering for future study.

Lastly, I designed this study with the goal of examining schools where relevant practice was exemplary. However, in doing so, I did not get a picture of which schools and practices are doing an ineffective job of dealing with bullying. While the goal of this study was the elucidation of best practices, it may be noteworthy to examine the schools that are failing to control bullying. That being said, I feel a greater contribution was made by discussing the schools and communities that are successful in their drive to reduce bullying.
Potential for Further Research

There are a number of potential topics that deserve further explanation under the umbrella of anti-bullying research. First, the literature on bullying does little in describing the role that socioeconomic status (SES) and financial resources can have on a school’s ability to prevent bullying. Furthermore, the literature review and the findings of this study indicate that parental and teacher presence is a significant factor in reducing bullying. However, in low SES communities, the higher demands on parents and teachers may prevent them from providing adequate presence and supervision. It would be interesting to note what effect this would have on bullying behaviour.

Second, this study did not attempt to differentiate between types of bullying such as physical bullying, verbal bullying, and exclusion. While references to these different types of bullying were mentioned in participants’ responses, it has yet to be determined which practices and strategies work best with the different types of bullying. For example, while it is reasonable to hypothesize that strategies focused on emotional intelligence and empathy might inhibit more overt bullying behaviours, it remains to be seen how well these strategies go to preventing more subtle forms of bullying. Further research is needed to examine how these different types of bullying respond to different prevention and intervention strategies.

Lastly, further research is needed into bullying in non-school environments. While there is a bevy of research examining bullying among children and adolescents in schools, there is less research examining bullying in other social environments such as workplaces, summer camps, and sports teams. This last area has become quite relevant recently, as more and more stories appear in the news of sports programs being shut down due to hazing and abusive behaviour. It would be interesting to look at whether these different environments show similarities to the
bullying found within schools. This study made every effort to avoid making any defining statements about bullying and human nature. Yet sadly, it is a phenomenon that happens in many different environments, and more research is needed in this regard.
REFERENCES


Hopper, T. (2012). High Profile Suicides such as Amanda Todd’s show there are no Simple Answers. *The National Post*.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Welcome to this interview. Thank you very much for your participation. This study is looking at the practices teachers can use to reduce bullying in the everyday classroom. I have ten interview questions on this topic. Feel free to ask for clarification on any of the questions. Furthermore, feel free to add any information you feel is important but does not relate directly to a question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. A lot of times in a bullying situation, the victim is afraid to come forward. Usually, this is because of intimidation, or a fear of being labelled a tattle-tale or teacher’s pet. As a teacher, how do you create an environment in your classroom where a victim feels safe coming forward?

2. What are some factors within a widespread school culture and climate that can promote bullying?

3. What are some school-culture factors that can protect against it?

4. What character trait of a teacher is the most influential when trying to prevent bullying in your classroom?

5. In what ways have advancement in technology and social media changed the nature of bullying? In what ways does this change approaches that teachers and schools can take to preventing it?

6. What are some factors that might make a teacher feel ill-equipped to deal with bullying?

7. What are some factors that might prevent a teacher from dealing with bullying?

8. Do you think that bullying is mainly a problem that takes place in the classroom or outside of the classroom?
9. How can a teacher use class time effectively to prevent bullying?

10. Do you see trends in bullying behaviour? Is it case by case, or are there trends in who instigates these scenarios?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ____________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying ____________________ for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. ____________________. My research supervisor is ____________________. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40-minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: _________________________________

Phone number, email: _______________________________

Instructor’s Name: _________________________________
Phone number: ______________________ Email: _______________________  

Research Supervisor’s Name: ________________________
Phone #: ______________________  Email: ____________________________  

____________________________________
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by __________________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix C: Practical Strategies

Activities that develop empathy and emotional intelligence

1. Shadow Masks

This activity is introduced at the beginning of grade 7. The idea is to give students a chance to explore their “shadow”, or the hidden part of themselves they do not show the world. After they have designed their shadow mask, they are asked to share it with the class. The underlying philosophy behind this activity is that students are less likely to bully each other if they know each other’s vulnerabilities and inner emotions.

2. My Inner Garden

Introduced in grade 8, this activity asks students to explore parts of the themselves through the designing of an acrylic mask. As students design their artwork, they are asked to symbolize what is going on inside them. As a compliment to their mask, they are asked to write a reflection piece asking them what is going on inside them and what the rest of the class is not seeing.

3. School Circle/Dialogue Circle

Done in middle school this activity facilitates open conversation around bullying. Used primarily in the first few months of school on a regular basis, students are asked to share their personal experiences with bullying. The School Circle further emphasizes the principle that students find it harder to bully others who they know at an emotional level.

4. I – messages

Used at the primary level, this literacy activity develops the emotional intelligence of young students. The idea behind an I –message is that it gives students a script for communicating their emotions to each other in order to resolve a conflict. An example of
an I-message is “I feel ____ when you ____ because _____ and I need you to _____”.
Thus, students are given a template to resolve conflicts without the direct intervention of the teacher.

Strategies that create a safe and inclusive environment

1. Placemats

   This activity is used as a strategy to break up cliques within the lunchroom. At the beginning of the year, students are asked to create placemats for themselves. The lunchroom is set up with long tables, and once a week throughout the year the placemats are mixed up, and students need to sit where their placemat lands. In this way they have to engage with different social groups throughout the year.

2. Letter writing

   This activity functions as a way for students to communicate with teachers and voice in confidentiality if they are being bullied. It also provides a means for teachers to identify anyone that is perpetrating a bullying act. Once a month, students are asked to write a private letter responding to the prompt: “What does the face of bullying look like at this school”. The teacher reads the responses in private. If a student’s name is being repeated a number of time, the teacher can bring that student in for further discussion.

3. Staff Circles

   This activity functions as an organized and professional way that staff can discuss and deal with a difficult or stressful issue. As opposed to simply venting their problem, staff form a team, each member with a designated role, in order to help solve the problem. A
staff member is designated with the role of observer, listener, and speaker. The idea is to support the staff member with the problem by generating ideas to solve the problem.

4. Caring Community Unit Study

Used at the primary level as an introductory social studies unit, this unit allows classes to discuss the difference between equity and equality, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence through art and drama activities.

5. Guidance Mentorship Program

Used in high school, this program assigns incoming grade nine students with a guidance councillor. Throughout the first few months of school, each grade nine meets with their assigned guidance councillor to check-in and see if there are any issues that are arising.

Key Research/Readings within Bullying Prevention

1. Barbara Coloroso – The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander

2. Debra Pepler – Observations of Bullying and Victimization in the School Yard

3. Howard Gardner – Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century

4. Dan Olweus – Bullying at School: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program