How Teachers are Integrating Bullying Prevention Through the Curriculum

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

Schools are faced with addressing the need to create safe school environments and reimagining ways to combat the presence of bullying. The purpose of this study was to gain greater insight into how teachers are integrating bullying prevention through the curriculum. I conducted a literature review as well as three interviews with elementary school teachers who work in the Greater Toronto Area. After analyzing the interview transcriptions several themes emerged. These include the impact of a teacher’s philosophy on their approach to bullying prevention, the curriculum areas where teachers are finding integration opportunities and the importance of the development of social and emotional skills in students.

Key Words: Bullying Prevention  
 Anti-Bullying  
 Integrated Curriculum  
 Social-Emotional Skills
Acknowledgements

One of the key themes repeated over the past two years at OISE has been the importance of creating a learning community. It has truly been a gift to have been part of the Master of Teaching community. From instructors to classmates, this experience has shaped me into the person I am today. I first wish to sincerely thank Janet Markus for her guidance throughout the process of writing this research paper. Her reassurance was much appreciated during the many busy days. To my beloved PJ 141: I feel privileged to have been able to spend every day of the past two years in the company of you wonderful people. Your insights, humour and unwavering support have made this program an unforgettable experience. Finally, I would like to thank my family, who has supported me through practicum, assignments and this research project. Mom, Dad and Janine, I will forever be grateful for the compassion you have shown me, as well as your willingness to listen to countless stories about Grade 2 students and the funny things that happened that day at school. You three truly are my pillars. Mom and Janine: Thank you so much for lending your time to editing my drafts. Each of the people mentioned in this section has made significant contributions to this project, as well as my personal and professional development over the past two years. Their support has helped me along the journey from student to teacher. I will forever be grateful to each of these individuals for their impact on my life!
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How Teachers are Integrating Bullying Prevention Through the Curriculum

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

The public profile of bullying in schools and its effect on students has become heightened to the point of becoming a “social phenomenon” (Bickmore, 2011, p. 650). Schools are faced with addressing the need to create safe school environments and reimagining ways in which to combat the presence of bullying. According to the Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students report (2012) produced by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), 29% of those surveyed in grades 7-12 reported being bullied; which represents roughly 288,000 students in Ontario (Paglia-Boak et al., p. 15).

Purpose of the Study

The bullying issue in schools is an educational problem that students, parents, educators, psychologists and government officials alike see as in desperate need of a solution. The Ontario Ministry of Education has enacted legislation to help create safer learning environments for students as a reaction to this problem. The Safe Schools Act (2000) indicates that schools are to follow the Provincial Code of Conduct which expects school members to “demonstrate honesty and integrity; respect differences in people and in their ideas and opinions; treat one another with dignity and respect at all times…” (“Making Our Schools Safer”, 2006). All members of a school community are expected to abide by these principles, but how can teachers integrate teaching about them across all curricula?
The practice of bullying prevention strategies in schools is vital to creating safe and positive learning environments for all students. In view of this, the objective of my research is to learn how teachers can integrate bullying prevention strategies across curriculum in order to share best practices with the education community.

**Central Research Question**

The overarching question guiding my research is: how are a small sample of elementary school teachers integrating bullying prevention programming across the curriculum?

My subsidiary questions are:

1. How do teachers define bullying and what are the characteristics they associate with bullying?
2. What kinds of supports or resources are available for teachers when they integrate bullying prevention initiatives into their classrooms?
3. Are teachers using prepared bullying prevention programs in their classrooms or are they creating their own plans?
4. What kinds of bullying prevention programs are currently accessible in schools?

**Background of the Researcher**

While I never experienced being bullied during my own schooling, I want to be able to create learning environments for my students that are safe and inclusive. I believe that it is imperative to create an atmosphere where my students feel that their classroom is a place where they are welcome to be themselves. Teachers have a responsibility to nurture students and help
them develop the skills to be able to interact with others in a productive and supportive manner. Fostering students who are respectful and supportive of their peers will not only create a more peaceful classroom environment, but also hopefully help to develop students who have skills that will enable them to be caring citizens within the broader community.

I chose my topic because I wanted to learn how to create an integrated curriculum from practicing teachers, since I see it as an opportunity to give my students a more meaningful education. Prior to entering the Master of Teaching program at OISE, I volunteered in multiple elementary school classes. I saw extensive bullying prevention teaching however, the integration with the curriculum was limited. The bullying prevention strategies that I have observed in different schools throughout my volunteering have often been centred on monthly school assemblies that celebrated a character trait or presentations with guest speakers.

The practicum experiences provided through the Master of Teaching program have been enlightening because they offered opportunities to gain insight into the day-to-day work of a classroom teacher and contextualized the learning done in the classes at OISE. After reflecting on the learning that was done when I was able to discuss specific philosophies and strategies with my Associate Teachers and other teachers in the schools, I decided to pursue an opportunity to improve my own practice through this research project.

During my practicum experiences I also observed the shift in schools to integrate social and emotional learning into their school culture. Several of my practicum schools had outside programs come in to teach students how to develop their social and emotional learning skills. I
was curious as to whether this focus was limited to the formal programs that came at different intervals throughout the school year or if teachers were integrating the values of these programs throughout their everyday teaching? I was also interested in gaining a better understanding of the reasons schools were bringing these programs in and whether they were a response to a specific concern.

I wanted to learn how I can integrate the tenets of bullying prevention throughout my teaching so that students can critically engage in content and utilize the curriculum as a means of support rather than regard bullying and bullying prevention education as extra-curricular material. I wanted to be able to compile strategies and resources to bring into my own practice. As a future primary/junior teacher I am particularly interested in how I can influence the way that my students engage with the curriculum they are learning and how I can encourage them to approach all curriculum as an opportunity to analyze the nature of interactions and develop a respect for others.

**Overview of the Study**

To respond to the research questions I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three teachers about the ways that they integrate bullying prevention teaching across the curricula in their classes. In Chapter Two, I review the literature about the role that teachers play in combating bullying and on the potential of an integrated curriculum. In Chapter Three, I elaborate on the methodology and procedures used in this research study. This includes information about the participants, data collection and limitations of the study. In Chapter Four, I report my research findings and in Chapter Five, I discuss these
findings and their significance in relation to the literature and the implications for my own practice as a beginning teacher. Also discussed are recommendations for practice, areas for further study and a review of the literature. A list of references and appendices are provided at the end of the project.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Bullying

This study examines the practices of teachers within Ontario’s publicly funded school systems and how they are integrating bullying prevention teaching. The Ontario government defines bullying in the Accepting Schools Act (2012) as “aggressive and typically repeated behaviour where”:

(a) the behaviour is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behaviour would likely to have the effect of,

   (i) causing harm, fear or distress to another individuals, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, harm to the individual’s reputation or harm to the individual’s property, or

   (ii) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual,

(b) and the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the pupil and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education; (“intimidation”).

(Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2012)

Although this is the province’s definition of bullying, the study’s participants provided their own definitions of bullying that they use to guide their practice. These definitions will be explored in Chapter Four.
Teacher Preparedness and Attitude Towards Bullying Prevention

Teachers are responsible for creating the atmosphere within the classroom and establishing the nature of the interaction between students. In order for teachers to feel prepared to handle bullying incidents and incorporate bullying prevention strategies, training for pre-service teaching would empower teachers before they even enter the classroom. Pre-service teachers have varied definitions of bullying and understand physical bullying as more serious than relational, homophobic and cyber-bullying (Craig, 2011, p. 29). Developing social-emotional skills in pre-service teachers could assist them in creating cultures within their classrooms that are understanding of the weight of the issue and address multiple forms of bullying. Pre-service education dedicated to enabling the development of social-emotional skills, like empathy, could be important to teachers’ understanding of violence prevention (Craig, 2011, p. 30). The confidence with which pre-service teachers approach handling bullying in classrooms is largely influenced by any training that they may have received in relation to violence prevention, consequently it is important that pre-service teachers receive violence prevention and intervention training (Craig, 2011, p. 28-29).

Some research has found that bullying prevention programs that are not integrated can sometimes be viewed by teachers as “add-ons” to an already full workload (Good, 2011, p. 50). Bullying prevention programs that are to be effective require the entire school to be invested and have to be perceived as integral to the learning community, rather than as an additional item for teaching (Good, 2011, p. 50). Bickmore (2011) has found that schools that are trying to integrate bullying prevention strategies through programs that use fragmented teaching, like those that aim to catch children doing good things, often lead to teachers abandoning consistent accordance
with the program after the initial start-up, or the lessons are rarely implemented (p. 664). The effectiveness of bullying prevention strategies is reliant on the perception of the value of these programs by the classroom teachers. Programs that are focused on extrinsic reward programs illuminate issues within schools in regards to bullying prevention, because these programs are easy to introduce without the need for professional development resources (Bickmore, 2011, p. 665). One of the key issues involved with integrating bullying prevention programs within schools is appropriate support for teachers through professional development and school resources. In Bickmore’s study of formal social skills programs, she highlighted the issue that only those teachers able to volunteer their own time for training were able to utilize the resources, thus alienating teachers that have responsibilities outside of school like taking care of their children (2011, p. 674). Bickmore suggests that the need for whole staff discussion and problem-solving related to handling conflict in schools cannot be replaced by the professional development that individual teachers receive (2011, p. 674). The attitude of teachers towards integrating bullying prevention strategies and programs within their classrooms is reliant on pre-service education, as well as on a support system within their schools.

**Proactive vs. Reactive Approaches to Bullying**

The approaches that schools take in attempting to combat bullying are characterized by proactive and reactive concepts. The consequent prevention and intervention strategies differ in the cultures they breed within schools. Prevention of bullying behaviour is vital because intervention strategies become more difficult to utilize effectively if bullying becomes engrained in a school culture over time. Intervention strategies usually involve the establishment of more rules and severe consequences despite having no positive association with improved student
behaviour (Good, 2011, p. 50). Some research examines the incorporation of proactive prevention strategies by teaching students social skills and assessing cultures within a school that may be promoting aggressive behaviour (Good, 2011, p. 50).

**Integrated Curriculum**

Although some teachers may integrate bullying prevention into their teaching in a fragmented manner, proactive strategies for dealing with bullying in schools can be integrated into the curriculum to create a learning experience that is more meaningful and allows students to reflect on the material they are learning in a personal way. Bullying prevention has been taught in literacy classes using novels, pictures, plays and media (Johnson, Augustus, & Agiro, 2012), as well as physical education classes (Gibbone, & Manson, 2010), but there is little literature on ways teachers are integrating it into other subject areas.

In physical education classes, teachers must be aware of the interactions between students and can adjust the lesson structure and classroom management strategies according to how different teaching methods may expose students who are physically or academically weak to possible bullying (Gibbone et al., 2010, p. 21). Furthermore, notions of trustworthiness, leadership and fairness can be integrated into the physical education curriculum so that students come to see these concepts as integral aspects of social interaction (Gibbone et al., 2010, p. 21). Research on literacy and physical education curriculum integration, while valuable, is limited in its ability to inform teachers of how to actively integrate bullying prevention across curriculum. My research seeks to inform teachers on specific ways they can teach prevention strategies through the all curriculum.
Integrating bullying prevention into the curriculum allows teachers to make further real-world connections for students’ learning. By teaching bullying prevention through curriculum, students will interact with the curriculum in a way that creates a more personal learning experience since it is based on reflecting on how people interact with each other and their environment. Creating the links between the curriculum and current issues will help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will translate from the curriculum to learning bullying solutions to apply to their own lives (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 62). As a pre-service teacher, I have been taught to connect the learning to my students’ own lives. By researching the integration of bullying prevention into the curriculum, I believe that this study will illustrate the ways that students can not only relate the curriculum to their lives, but also reflect on bullying and relationships in their lives. Changes to curriculum teaching, in addition to pedagogy, will help to establish renewed concepts of bullying prevention within schools (Bickmore, 2011, p. 676-677).

Bullying Prevention Programs

Bullying prevention programs differ by school and work to target various issues that contribute or exaggerate to the issue of bullying. In Mishna’s Bullying: A Guide to Research, Intervention, and Prevention (2012), the multiple forms of bullying prevention strategies that schools employ are explored:

Anti-bullying programs vary considerably in their scope and aims, including interventions that target children who are victimized or who bully; interventions that target peers, as well as students involved in bullying and may be led by peers who are
taught skills; curriculum-based programs to increase social competence and skills; and interventions that target the whole school, including children involved in bullying, peers, curriculum, teachers, administrators and parents and the school climate. (The School: Multiple Levels and Systems section, para. 4)

The bullying prevention strategies and formal programs are extensive and require schools to reflect on their school community in order to find a plan that best suits the current climate of their schools, as well as the climate they wish to create. Character education is a strategy that is centred on teaching “civility and community development” and encourages students to engage in practicing positive behaviours while also reflecting on any negative behaviour (Gibbone et al., 2010, p. 21). Gibbone et al., (2011) suggests that teachers can integrate prevention strategies within unit plans, as well as over the course of the school day in order to incorporate it into meaningful learning experiences within the curriculum (p. 21-22). This research project seeks to explore how prevention strategies can be integrated through programming across curriculum, as well as how they relate to school wide strategies.

**Bullying Prevention Philosophies**

It is impossible to discuss bullying prevention without recognizing the impact of bullying on children’s lives. The consequences of bullying are such that students’ emotional well-being is at stake. Given the prevalence of mental health issues experienced by today’s students, schools are tasked with re-evaluating the current educational structures. The relationship between mental health and bullying is reciprocal in nature. While bullying contributes to mental health issues like depression and anxiety, the presence of these issues is stigmatized and has the cyclic effect of causing children to be bullied (Whitley, Smith & Vaillancourt, 2013, p. 60). Proactive
approaches to addressing mental health in schools are intertwined with proactive bullying prevention strategies (Leschied, 2013, p. 6). The Mental Health Commission of Canada suggests that teaching dedicated to bettering social-emotional skills (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making, social interactions, self-management) be taught within the curriculum because of the benefits for students’ mental health (“School Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse: A Review of Systematic Reviews and Met-analyses”, 2012). This project explores the connection between bullying prevention strategies and social and emotional skills in students.

Some research suggests that emotional intelligence influences both bullying behaviour, as well as feelings of victimization (Lomas, Stough, Hansen & Downey, 2012; Mavroveli & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011). Salovey and Mayer define “emotional intelligence (EI) as a form of social cognition that encompasses the perception, analysis and production of behaviours specific to emotional content” (as cited in Lomas et al., 2012, p. 208). The work of Lomas et al., (2012), which sought to develop an understanding of bullying through the exploration of emotional intelligence in relation to “bullying behaviours and peer victimization” (p. 207), yielded results that suggest that emotional intelligence is vital for both the bullied and the bully as part of school prevention strategies. According to the study:

The findings suggest that adolescents with better-developed EI skills are less likely to become targets of bullying behaviours, which may have implications for managing bullying and peer victimization within schools. Measures of EI may be utilized to identify students who show less developed EI competencies, which may allow for more targeted, accurate or timely intervention to protect students from the potential harmful consequences that are associated with exposure to bullying. (Lomas et al., 2012, p. 210)
Given the importance of emotional intelligence in promoting mental health, I believe that my research may shed light on how teaching that integrates curriculum with bullying prevention creates opportunities for students to develop their social and emotional skills. While the research by Mavroveli et al., (2011) shows a connection between higher emotional intelligence and lower bullying behaviours, the study does not elaborate ways that student emotional intelligence can be developed in schools (Mavroveli et al., 2011).

This study explores the question of how teachers are integrating bullying prevention programming across the curriculum. The project examines specific strategies and resources that teachers are using and the supports offered to teachers. Additionally, the study addresses the challenges that may accompany integrating bullying prevention work in classrooms and schools.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This is a qualitative research project that includes a review of literature in the area of meaningful bullying prevention and its integration across the curriculum. The project also uses face-to-face interviews with three teachers who are integrating bullying prevention across the curriculum. This chapter outlines the various stages involved in the data collection process, as well as the limitations of the study.

Procedure

The research in this study is the product of a literature review, as well as face-to-face interviews with three elementary school teachers. In doing the literature review, insight has been gained into the Ontario government legislation and the implications for bullying in the education system. Further, the literature review explores the Ontario curriculum as a means of becoming better acquainted with the areas in which anti-bullying teaching can be integrated in the curriculum. The review of the literature looks at the potential and philosophy behind integrated curriculum teaching. As a further investigation of integrated curriculum, the review analyzes meaningfully integrated bullying prevention teaching across the curriculum. The literature review informed the creation of my interview questions.

Interviews were conducted with three elementary school teachers. I conducted recorded, face-to-face interviews with each of the participants and one participant emailed me afterwards with additional information that she had not included in our initial interview.
**Instruments of Data Collection**

The research study utilized informal, semi-structured interviews as the instruments of data collection. By using this interview format, participants were able to expand on their responses, and make connections and insights that they found relevant to the discussion points. Prior to the interviews, my research supervisor reviewed and approved the questions. The semi-structured protocol can be found in the Appendices. Each interview was conducted using the same list of interview questions.

**Participants**

The participants for this study were chosen through purposive sampling. The interviewees in the study are elementary school teachers who integrate bullying prevention teaching across the curriculum. Integration involves consistent efforts by teachers to build bullying prevention teaching into the Ontario curriculum. By using a small sample size of three teachers, the study examines in depth the intricacies of the teachers’ responses and gains insight into specifics of their integrated teaching practice. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research is unique in the attention it pays to individual points of interest and insight: “The intent in qualitative research is not to generalize the information … but to elucidate the particular, the specific” (p. 157). To aid in this investigation into the specificity of integrated bullying prevention teaching across curriculum, the interviews were conducted with teachers who practice teaching an integrated curriculum and articulated a focus on meaningful bullying prevention teaching.
My first participant was located through conversations with my classmates at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. A classmate had observed curriculum integrated bullying prevention during one of her practicum placement and was able to connect me with the teacher. My second participant was a former Associate Teacher of mine whose philosophy and bullying prevention practice I was able to see during my time in practicum in her class. Finally, my second participant introduced me to my third participant.

All of the participants in the study were female elementary school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area. I have used pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Wendy is a teacher of a combined grade three and four class at a school within a District School Board. She has been a teacher for 22 years and has taught in classes ranging from Kindergarten to grade five. Wendy’s current class has a co-teaching format that sees her planning and teaching with another teacher. Chelsea teaches grade two at a Catholic school and has been teaching for eight years. She has experience teaching in primary, junior and intermediate divisions. Chelsea has a background in early childhood education and social work. Chelsea shared that her experience as a teacher for behavioural classes at the beginning of her career has had a significant impact on her teaching philosophy. Kate has taught for 20 years in a Catholic District School Board. She currently teaches a combined grade one and two class.

Data Collection and Analysis

Once the interviews were completed I transcribed the conversations and analyzed them by extracting themes relevant to my research questions. I read the transcripts multiple times and used the highlighter tool in my word processor to emphasize quotes that aligned with my
research questions. The next step involved typing key words to represent themes beneath the quotes that had been highlighted. I cross-referenced the interviews to see if there were any themes being repeated by the different participants.

The interviews have been analyzed to gain insight into the specific strategies teachers can use to integrate anti-bullying teaching across the curriculum. Additionally, they have been used to better understand participating teachers’ philosophies of education and reasons for integrating their curriculum. The interviews served to further the discussion of the factors supporting the work of integrated teaching and have allowed insight into the challenges that accompany bullying prevention.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

In accordance with the ethical review procedure provided for the Master of Teaching program, this project was structured around multiple conditions for the research process. The conditions of the procedure included the instruction that a consent letter was required for each participant and that the project maintain the interviewees’ anonymity and no information that could possibly identify the individuals would be included in the project. The procedure further stipulates that participants are free to decline to answer certain questions or remove themselves from the project at any point. The condition that if participants choose to remove themselves, the data collected from them will be not be used in the project, helps to ensure that the participants are protected and their voluntary contributions are respected.
Limitations

The scope of the findings for the research study are limited due to the small sample size, as well as the ethical review specifications. The sample size limited the number of perspectives on ways that teachers can integrate bullying prevention strategies across the curriculum. Strategies for implementing an integrated curriculum were limited to the voices of only the three teachers who were interviewed. Further, the ethical procedure stipulated that the research could not involve speaking with children. Consequently, the research is absent of students’ perspectives on this area of study. Classroom observations were not permitted, thus limiting the study by only including those strategies that the teachers themselves shared. Useful strategies that the teachers may not think are applicable may have been left out of the interview.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will present the main findings of the three interviews that were conducted with Ontario classroom teachers. The data revealed that the teachers interviewed had a range of ideas and approaches related to the prevention of bullying. This information has been organized according to several themes and subthemes:

Theme 1: Overview and Foundation of Bullying Prevention

- Definitions of Bullying and Associated Characteristics
- Social-Emotional Learning

Theme 2: Teacher Values and Beliefs

Theme 3: Curriculum Connections

- Language
- The Arts

Theme 4: Catholic School Approach

- Religious Education Curriculum
- Classroom Design

Theme 5: Classroom Strategies and Activities

Theme 6: Classroom and School Based Programming

Theme 7: Professional Development

Theme 8: Challenges

- School Environment
- Students’ Attitudes
Theme 1: OVERVIEW AND FOUNDATION OF BULLYING PREVENTION

Definitions of Bullying and Associated Characteristics

The teachers’ definitions of bullying will have an impact on their instructional approaches to the issue. To establish an understanding of their practice and classroom dynamic, the teachers were asked to define bullying and describe related characteristics they may have witnessed within their classrooms during their careers.

When asked to define bullying, Wendy explained that it is “if somebody is repeatedly making fun of somebody- put downs, insulting or teasing.” Chelsea said that bullying is “anything that makes a child or a person feel uncomfortable, anxious or nervous about a behaviour that’s being done towards them” and it may involve comments or it may be physical. Kate stated that “bullying is when you are coercive in any kind of activity,” and it may be characterized by tone of voice, word choice or telling people to do things rather than asking.

Social-Emotional Learning

All three teachers emphasized the importance of giving students tools to express their emotions and develop social skills to improve interactions with their peers and prevent bullying behaviours. Social-emotional learning was at the foundation of what each teacher emphasized as her focus for bullying prevention. Wendy emphasized the importance of students understanding that everyone has different emotions and there is no wrong way to feel:

Letting the kids know that it’s okay to feel angry. Everybody feels angry but it’s how you express it. We don’t know what you’re thinking so you have to tell us. You have to use your words, not your hands.
The majority of Kate’s teaching career had been spent teaching very young children and she had observed that these students do not fully understand how to interact with their peers and so she has to explicitly teach social skills to prevent conflicts.

Chelsea believes that equipping students with emotional skills eliminates negative behaviours that can contribute to tensions: “When they don’t have ways to express their emotions, I find that’s when they tend to get aggressive, angry or shut down. I don’t want that in my class.” She expanded on this thought by explaining that when students understand why they do things and why they are upset or happy, this can in turn help them understand the reasons for another child’s actions or feelings. Chelsea displayed posters around her class with emotion words like happy, proud, angry, upset and sad.

**Theme 2: TEACHER VALUES AND BELIEFS**

In the course of the interviews, teachers identified their own values, beliefs and intentions related to bullying prevention teaching. Wendy’s focus was on being inclusive and emphasizing the positive rather than creating a space filled with “don’t do this, don’t do that” language. She believes that integrating bullying prevention through the curriculum is a “necessity.” Wendy encourages her students to reflect on their own experiences and then share their strategies for handling conflict. She believes in having her students be partners in generating solutions for issues that arise, rather than having a classroom environment where teachers are seen as the source with all of the answers.
Kate explained that part of her reasoning for integrating bullying prevention into her teaching was because many students in her combined grade one and two class were too young to understand how to play with other children or how to express their desire to have something. Kate does not always explicitly use the term bullying, but rather she frames the students’ social-emotional learning and bullying prevention within the context of friendship. Kate’s focus is on helping students understand behaviours associated with being a friend.

Unlike the other participants, Chelsea had been bullied when she was in elementary school and she found it “upsetting to remember” the things she had to go through. Chelsea had been told, “You’re a child get over it” and “It’s a part of childhood.” Chelsea believes that no child should have to accept bullying as simply an inherent component of childhood. Chelsea’s previous experiences being bullied had greatly informed the culture of her classroom and the approach she takes to bullying prevention. Chelsea believes that bullying is often formed by “ignorance” related to the feelings of others or poor social skills: “If you don’t understand that you’ve hurt someone, how are you a bully when that’s all you’ve ever been shown?” Chelsea believes that education targeted at ignorance will help eliminate bullying behaviours: “Change their mentality and the way they view others and themselves. Help them to love themselves and you’ll change, I think, the behaviour.” Chelsea’s experiences teaching in behavioural classes have also greatly impacted her attitude towards mainstream classroom teaching. Chelsea explained that many of her students in the behavioural classes had previously been bullied and were often looked upon differently by classmates.
All of the participants stated the importance of establishing the foundation for bullying prevention and having discussions about how to treat one another starting at the beginning of the school year. Wendy and Kate explained that their approaches were both proactive as well as reactive to situations that arise throughout the year, while Chelsea emphasized the proactive approach she takes in her class.

Theme 3: CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

There are a number of ways that the teachers who participated in this project promote bullying prevention within their classrooms. Wendy, Chelsea and Kate shared how they were able to connect the social-emotional learning integral to their bullying prevention ideologies to the curriculum.

Language

Each of the teachers interviewed integrated bullying prevention through the language curriculum. Different teachers found different opportunities to integrate bullying prevention through reading, writing, oral language and media literacy. All three participants extolled the impact that picture books have in specifically addressing bullying and serving as facilitators for further discussion and problem solving. Wendy, Chelsea and Kate praised the effectiveness of *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O’Neill in helping to raise the topic of bullying. Wendy explained that the book is about a student at school who monopolizes the playground by telling the other children what to play and how they should be playing. A new student enrolls in the school who does not know the rules that have been established by the bully, so she plays however she wants, doing all the things that the other children are too afraid to do. The new student is very friendly
to the bully and the bully realizes that there are different ways to play with the other children that are more cooperative. Kate reads *The Recess Queen* at the beginning of the school year as a way to segue into class discussions about what friendship looks and sounds like. Kate makes sure to integrate books on friendship to lead the students towards understanding that while there may be conflict within friendships, there is a conflict resolution process and she would have her students practice those scenarios in the classroom. All participants integrated picture books with oral communication and would achieve this through circle time discussions.

As a way to have students develop their understanding of language and actions that may constitute bullying, Kate teaches a unit on inferring using picture books. She also integrates lessons around sequencing where students have to organize events surrounding an instance of bullying and consequent reactions.

The selection of book titles shared by the teachers through discussion of their integrated bullying prevention and language programming yielded a list with varying themes. Read-aloud books include *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*, *The Recess Queen*, *Children Around the World*, *For Every Child a Better World*, *You’re Too Big!*, *The Sissy Duckling* and *Oliver Button is a Sissy!* Chelsea also used a workbook that was targeted at helping students grow in their emotional learning, called *My Book of Feelings*.

Wendy has her students write stories, letters and poems surrounding related bullying prevention themes. Wendy explained that Valentine’s Day provides an opportunity for students to write about friendship and express their thinking about what friendship looks like, sounds like
and feels like. Wendy has her students compose letters from either the perspective of the person being bullied or the bully. Chelsea uses journal writing in her class to provide students with opportunities to express their emotions. She makes sure that at least one journal entry a week is a free write in case students need to express their feelings on paper.

As a means of integrating the media literacy curriculum, all three participants had their students create posters targeting bullying behaviour. Wendy has her students create posters illustrating what bullying is, what it does and does not look like and what friendship looks like.

The Arts

Most teachers interviewed use the Language curriculum as the primary method of integrating bullying prevention teaching. However, all three teachers often used drama and role-playing as an extension of their language activities that used picture books and stories. Wendy provides her students with scenarios, which they are responsible for demonstrating a possible resolution. Chelsea and Kate similarly provide students with drama opportunities for developing their social-emotional skills, however it is often through the Fully Alive religious education curriculum, which will be discussed in Theme Four.

Theme 4: CATHOLIC SCHOOL APPROACH

Chelsea and Kate provided a different perspective than Wendy, since they both work in Catholic District School Boards. Although Chelsea has worked in both Catholic and public school systems, she made a “conscious choice” to establish her career within the Catholic system
because she loved that “morals and character development is ingrained into the religion curriculum”.

**Religious Education Curriculum**

Chelsea and Kate integrated the Fully Alive religion curriculum with their language programs. Both teachers shared that they used stories from the Fully Alive textbook to engage students in meaningful discussions and activities surrounding bullying and how to treat other people. One example that Chelsea shared from the text was a story about an older boy who took away a younger child’s ball. The Fully Alive program has questions that serve as prompts for discussion. Possible questions may be, “What should the kid do? Should he hit the other boy? Take the ball back? Tell the teacher? Tell the boy he’s angry? Say nothing and be grumpy? Be upset the rest of the day?” Chelsea stated that the stories and questions allow for conversations about how different people react differently when they are feeling certain emotions.

**Classroom Design**

Chelsea sets up a prayer table beside the door into her classroom with a small mirror above it. Chelsea has the mirror above the prayer table because she tells her students that they are all made in God’s image. Students can look into the mirror throughout the day and share an affirmation:

It’s beside the prayer table purposefully for the reason that as they enter the room they know that no matter what happens today they believe this about themselves. They’re children of God and they have God in them. No one can tell them, “No, you’re not beautiful,” or “No, you’re not smart.”
Chelsea often sees her students walk away from the mirror with a smile on their face.

**Theme 5: CLASSROOM STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES**

Using the book *Have you Filled a Bucket Today?* as a starting point, Wendy has her classes create ‘buckets’ to create a classroom atmosphere that celebrates positive behaviours. Wendy gave her students paper bags to decorate and would use it as an opportunity to highlight the positive and not only address negative actions: ‘If something nice happened, we would write down “I notice you helped Susie with her shoes,” and then we would put the note in the kids’ paper bags.’

Chelsea uses an activity that she calls “I Person” that provides an opportunity for the class to have a safe, open discussion about the impact of words can have on a person and how to build people back up once they have been hurt:

I’ll take an adult body, myself or someone else, and we’ll trace it out on big, brown craft paper and decorate it to look nothing like any adult you’ve ever seen. The kids name it. They have a life-size body that’s posted on the chalkboard or somewhere they call all see it. They’re in a circle formation because it shows they’re all safe. They can all see each other and they can all feel each other’s expressions and emotions physically when they’re expressing them. And you can say like what’s special about this ‘Amy’ and they might say “Oh, her hair, etc.”

Chelsea scaffolds the class discussion and tells students that the Amy has had a lot of issues with people not being very nice to her. She follows this by asking the students if there has ever been a time when they felt like Amy. Chelsea has her students use sentences that start with “I” and let’s
the class close their eyes if they want to make students feel more comfortable. Students share a time when they felt hurt and the teacher writes the different things on a chart. Chelsea said that students have shared feelings like “I hate wearing glasses” or “I hate that I’m not good at math”. As students share something that has hurt them in the past or something that is currently bothering them, they rip a piece of Amy off so by the end of the sharing circle, each child is physically holding a piece of Amy. The class has a discussion about the things that were written on the chart and the teacher shares something as well. Once the students have discussed the chart, Chelsea tells the students to think of something that someone has said to them that made them feel happy, special or changed how they felt about themselves in a positive light. As students share positive comments, Chelsea gives them a colourful Band-Aid, which acts as tape, so they can physically put Amy back together. Chelsea then begins a conversation about how they have built Amy back together and although she has scars, she is “happy because she’s back together again. She’s slowly becoming whole.” The class has a discussion about how the way people feel and the way they act is the “result of what has happened to them or their experiences” and that it is important to consider that everyone has a different story. Chelsea uses this activity, which she learned through a workshop, half way through the school year when they have created a safe environment.

Kate uses various special events and occasions throughout the year to integrate conversations about how people should treat one another. Around Remembrance Day, Kate introduces conversations about peace that are relevant to the lives of her young students. Her classes discuss peace in the schoolyard at recess and how to treat siblings and friends.
Theme 6: CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMMING

When asked if there were any formal programming that they have used to aid in social-emotional skill development and bullying prevention, all three of the interview participants responded that they have been involved with school-based programs.

Wendy stated that she has used school board resources in the past after reaching out to her principal when the approaches she and her co-teacher were utilizing were not effectively eliminating the bullying within the class. Her principal arranged for representatives from the school board who work specifically with developing social skills to come in to assist. This team is referred to as BRASS (Behaviour Response Active Support Service). Two people from the BRASS team came into the class to help Wendy and her co-teacher learn specific activities designed to help students to incorporate more positive relationships within the class and learn how to communicate when they are not getting along with others. The BRASS team brought in an activity called the Parking Lot, which simply required a Bristol board and sticky notes. Wendy explained that the Parking Lot activity can be used for many different things but her class used it to talk about feelings and events that happened at recess:

If you got into an argument or a fight at recess, get a sticky note and stick it on the Parking Lot. When recess was over we would talk about the sticky notes that had appeared. If there were four sticky notes it meant this happened, this happened, this happened and this happened. We would talk about those different things. “This sticky note says that …” and it could be anonymous or they could sign their name. “So this sticky note says that John was kicked, okay class what can we do about this?” We would
talk about different solutions and I would record the different solutions on sticky notes. I
would put them back on the Parking Lot as a reference that the kids can use.

The sticky notes on the Parking Lot would stay there because things like kicking, name-calling
and students taking other children’s snacks were happening frequently. The team came in once
month over the course of four months to see how things progressed.

Wendy also uses the Second Step program in her class, which is a collection of resources
for teachers to use to help students develop their social-emotional skills. Wendy uses the
program’s activities, posters, videos and lessons to promote positive relationships. Wendy
explained that the program helps children learn social-emotional skills like reading body
language. In one of Wendy’s previous school, all teachers were trained according to the values
of the TRIBES Learning Community program aimed at establishing positive learning climates,
but not all teachers were actively practicing the program’s agreements.

Both Chelsea and Kate have had the Roots of Empathy program in their classrooms. Kate
explained that the Roots of Empathy program complemented her bullying prevention work
because of the parallels between recognizing emotions in a baby and respecting the feelings of
their peers: “The baby has feelings and [the students] learn to appreciate the feelings of each
other.” Chelsea has had it in her classroom for the past two years and its goals of teaching
students about empathy and emotions align with her goals for her classroom. Chelsea believes
the program helps children develop their ability emotional connect with other people:
“Sometimes children need more experiences learning what the word empathy means and to
understand why people act a certain way”.
Theme 7: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Two teachers responded that they received professional development and training that they have been able to directly tie into their work on bullying prevention. Wendy had worked in a school where the principal wanted all the teachers to be TRIBES trained. While she thought TRIBES was a “great” program, Wendy felt that the effectiveness of the program in that school was limited because the “administration wasn’t that strong at the school” and “there were no consequences for [students’] behaviour.” Chelsea had received extensive professional development during her time as a teacher in a behavioural program. She had attended workshops and was given resources dedicated to peace-building and developing students’ emotional skills. Some of the books that Chelsea learned about through workshops and has since purchased them for her own classroom resources include *Peace Works: Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids* and *Creating Peace, Building Communities*. Kate said that while there have been professional development opportunities offered by her schools and within the school board, she has not participated in any.

Wendy and Kate could not recall any specific training during their pre-service programs that was dedicated to learning how to integrate bullying prevention. Chelsea stated that it was integrated into her pre-service literacy course.

Theme 8: CHALLENGES

*School Environment*

Wendy mentioned that while the BRASS team was happy with her and her co-teacher because they were trying to implement the strategies they had been taught, it was still
challenging because the behaviours were frequently being repeated. Wendy said that the students who were in the class when Wendy received support from the BRASS team have had difficulty in subsequent years with bullying. Wendy emphasized that bullying prevention work must be continuous in order to be effective and it must involve the whole school. While sharing her experiences at different schools, Wendy reflected on the importance of a strong administration team in establishing consequences for inappropriate behaviours and the negative impact on a teacher’s efforts if there is not widespread staff support. On a similar note, Chelsea described the difference between how a student may behave in her classroom with how they behave once they move on to the next grade. Chelsea shared a story of one student who had developed a reputation in previous grades for fighting, but in her class he had made positive behavioural changes and was starting to become well liked by his peers. However, the following year, the student was getting into fights again and arguments with teachers. Chelsea expressed frustration with only having so much power to impress change on a students’ behaviour since there are many other influences.

**Students’ Attitudes**

In discussing the challenges of integrating bullying prevention and how receptive students were to this type of work, Wendy explained that students know appropriate behaviour but they often make different choices when it comes to their actions and words. She found that negative behaviours would sometimes be frequently repeated even though strategies had been discussed and posted around the class:

Sometimes kids, when you talk to them, they know what to say. But when they’re in a situation they don’t use the modeling that we talked about in class. They know they’re not supposed to hit. You can ask any kid “do we solve our problems by hitting?” They’re
all going to say no. But when they’re in a situation because they’re so angry or just want to get to play, they don’t always use what they’ve heard in class. That’s why I think it’s important that you have administration modeling, all staff modeling and all students modeling. Because when you hear it from everybody I think it becomes more ingrained.

When asked about the challenges of integrating this form of teaching, Kate explained that it is difficult for the students to see themselves as bullies because “they have these perceptions of a bully as big and mean. They can’t see themselves as being that.” She explained that they are normally only perceptive of the behaviours associated with poor social-emotional skills when other people are demonstrating them.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of my research findings and their significance in relation to the literature. I reflect on the implications of the study on my own teaching practice. I provide insight into the implications of the study and highlight specific recommendations for practice that have come from the findings. Finally, I share questions that have been raised through this project and my closing thoughts.

Reflection

As I began the process of choosing a topic for my research project I knew I wanted to pursue an area of research that would ultimately serve to enhance my own teaching practice. As the course of my research has progressed, I have been able to gain insight into various approaches towards bullying prevention. Through my interviews I have been able to compile a list of specific activities and resources for integrating this important work into my classroom. My research provided me the opportunity to learn practical strategies for creating a classroom that has bullying prevention ingrained in its structure, as well as the curriculum taught. All three participants expressed the importance of explicitly teaching students how to interact with other people, as well as providing students with opportunities to understand their emotions and learn specific strategies to express them. Empowering students with tools to aid in their social and emotional learning is the foundation for how I want to establish the learning environment in my classroom in the future. The teachers who participated in my interviews shared that social and emotional skills were fundamental to their bullying prevention approaches.
I want to create a classroom environment where students understand that they are safe to express their emotions. I believe that providing students with explicit tools to assist in their social and emotional learning will not only influence the presence of bullying in my classroom, but also extend to their lives outside of school and in the future.

My findings have also highlighted the challenges that teachers face when integrating bullying prevention or handling specific instances of bullying. I believe that being able to gain insight into the experiences of three teachers has allowed me to better prepare for any potential issues that may arise. Having highly experienced teachers share their stories of difficult classroom dynamics, as well as their convictions to keep working at it despite moments of frustration, demonstrated to me the importance of the commitment to bullying prevention.

I have learned that there are countless resources available through schools and it is important to ask for assistance from other teachers and administration if needed. Also, becoming educated on the programming and supports offered within each school board will allow teachers to take advantage of the resources available to teachers. Through my research I feel better prepared to enter into my own teaching career with practical strategies for integrating bullying prevention and social and emotional learning into the curriculum and classroom structure.

**Implications and Recommendations**

The implications of this research demonstrate the importance of integrating social and emotional learning through the curriculum. All participants shared their views on the importance
of understanding that bullying often occurs because students do not understand how to express their emotions in a positive way or they do not know how to interact socially with other students. The proactive approaches of the interview participants aligns with the research that finds schools teaching students specific social skills is being used as a bullying prevention strategy (Good, 2011, p. 50).

The interview findings suggest that bullying prevention is being integrated through the curriculum primarily in language and the arts. My literature review highlighted ways teachers are integrating bullying prevention through language and physical education, but I am curious as to whether there are truly no other opportunities in different curriculum areas to integrate conversations founded in anti-bullying ideas. Investigating how teachers can integrate bullying prevention themes through other areas of the curriculum needs to be explored by teachers and pre-service programs.

The study revealed there are many supports in schools available to teachers to assist them in developing positive social and emotional climates for their students. However, professional development and school resources are often limited to those who actively seek them out or volunteer their time (Bickmore, 2011, 676). Educational communities need to assess how supports are to be made more easily accessible to teachers.

In order to develop school environments where positive social engagement is actively practiced and the prevalence of bullying is limited, teachers should seek opportunities to embed
bullying prevention throughout their daily teaching. Pre-service programs need to help teacher candidates make connections to bullying prevention through various areas of the curriculum.

**Limitations**

The small sample size of this study limited the amount of practical strategies and resources I was able to compile in my findings. Additionally, I had difficulty finding participants who self-identified that they were integrating bullying prevention teaching through the curriculum. All of the participants in my research are currently teaching in primary classrooms with one participant teaching a combined primary-junior class. Consequently, the strategies and resources are directed towards teaching in the primary grades and do not offer insight into specific bullying prevention strategies for junior and intermediate classrooms. Since two of the teachers who participated teach in Catholic District School Boards, their offerings on integrating bullying prevention with the religion curriculum program will not be applicable to teachers working in District School Boards.

**Further Study**

I would be interested to further explore how pre-service programs are preparing teacher candidates to explicitly teach students social and emotional skills. I am curious as to how pre-service programs are assisting teacher candidates in understanding how to integrate bullying prevention through the curriculum. Is bullying prevention being taught as a stand-alone topic or are pre-service programs integrating it through various curriculum areas?
Additionally, I am curious to explore the nature of classroom and whole school approaches to bullying prevention. One of my participants shared her frustrations with the ineffectiveness of bullying prevention efforts when the administration was not strong and not all teachers participated in the efforts. What is the impact of a single teacher doing bullying prevention in her classroom compared with whole school efforts? How does the school culture influence the impact of the work that individual teachers are doing to prevent bullying?

**Conclusion**

The research process has allowed me to gain practical knowledge of ways that bullying prevention can be integrated through various curriculum areas and compile specific resources to aid in my efforts to incorporate it into my classrooms in the future. I have learned the importance of seeking out resources within the school as well as the school board that are specifically aimed at helping teachers integrate social and emotional learning and positive relationships into their classroom climate. I am excited to take the strategies and resources I have learned through my research into my own practice and share the insights with my colleagues as I begin my teaching career.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date: _______________________________

Dear _______________________________

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. I am studying how teachers are integrating bullying prevention across the curriculum for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

My data collection consists of a 45-minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research 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 question. I will destroy the audio 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: Nicola Wyslobicky
Phone Number: __________________________
Email: nicola.wyslobicky@mail.utoronto.ca
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 Nicola Wyslobicky and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature:

Name: (printed) ______________________________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your participation today will be very helpful to my research topic. This project is looking at ways that teachers are integrating bullying prevention teaching across curriculum. I also want to remind you that your responses will remain anonymous and should there be a question you are uncomfortable with you do not have to answer. Please feel free to ask for a question to be repeated or for clarification at any point of time. Are you ready to begin?

Questions:

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. What grades have you taught?
3. How do you define bullying?
4. What are the behaviours or characteristics that you associate with bullying?
5. What has been your experience with bullying and bullying behaviour in your classroom and/or school?
6. Please describe any approaches or strategies you have been using in your classroom to help students address some of the characteristics described.
7. How did your interest in integrating bullying prevention through the curriculum develop?
8. Where are you finding opportunities in the Ontario curriculum to integrate anti-bullying teaching?
9. Can you give me examples of how you have integrated anti-bullying into the curriculum?
10. What kinds of resources or supports are available to you?
11. Is there any anti-bullying programming running in your school? Are they associated with any formal anti-bullying programs?

12. Did you have opportunities for learning how to integrate bullying prevention during your pre-service teaching? Professional development?

13. Are there any challenges to integrating bullying prevention?

14. Are students receptive to bullying prevention teaching?

15. As a teacher how would you describe your focus on anti-bullying programming in your classroom?

Those are all the questions I have for you today. Are there any questions you would like to re-visit? Are there any questions you would like to ask me? Thank you again for agreeing to participate. It is greatly appreciated.