Exploring the Implementation of Cooperative Learning to Mitigate Bullying Behaviors in Elementary Classrooms

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Abstract

The aim of this research study was to investigate the outcomes on students’ bullying behaviors when educators implement cooperative learning as one of their main teaching and learning methods in the classroom. The main research question that guided this investigation was: How does a sample of elementary teachers mitigate bullying behaviors in cooperative learning environments? While the existing research in this area describes the negative outcomes that bullying can attribute to social and academic performance, it lacks how cooperative learning can promote communication, accountability, and positive interdependence and be used to combat bullying behaviors in the classroom. In order to investigate this gap in research, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two elementary school teachers: one working with the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) and the other in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The findings suggested that while educators observed positive outcomes to implementing cooperative learning, they also found that students lacked the prerequisite learning skills to participate effectively. The implications of these findings exhibit the important value from implementing anti-bullying practices inside the classroom by using cooperative learning for those in the Faculty of Education, school boards, and teachers.

Key Words: cooperative learning, anti-bullying practices, classroom environment, social skills, student–teacher relationships, academic outcomes
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Starting from a young age, children are attending school for upwards of fifteen years; making this environment a second home where children will develop and foster social, emotional, cognitive, language, and gross/fine motor skills. Another aspect of school that most students have experienced once or multiple times throughout their elementary years is being bullied by one or more of their classmates or school peers. Bullying has many definitions, interpretations, and beliefs which make it difficult to understand and define as there will always be a lack of agreement in what a group or individual considers to be bullying.

Bullying is generally defined as repeated acts of verbal or physical aggression that is intended to inflict harm on a weaker or less powerful victim (Lacey, Cornell, and Konold, 2015). There are typically five different forms of bullying; physical, verbal, social, extortion, and cyber (Smokowski, Evans, & Cotter, 2014). An act does not necessarily fall into a single category and can contain a multitude of forms through various contexts and situations. Looking at the Ontario Ministry of Education’s policy document, Bullying Prevention and Intervention (2012), it speaks to bullying as explicit acts of physical or psychological harm to a student and how the atmosphere of the school environment better teachers and students can help mitigate or increase acts of bullying that are and have happened. By outlining detailed notions of bullying practices, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) is able to monitor and ensure Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention is followed accordingly within all schools under the Ministry of Education. Bullying has and is a problem for students, families, and schools as the consequences of victimization has been shown to continually effect the wellbeing of that student into adolescence and adulthood (Lösel & Bender, 2011).
Bullying has also been seen to effect students’ academic achievement as students who are victimized by their peers are likely to demonstrate poor academic performance which is consistent with arguments that children’s social experiences at school affect their academic performance (Cushman and Cowan, 2010). There are a number of factors that can attribute to a student’s decrease in academic performance that are linked to the consequences of bullying and a student’s mental and physical health and wellbeing. One possible relational outcome of lower academic competence is that victims of bullying are more likely to have diminished attention and concentration in class as their focus is on the stress and anxiety they have endured from their classroom bullies (Ma et al., 2009). Not all research has found a strong correlation between academic achievement and victimization as it is dependent on variable outcomes, circumstances, and participant generalizability (Konishi et al., 2010). However, mental health and academic achievement can be improved with the development and sustainment of a positive learning environment, teacher implementation strategies, and teacher-student relationships (Hancock, 2004; Cushman and Cowan, 2010; Konishi et al., 2010; Lösel, & Bender, 2011; Smith, Polenik, Nakasita, and Jones, 2012; Smokowski, 2014).

In today’s classrooms, teachers are implementing more strategies and approaches that foster a positive and safe learning environment for their students which include; creating a sense of belonging, respect, and trust between student and teacher (Cushman & Cowan, 2010; Konishi et al., 2010; Smith, et al., 2012), implement a co-constructed and cooperative classroom with students; physically and academically (Handcock, 2004; Cushman & Cowan, 2010) and a teachers ability to foster positive student-peer relations through ongoing assessments, observations, and guiding strategies (Johnson & Johnson, n.d). When children believe that their
teacher and classroom environment is supportive, they are able to put trust in their teacher to address and intervene when faced with bullying in school (Konishi et. al, 2010).

Cooperative learning is rapidly gaining popularity as an instructional approach that enhances students' communication and interpersonal skills (Persons, 1998, p. 225). To understand what cooperative learning is, Cooper et al. (1990) defined cooperative learning as “an instructional technique that requires students to work together in small fixed groups in a structured learning task” (as cited in Persons, 1998, p. 225). Johnson and Johnson (n.d) add to this definition by stating that cooperative learning is working together to accomplish individual and shared goals to maximize their learning and the learning of others. As the research around this learning approach is still developing, current research remains focused on the positive social outcomes affiliated with cooperative learning groups and environments (Person, 1998; Hancock, 2003; and Lacasani et al., 2011). Students who participated in cooperative learning groups demonstrated stronger social skills; listening while others speak, maintaining eye contact, respect peer views and opinions, and accept criticism in a positive manner (Hancock, 2003; Lacasani et al., 2011).

1.1 Research Problem

Bullying has continually been addressed in all schools as it has escalated over the years in developing negative outcomes for a student’s mental/physical health (Esbensen, and Carson, 2009; Konishi, Hymel, S, Zumbo; and Li, 2010) and their academic performance (Ma, Phelps, Lerner, and Lerner, 2009). A student’s mental health can attribute to school experiences and relationships by negatively impacting their view of their peers and classroom teacher (Smokowski et al., 2014). Mental health also contributes to other areas of a student’s wellbeing as being bullied by peers predicts higher anxiety, greater depression, low self-esteem, peer
rejection, suicidal behaviors, and aggression (Ma, et al., 2009). However, some research says that those predictors of outcomes might instead be factors in determining a victim (Lösel & Bender, 2011. These effects in turn alter a student’s perspective on the school, learning, (Ma et al., 2009) as well as develop internalized problems such as anxiety, loneliness, and being socially withdrawn (Smokowski et al., 2014).

When faced with peer groupings in school, victims of bullying can be placed in the line of fire for criticism, rejection, and lack of involvement in group tasks. Those actions can then later be associated with lower self-esteem and self-efficacy in the students’ knowledge, abilities, and engagement within curriculum groupings (Callaghan and Joseph, 1995; Ma et. all, 2009). Furthermore, students who are victimized by peers are likely to demonstrate poor academic performance, consistent with arguments that children’s social experiences at school affect their academic performance (Konishi et. all, 2010). While Hancock (2003) summarizes the differentiated outcomes between students with high and low social competences by including a student’s personal learning preference (alone or with a group) he makes a conclusion that those preferences will also initiate some backlash in the cooperative context. Students personal learning preference correlates with their social personality type (Nussbaum, 2002) as some may consider themselves to be more introverted or extroverted in social situations. Nussbaum (2002) identifies some contributing factors for introverts working in small group discussions that range from anxious or no communication to avoid punishment or negative reactions, focus on internal rather than external thought, and difficulty dealing with social demands. However, extroverts are seen as students who were strive within these learning contexts (Nussbaum, 2002) which, in some situations, are not always the case.
Although teachers are encouraged to create these safe spaces for their students, it is evident that they do not always understand the degree to which their various teaching strategies and interactions influenced student attitudes and behaviors (Cushman & Cowan, 2010). Teachers bring their personal beliefs, values, and opinions into the classroom which ultimately has an effect on students’ experience (Cushman & Cowan, 2010). By insuring that teachers have created a solid foundation in classroom management and student-teacher relationships, they will be more likely to demonstrate positive emotions onto the students which in turn will reflect back onto them (Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015).

The problem is that teachers’ strategies implementing cooperative learning environments should reflect a sense of classroom makeup/management, direct guidelines of a task, and accurate accountability for each student in the group to be responsible to understand and relay the correct material gained in that experience (Johnson & Johnson, n.d). Without this knowledge, teachers will not have the correct skill set around cooperative learning, bullying, and academic achievement to implement valuable peer learning opportunities for their students.

1.2 Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how elementary teachers diminish bullying behavior in cooperative learning contexts; proactively and reactively. As classrooms continue to develop and implement cooperative learning groups within the school environment (Johnson & Johnson, n.d; Person, 1998) students who require specific instructional methods based on their degree of social anxiety or ease (Cushman & Cowan, 2010) are challenged to adapt to this alternative learning platform. Hancock’s (2003) divide of predispositions to learning (individually or in groups) stipulated that those students will be more likely to stick to their deserved preference; those who work individually would be more reluctant to work in a group.
Understanding whether a student demonstrates an introvert or extrovert personality, will contribute to the outcomes of cooperative learning within the classroom. By implementing effective and strategic cooperative learning practices, teachers can help mitigate bullying behaviors within their classrooms. By starting the year off by promoting positive social peer-to-peer and peer-to-teacher conversations and by maintaining observations of the students in various classroom activities can help teachers create strong connections and help students problem solve when faced with a challenging social situation.

Another purpose of this study is to learn about what outcomes (positive or negative) teachers observe from students in a cooperative learning environment. While it is important to understand that while my purpose is to identify the positive outcomes of implementing a successful cooperative learning environment free from bullying behaviors, the negative outcomes also provide opportunities to develop and enhance the approach further in the future to assist other teachers. For this reason, it is important to follow the three areas Cushman and Cowan (2010) identified in which peer relationships and cooperative learning can provide positive outcomes as long as the educator presents constructive teacher qualities such as; treat students fairly, humor, consistency, engaging teacher strategies such as; open communication, positive student-teacher relationships, and encouragement, and the classroom culture; such as group cohesion, individually recognized, and emotional safety and trust. While every classroom is different, based on the students and teacher, factors such as teacher qualities, teacher strategies, and the classroom culture can attribute to the success or failure of a cooperative learning classroom. By having a strong understanding and variations of all three categories, you can then create that safe space for students to flourish through cooperative learning environments (Konishi et al., 2010).
1.3 Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study is: How does a sample of elementary teachers mitigate bullying behaviors in cooperative learning environments? Sub questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- What range of bullying behavior do these teachers see exhibited in cooperative learning environments?
- What instructional strategies and approaches do these teachers enact to mitigate bullying behavior in cooperative learning contexts and why?
- What experiences inform these teachers’ preparedness in enacting these strategies, and what informs their commitment to anti-bullying?
- What challenges do these teachers experience in this work, and how do they respond to the challenges they face?
- How do these teachers’ students respond to their instructional approach aimed at mitigating bullying behavior? What outcomes do these teachers observe from their students?

1.4 Background Of The Researcher

The topic of bullying within the classroom context hits a variety of cords with me on a personal and academic level. In regards to my personal connection with the topic, I am someone who experienced feeling excluded from classroom activities and group work because of anxiety and low self-esteem from being a victim of bullying. My elementary school experience with group tasks and activities were not divided by level or random assignment but rather the student’s choice of partner or group. As I went through four years in elementary school without peer relationships or connections within my class, I found myself being placed into groups by the
teacher and given the worst job or section to complete by my peers. My level of interest and enjoy in school dropped dramatically as I would find any possible excuse to miss school for days at a time. As a result, I attended summer school for math and language in grades 5 and 6 to increase my grades as the school informed my parents that if my grades did not improve I would be held back. My past experiences with bullying have dramatically altered my current way of looking at cooperative learning as those same fears of rejection, ridicule, isolation come flooding back.

However, I use those current feelings and views of bullying and cooperative learning to my advantage in my post-secondary education and graduate studies ranging from Early Childhood Education to Master’s in Teaching. My past experiences speak to my ability to empathize with students who current are experiencing similar circumstances where they are placed with peers who invoke fear, anxiety, and self-hate and are asked to perform their best. It’s not fair to ask a student who is struggling with their peers to work towards a common goal, as it is more likely that the work being completed was pushed onto one students rather than a collective agreement. Being more aware of the implications bullying had caused me in my junior and adolescent years, I have become more understanding of the expansive workload teachers have on a daily basis. Furthermore, I have also learned that through gradual application of strategies, approaches, and views surrounding the importance of cooperative learning, students will develop prosocial behaviors, that with the teachers assistance, will be monitored and fostered so students can learn to accept other views, opinions, and praises in a positive and constructive manner. A prime example of a collective understanding of my past and current experiences I would use in the classroom would be to implement TRIBES to ensure that all students feel safe, appreciated, and valued within my classroom. TRIBES is a guide in which
students hope to achieve learning goals by following the four classroom agreements: attentive listening, appreciation/no put downs mutual respect, and the right to pass. Students learn and engage with cooperative learning skills that allow them to work well together in their long-term groups (tribes) (About Tribes, n.d).

1.5 Overview

This research study is organized into five chapters through which I have conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two elementary teachers about how they mitigate bullying behavior in cooperative learning environments for the purpose of determining what outcomes (positive or negative) teachers observe from students. In Chapter 2 I review the literature on the effects of bullying on mental health, teacher-student relations and cooperative learning environments. Next, in Chapter 3 I elaborate on the research approach and procedures, instrument of data collection, participant’s ethical considerations, and methodological strengths and weaknesses. In Chapter 4 I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in chapter 5 I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I will then articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and point to areas for future research, which will allow for a continuous awareness of this growing issue students face on a daily basis. At the end of the chapters, a list of references and appendixes will be placed accordingly.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In today’s classrooms, issues surrounding bullying have escalated from being considered a ‘rite of passage’ to a focus on the mental health effects of bullying on students. Much of the research in this area of study is focused on the effects of bullying on students’ mental health (primarily social and emotional), academic achievement, and future psychological and social outcomes. The current research addresses major themes and issues existing within my own study but lacks a focus and inclusion of students’ social engagement within classrooms, primarily cooperative learning. By investigating the current research on school environments, social and academic outcomes, as well as preventative measures, we can create a clear picture of how great an impact bullying has on a student’s overall well-being.

The literature review has been divided into four areas that will explore what bullying is and the different contributing factors that can alter the outcomes of bullying on a student’s social and academic well-being; Definition of bullying, the school environment, the teacher as a facilitator, and cooperative learning.

2.1 Definition Of Bullying

The definition of bullying can vary depending on the person, society, or governing body (Esbensen & Carson, 2009). This is an important issue confronting researchers and policy makers as there is a need to reach consensus regarding what constitutes bullying and bullying victimization (Esbensen & Carson, 2009). As bullying can take many forms, it raises the issue that there may never be one inclusive agreement that is able to incorporate the individual interpretations or bias regarding bullying and bullying victimization. As this literature review investigates the implications of bullying on students’ academic achievement and mental health in
cooperative learning during school, the definition which will be referred to will be drawn from Ontario’s Ministry of Education policy document. The Ministry of Education (2012) describes bullying within the Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention as:

Aggressive and typically repeated behavior by a pupil where, (a) the behavior is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behavior would be likely to have the effect of, (i) causing harm, fear or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, or (ii) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual (p.4).

The Ministry of Education (2012) outlines their interpretation of bullying and some examples to exemplify acts of bullying common within the school to provide educators with some guidelines around this sensitive and possible destructive act. These acts are categorized into two primary types of bullying behavior: direct and indirect. Direct bullying is defined as face-to-face physical and verbal aggression and indirect bullying is more covert in nature and may occur via a third person (e.g. spreading malicious rumors, purposefully isolating others from social situations) (Smith, Polenik, Nakasita & Jones, 2012). Some of the more common direct bullying actions are physical assaults, cruel teasing, being called “bad names,” and social exclusion (Ma et al., 2009) whilst indirect bullying can refer to cyber bullying, spreading rumors, and anonymous messaging (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Among the types of bullying (direct or indirect) bullying can take the form of physical, verbal, electronic, written or other means by which causes one or more people harm, fear or distress (Ministry of Education, 2012). When we look back at bullying over time, it originally began with a focus on aggressive personality patterns that were dependent on social context
As the development and knowledge of bullying has become more prominent in our schools, work lives, and social lives, we have learned that bullying can be considered proactive goal-directed aggression (Salmivalli, 2010). Students who exhibit these bullying behaviors are socially skilled and knowledgeable of manipulative and controlling abilities over their peers in order to reach their desired goal (Salmivalli, 2010). These types of psychological manipulation patterns are still present in today’s bullying but are represented through different formats and contexts. Research suggests that direct bullying is more likely to take place with primary students whereas junior/intermediate students are more likely to engage with indirect forms of bullying (Esbensen & Carson, 2009).

When a student is experiencing any form of bullying, it should be implicit that this is typically not a single occurrence but rather a series of events that have taken place over a period of time as mentioned in the Ministry of Education policy (2012). Smokowski, Evans, and Cotter (2014) incorporate this awareness of repetitive attacks as part of their study when investigating the impacts of current, chronic, and past occurrences of bullying on students school experiences, mental health and social supports. With technology continually developing, there are always new ways that we can communicate with one another either through social media, text messages, or even cell phone applications. Society continues to change with time, as do the behaviors and actions of bullying within our schools. It is important to be aware that changing social contexts and circumstances will alter the way that students commit acts of bullying and whether or not it is easily identifiable by teachers, staff, and parents. Over the last 30 years, schoolwide bullying has been increasingly seen as a prevalent issue facing our students as it can create negative implications for the victims during the present time and the future (Ma et al., 2009). In the results of their study, Smokowki et al. (2014) were able to indicate a positive correlation between
current, past, and chronic victimization with lower levels of academic success, social interactions, and mental health.

2.2 Effects Of Bullying On Students

Bullying can effect a number of areas such as; mental health, self-worth/self-efficacy, and academic performance. While there is a growing number of studies that illuminate the effects of bullying on the various outcomes, actions, and thoughts of victimized students there is a change in how the deliverance of knowledge has been altered from teacher-centered to student-centered. When students who are being victimized in their classrooms experience negative outcomes from those actions and behaviors, they can exhibit diminished mental health, self-worth, and academic performance; especially with the rise of cooperative learning in todays’ classrooms. Understanding how and why these effects take place and the magnitude of the negative influences bullying creates in one or more of these areas, can then attribute to the students engagement and experiences in school.

2.2.1 Effects on Students’ Mental Health

Mental health has been increasingly reported as a growing concern for students in school, as it can dramatically affect their emotional well-being, social connections, and interest in school. While bullying can take many different forms, much of the research found that bullying does affect a students’ mental health after repeated attacks. Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, and Li, Z. (2010) and Smokowki et al. (2014) found similar findings in their studies that bullying victimization is associated with decreased self-efficacy, loneliness, poor social and emotional adjustment, depression, and anxiety after repeated attacks. Smith et al. (2012) had similar results but categorized their findings of mental health outcomes into three categories; self-perception, social acceptance and rejection, and social competence. The results validated prior knowledge of
mental health outcomes by stating that students who were being bullied had low self-esteem/worth, were more likely rejected by peers when attempting to be accepted, and had low prosocial skills (Smith et al., 2012). All of these outcomes present a problem for students in the classroom as it hinders their ability to make positive relationships, create confidence in themselves and their abilities as well as to being actively engaged in school to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

However, even though there is general consensus in the research surrounding the effects of bullying on mental health, Lösel and Bender (2011) discussed within their findings, “whether problems such as anxiety, depression and social isolation are consequences of being bullied, or risk factors for being selected as a victim” (p.89). As this can pose a problem for investigating the outcomes of bullying on mental health, it should not diminish the fact that bullying has been found to cause mental health issues in students. Instead, teachers should be aware of their students’ needs and discuss the topic of mental health to first, reduce the stigma, secondly, to offer help to students who are experiencing mental health problems, and lastly, to provide opportunities for those students to succeed academically.

2.2.2 Effects on Students’ Academic Performance

One common area that has emerged through the inquiry of bullying is around academic performance and success of victimized students in classrooms. Academic performance and outcomes have been widely scrutinized in the area of bullying as it can leave detrimental effects on a student’s performance, engagement, and ability to perform well in school. Lacey, Cornnell, and Konold, (2015) found that peer victimization results in problems such as anxiety and depression, which in turn reduces the students’ enjoyment of school and commitment to learning, and that this disengagement from school results in decreased academic performance (p.5). It is
easy to see that when a student is bullied, a chain of events can unfold that influences a students’ engagement and lead to negative academic outcomes. This statement is reflected in their findings when they used the Standards of Learning exam to test engagement and found a strong link between teasing/bulling and academic success were attributed to the role of student engagement within daily lessons (Lacey, Cornnell, and Konold, 2015). Similarly, Konishi et al. (2010) also found this relationship in their study which focused on math and reading achievement; schools with higher levels of bullying were likely to have lower scores in both academic categories. However, Konishi et al. (2010) found that some researchers had failed to find a relationship between peer victimization and achievement by stating that only relational forms of victimization such as gossiping and verbal emotional abuse were linked to achievement but not direct forms.

In comparison, Ma et al., (2009), Konishi et al. (2010), Popp, Peguero, Day and Kahle (2014) and Lacey, Cornnell, and Konold (2015) who discussed the negative consequences associated with bullying and academic performance, also found that peer, teacher, and school influences play an important role for a student’s academic outcome in school. However, even though the research discusses the influences of bullying on individual success, there is a lack of research into cooperative learning and how those group formations can have a greater effect on the academic success of victimized students. The consequences of bullying are not a standalone concept, they use interlocking influences from the classroom atmosphere, school environment and teacher connectedness to either benefit them or be a detriment to their academic success.

2.2.3 Effects on Students’ Self-efficacy and Self-esteem

When discussing the outcomes of a students’ mental health and academic performance in school, one element that elevated itself throughout the literature was recognizing a student’s self-efficacy and self-worth in association with bullying (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Esbensen &
Carson, 2009; Ma et al., 2009; Cushman & Cowan, 2010; Lösel & Bender, 2011; Smith et al., 2012). Self-efficacy refers to a student’s belief in their ability of being able to accomplish a task or goal (Khoury-Kassabri, 2011), whereas self-esteem is a positive or negative feeling a person has about themselves (Lösel & Bender, 2011). Both self-esteem and self-efficacy imply another important element for students’ mental health as both can project negative feelings and attributes onto one’s own self which can then effect a student’s social and emotional actions, as well as academic success (Ma et al., 2009). While some researches briefly address into self-esteem/self-efficacy within their studies of the effects of bullying (Konishi et al., 2010; Lim and Hoot, 2015; Lacey et al., 2015;) others used those concepts to validate the link between bullying victimization and low levels of academic/personal self-esteem and self-efficacy (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Esbensen & Carson, 2009; Cushman & Cowan, 2010; Khoury-Kassabri, 2011; Smith et al, 2012; and Smokowski et al., 2014).

Esbensen and Carson (2009) and Smokowski et al., (2014) had used a similar longitudinal method and found that students who experienced bullying victimization consistently had lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy within the classroom. By investigating self-esteem and self-efficacy through a longitudinal study they were able to capture a more detailed and expanding knowledge of these concepts in comparison to a one-off study. As a student’s ability to change the way they feel about themselves and their abilities relies on; how comfortable they feel in their classroom environment, and strategies a teacher implements to validate student responses and engagement.

2.3 The School Environment

Students on average spend seven hours a day at school, five days a week, for almost ten months out of the year in school classrooms. During that time, teachers and staff create an
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Environment within the school and their classrooms that models growth learning, peer engagement, and interest in all areas of the curriculum. It is important to investigate the influence an environment has over a students’ ability to perform and function within a classroom and with their peers/teacher. As classrooms and schools continue to develop, more educators are implementing cooperative learning environments rather than traditional individual assessment and evaluation (Persons, 1998). So while looking at negative and positive school and classroom environments, it should be noted that this continual development also contributes to the atmosphere and style of learning. Research has suggested that school success is optimized within caring, supportive, and safe environments (Konishi et al., 2010) without which students will not be able to flourish and demonstrate their abilities of their full potential.

2.3.1 Negative School and Classroom Environments

The type of classroom environment that students are working and learning in has the ability to alter their capacity to learn and feel confident in their skills to actively engage themselves within the classroom. Some teachers, without knowing it, end up creating an environment that is not appropriate for their students to actively engage and immerse themselves into the curriculum (Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015). Teachers may shut down students’ engagement and participation in the classroom by; not supporting trying, placing a student closer to their desk to ‘keep an eye one them’, or even using a students’ work to demonstrate what ‘not to do’. By creating and sustaining negative behaviors within the classroom environment between the student and the teacher, students may be more reluctant to speak up about problems they are facing inside and outside the classroom if they feel they are not respected. This can also be said for the school environment which creates a broader view of bullying (not just seen in classrooms) as it can affect the whole school. Lacey, Cornnell, and Konold (2015) state that;
School-level findings are important from a theoretical and policy perspective because they imply that peer victimization is not limited to individual effects requiring individual intervention with the students who have been bullied but requires a broader consideration of the school climate and potential impact across the student body (p.3).

The environment is shaped by those in it who contribute to the sense of a safe, positive, and constructive learning environment, especially by the teacher’s actions, beliefs, and strategies implemented, which in turn has an impact on the students’ actions (Cushman and Cowan, 2010; Konishi et al., 2010; Lacey, Cornnell, and Konold, 2015). While it is important to focus on the classroom as its own environment, (Konishi et al., 2010) focuses their study on the school level; discussing bullying as an incorporated part of the school environment. Konishi et al. (2010) describe the coloration between bullying and teacher-student relationships as; “…aspects of school climate that reflect an overall level of tolerance for negative interpersonal interactions” (p. 22). Educators must be aware of the impact their interpersonal interactions with students can make as it can determine how that student may act when facing social and/or academic problems.

2.3.2 Positive School and Classroom Environments

When students come to school they expect to attend a community that provides a safe, supportive, and positive environment that can challenge and foster their learning in a way that engages and encourages their participation (Cushman & Cowan, 2010). Students spend a fair amount of time at school and if a student is personally being victimized, they may feel less connected and invested in learning in comparison to more positive school environments (Lacey, Cornnell, & Konold, 2015). Having strong connections to the school includes a students’ enjoyment in attending, but also includes positive experiences they have had with peers and teachers in cooperative learning activities/environments.
One factor that Cushman and Cowan (2010) established through their findings was the importance of the classroom culture to help recognize the multidimensional classroom and help adapt the teacher’s practices to fit the students’ needs. All students have different learning processes, methods, and tools they use to understand the material taught within the classroom so Cushman and Cowan (2010) have argued that teachers should include student interests, emotional and psychological well-being, and safe opportunities to take risks. In order to create this environment, teachers and students are required to co-construct (Cushman and Cowan, 2010) promote self-efficacy/self-esteem (Cushman & Cowan, 2010; Konishi et al, 2010) and have high levels of classroom management (Lacey, Cornnell, and Konold, 2015). To implementing these factors successfully, a teacher needs to be equipped with the right tools and knowledge to create a positive environment for their students which in turn will help students who are being bullied have more positive outcomes with their academic success, peers, and surrounding environment. Knowing the connectivity between classrooms and the school, drawing more attention to the teacher’s actions and approaches with dealing with bullying in the classroom can raise some possible outcomes to support cooperative learning environments.

2.4 The Teacher As A Facilitator

As discussed earlier, the weight of creating a positive environment rests with the teacher and their ability to create a sense of belonging, safety, trust, and respect with their students to allow them to foster their learning in a cooperative classroom. In order to do so, Cushman and Cowan (2010) elaborated on three factors of particular interest to both teachers and students which emerged from their analysis: teacher qualities, teacher strategies, and the classroom culture. In most instants, teachers are at the forefront when addressing issues of bullying within their classroom or school, developing and implementing the right strategies, connections, and
feelings help students to ask for help when they are the victim or when they know the victim. In order for the teacher to become a facilitator they need to ensure that promote and maintain teacher-student relationship while also presenting and engaging with preventative strategies that target mitigating bullying behaviors between students.

2.4.1 Teacher-Student Relationships

Bullying or peer victimization within the school environment can look, sound, and feel differently depending on the student and type of bullying they are experiencing. After looking at both the classroom and school settings, both provide opportunities where teachers and staff can contribute to a constructive and supportive environment to foster a students’ learning capabilities and success. However, it is not enough to look just at the effects of the school or class environment; it is the interactions and relationships made that create opportunities for students to reach out for help and flourish in a cooperative learning environment. Konishi et al. (2010) focused their research predominantly on the importance of teacher-student relationships as they found that closer relationships and better communication with teachers can develop within these environments and, as a result, students may be better able to seek help when they need it.

By establishing strong and trusting teacher-student relationships, students are more likely to feel comfortable with discussing an issue of bullying when they feel that they can trust their teacher to address the problem. Konishi et al. (2010) state that, “Outside the family, schools are one of the primary socialization forces within our culture, and student–teacher relationships play an important role in this process, affecting both academic and social outcomes” (p.20).

In their research, Cushman and Cowan (2010); Konishi et al. (2010); and Smokowski et al. (2014) found in each of their studies that when there was a positive relationship between teachers and students, it enhanced self-worth, contributed to a positive learning environment and
students demonstrated higher academic achievement. Furthermore, Cushman and Cowan (2010) were the one study to discuss how teachers own values and philosophies relating to learning permeate their classrooms and affect students’ experiences. While a lot of the research outlines the positive and purposeful methods of relationships and conveying a safe and open space; it needs to be known that no all approaches and methods are on purpose and teachers should be aware of subtle values and impressions they leave on their students.

Further findings in Konishi et al. (2010) study confirmed that student-teacher connections were an effective way in moderating or diminishing the likelihood that the school climate of bullying would lead to poor academic achievement. In their discussions, the researchers identify and expand on the importance of embedding bullying prevention and intervention strategies on an individual and school level to help elevate the effects of bullying on a student’s academic, social, and mental well-being.

2.4.2 Prevention Strategies

In order for teachers, staff, and students to experience some of the benefits from positive teacher-student relationships that foster trust, respect, and a safe learning environment there needs to be some incorporation of preventative/intervention strategies to understand your students’ needs. In Popp et al. (2014) study of gender, bully victimization, and education, they concluded that having social support from teachers, administrators, and peers that can come to your aid when you are being bullied is critical to ending bullying victimization. By creating and developing social supports on an individual and school level, students trust educators and peers more as victims of bullying often perceive that teachers and peers are unable and unwilling to stop the bullying (Smokowski et al., 2014). Being aware that victims of bullying feel as if those who surround them are unwilling to help makes the issue and effects of bullying more difficult
when looking a cooperative learning environment. Mincu (2015) explored the connection between teacher quality and school improvement and how the role of research can influence outcomes in the students. Mincu (2015) stated that, “…school and teacher practice can only be improved if teachers are actively and collectively engaged in the investigation of problems and produce local and specific solutions” (p.263). In order to perform these solutions, Mincu (2015) states that teachers should be allocated more preparation time explore options, to plan, trial and reflect on what works and what doesn’t work with the students they currently have.

By addressing this issue as a school wide cooperative method or strategy, researchers have established through that teachers who implementing anti-bullying programs (Popp et al., 2014), effective intervention approaches (Cushman & Cowan, 2010; Ma et al., 2009; Lacey et al., 2015), and were involvement in international bullying awareness projects (Lim and Hoot, 2015) have diminish the prevalence of bullying. Cushman and Cowan (2010) who concentrated on teachers creating positive environments for their students found evidence in their study that a teacher needs to have a strong connection with their students in order to implement strategies, intervention or prevention measures, and contact with other staff supports. By continuing to grow and develop these support systems and relationship with students, the hope is that a school wide approach will be taken as well as individual interventions to focus on improving social skills, decreasing risk factors, and minimizing the long-term impact of bullying (Lacey et al., 2015). By combining strong teacher-student relationships, effective prevention/intervention strategies, and teacher skills, more exploration into the effects of that combination are needed to determine how great an effect bullying has on cooperative learning within the classroom.

2.5 Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a concept and method that teachers have been implementing more
within their classrooms to allow students to conduct work in small peer groups to stimulate learning, inquiry, and developmental growth (Persons, 1998). As research states that a substantial amount of what students learn comes from their peers (Cushman & Cowan, 2010) it is important to research and study the effects of cooperative learning with students who experience bullying and how it may alter their academic success, self-efficacy, and school relationships. This context of learning can provide students will positive and beneficial outcomes by working with other peers to stimulate knowledge growth and understanding of new and old material. Cooperative learning is defined as, "...working together to accomplish shared goals. Within cooperative situations, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students; work together to maximize their own and each other’s’ learning" (Johnson & Johnson, n.d, n.p)

This educational and learning approach has developed more through Johnson and Johnson (n.d) insight and development of the five essential principles of cooperative learning that are imperative to the success of any type of cooperative learning in the classroom. Johnson and Johnson (n.d) identified five principles as: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. Each of these five components are required in order to successfully implement cooperative learning in the classroom; however, the social skills and practices of students are more greatly necessary for students before engaging in cooperative learning. Similarly, in order to actively foster these principles in cooperative learning, it is imperative that adequate consideration for grouping, goal setting, and roles and responsibilities are taken into account by the teacher and discussed in greater detail with the students. Students should be grouped for instruction to maximize
opportunities to learn, and the type of grouping can produce different results based on the circumstances (Gillies, 2007).

Within those groups, students should develop and research individual and shared goals in the cooperative learning activity (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008) while also maintaining their role/responsibility in that group to help contribute to the overall group learning (Johnson and Johnson, n.d). However, as this method of learning in classrooms continues to develop and increase steadily over the years, it is under researched in the effects on mental health, academic performance, self-worth/esteem and environmental outcomes. While research has been conducted on the outcomes of bullying on students, little research has been conducted on whether bullying can play a role in the outcomes of students in cooperative learning classroom environments as students are expected to build their knowledge through multiple grouping styles.

Hancock (2004) and Person (1998) have both investigated the cooperative learning process and benefits to interpersonal and social development. Hancock (2004) found that students seemed to value the cooperative-learning process more than they valued learning and students with high peer orientation may have become particularly motivated to learn, whereas students with low peer orientation may have become less motivated. Students who demonstrate low pro-social skills or actively choose to work alone rather than in groups (Person, 1998) they are more likely to dislike the cooperative learning environment that has been established. Lavasani, Afzali , and Afzali (2011) established through the findings of a longitudinal study that students obtained social skills that allowed them to respond respectfully, listen to other’s views, and taught to accept the criticisms. While Person (1998), Hancock (2003), and Lacasani et al. (2011) found that social skills had improved with the implementation of a cooperative learning environment, each study lacks outside factors such as bullying being an issue present when
conducting group formations. While the methods can be difficult in gathering accurate information on the connection between peer victimization and academic success, it leads itself to believe that with a stronger understanding of what teachers interpret from the actions and conversations with their students, they can implant strategies and programs that foster cooperative learning while addressing the issue of bullying.

2.6 Conclusion

In this literature review I examined the research around mental health, the school environment, the teacher as a facilitator, and cooperative learning. This review demonstrates that there is a lavish amount of research on students’ mental health and academic performance and success within the classroom. It also identifies that there is still areas of research that can be investigated further, especially around environmental effects through the teacher as a facilitator and the incorporation cooperative learning and how it may affect those students being victimized by peers within their classroom.

By focusing on teachers’ relationships, prevention/intervention strategies and a cooperative learning environment I hope to contribute further to the informative practices and methods within the research by paying closure attention to mitigating bullying behavior, challenges in classroom management, and enacting strategies in a cooperative learning environment. This study addresses what strategies and approaches teachers implement in cooperative learning contexts, the challenges they face, and the bullying behaviours witnessed inside and outside the classroom. By bearing in mind that the concept of cooperative learning is continually developing within the classroom context, it is my hope to provide a better understanding of implementing strategies and approaches for teachers to mitigate bullying.
behaviors within the cooperative context and provide further training and informative resources to help teachers to implement effective cooperative learning practices in their classroom.

In Chapter 3, I will detail the methodology I used to carry out my research. I discuss my research approach, procedures and the data collection instruments. Next, I state the sampling criteria and recruit procedures used to gain participants and then provide background information on their prior experience, knowledge, and practices. Finally, I explain the data analysis process, ethical procedures, as well as strengths and limitations of my research.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the research methodology within my study. I begin by reviewing the research approach, procedures, and the data collection instruments before exploring in greater detail the participant sampling and recruitment criteria. I then provide information about my participant’s educational and professional development to exemplify their background experience and knowledge in my study’s topic. Following that, I explain how I chose to analyze the data while also stating ethical procedures to ensure participants remain confidential and have the right to withdraw their participation. I then proceed to state the strengths, while also addressing the limitations my study cultivates on top of the existing background knowledge. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions I have made and the rational for those decisions based upon my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach And Procedures

This research study will be conducted using a qualitative research approach that includes a review of the existing literature that speaks to the significance of using this method in combination with the application of semi-structured interviews with two elementary school teachers. It is important that the approach you take when conducting your research compliments the purpose and overall goal of your study to allow the findings and discussion to speak to the key elements that will be addressed and outlined. When conducting research, there are two types of research approaches you can choose; quantitative or qualitative. Malterud (2001) suggests, Rather than thinking of qualitative and quantitative strategies as incompatible, they should be seen as complementary. Although procedures for textual interpretation differ
from those of statistical analysis, because of the different type of data used and questions to be answered, the underlying principles are much the same (p.483).

While both approaches look at the measurement of data collected, one focuses on numerical analysis, while the other emphasizes the exploration of meaning. “Quantitative research allows data to be collected that focuses on precise and objective measurements that use numerical and statistical analysis to support or refute a hypothesis” (Campbell, 2014, p.3). Qualitative research on the other hand is the, “systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or conversation. It is used in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, in their natural context” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). By comparing the two approaches to research, quantitative provides readers with a direct accountability of the data, whereas qualitative research “focuses on eliciting people’s stories” (Grossoehme, 2014, p.109).

I believe that using the qualitative approach in this study allows me to explore and make connections with the elementary teachers and their experience with bullying within a cooperative learning environment. Individual teachers can offer specific insight and stories that cannot be explored in a multiple choice or true and false questions. So rather than using a quantitative method of analyzing objective data to prove a hypothesis, qualitative research can provide open-ended opportunities for educators to be inspired, draw conclusions, and offer experience to support change. From deriving meaning through this qualitative study allows me to understand and express what positive or negative outcomes these teachers have observed from those who have been victimized and what that can do to help future teachers’ plan, prevent, and continually assess in their classroom environments.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

When using a qualitative research method in a study, interviews are the primary method in guiding this style of research. For this study, I share the same belief as Cohen and Crabtree (2006) that semi-structured interviews will provide me with an opportunity to explore specific topics and elements of relevance that arise in the interview that will develop my purpose and answer my research question. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) explain that semi-structured interviews are “generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee(s),…occur with an individual or group,… and take between 30 minutes to several hours to complete” (p.315). One of the major benefits of conducting a semi-structured interviews is to allow me, as the interviewer, more lenience and freedom to ask probing questions as structured interviews often produce “quantitative data” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.314).

According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), interviews that are less structured allow the person being interviewed to be a participant in meaning making rather than a conduit from which information is retrieved. These types of interviews allow the interviewer to delve deeply into the social and personal matters of those being interviewed in order to get a better understanding of their beliefs, practices, or challenges (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interview offers interviewees as well as interviewer, a give and take opportunity that focuses on topics that are relevant and significant to us as educators. “Qualitative methodologies accept that the investigator is part of what is being studied and will influence it, and that this does not devalue a study but, in fact, enhances it” (Grossoehme, 2014, p.112). While semi-structured interviews offer fluidity in the data collected, the benefit of having an
invested interest in the effects of bullying on students in cooperative classrooms allows me to enhance my knowledge with what insight these teachers can offer from their experience.

3.3 Participants

In this section of the chapter, I first review the sampling criteria I have created in order to gather participants for this study based on common academic advancements, experience, and dedication to anti-bullying practices in a cooperative learning environment. I will discuss the sampling procedures which include the type of sampling I used to gather my participants. Lastly, I have included a sub-category in which I will introduce my participants with their assigned pseudonyms in a biography of their background knowledge and experience.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Choosing the right sample of participates relies on your research questions, theoretical perspectives, and evidence informing the study (Sargeant, 2012). For that reason, it is important to have detailed sampling criteria that outline specific qualities and knowledge that participants should have to allow for some control in who would be best suited for this study. I used the following three measures to gather my participants:

1. Teachers will have at least five years or more of full time teaching experience in either the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) or the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

Teachers who have been teaching for over five years have had an opportunity to grow professionally, develop their presence within a school, made connections with their students and colleagues, and implemented their own practices and methods into their classroom. By having a few years of experience, teachers are also able to speak to prior and present students, classroom
management abilities, and types of learners they have and how that translates to a cooperative learning environment.

2. Teachers will have had professional development training in bullying prevention/intervention and have participated in anti-bullying education programming and campaigns in their school.

This study looks at the effects and outcomes of bullying in a cooperative environment on a student’s academic and mental wellbeing. Teachers who are well versed in the background knowledge of bullying as well as informative practice in prevention and intervention strategies will be best suited for using those qualities through classroom management in this style of learning. Knowing that bullying can have a dramatic effect on students, teachers who have developed current skills and knowledge demonstrate their commitment to students and student learning and ongoing professional learning (Ontario College of Teachers, 2012).

3. Teachers will have demonstrated leadership in the area of cooperative learning.

As my study focuses on the effects of bullying on students’ academic and mental well-being within a cooperative learning environment, I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a strong belief and dedication to the implementation and support of cooperative learning platform in their classroom. They will be familiar with benefits and challenges of this development learning environment and be able to offer insight to how they choose to use it and too what degree is it present within the curriculum.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment

Using the sampling criterion that was created in order to establish homogenous traits and qualities required among the participants, the sampling procedure that would be best suited for this study is purposeful and convenience sampling. According to Tong, Sainsbury and Craig
(2007), purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who share particular characteristics and have the potential to provide rich, relevant and diverse data pertinent to the research question (p.352). Convenience sampling on the other hand, is less optimal as you choose the first few participants that agree but they might not capture important perspectives or qualities that were initially outlined in the sampling criteria (Tong et al., 2007, Grossoehme, 2014).

By using purposeful sampling, participants that are selected are those who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sargeant, 2012, p.1). To gather participants using purposeful sampling, I attended professional development workshops and webinars from various associations while also contacting anti-bullying organizations that activity work in partnership with Toronto based school boards. However, because of the constraints placed on the methodological methods that only allows for a small sample of teachers to be interviewed within this study, convenience sampling will also be used to allow me to use my existing affiliations with teachers in the TDSB and TCDSB. I had contacted the principals of the school’s I have had prior practicums in my graduate and ungraduated programs and provided them an outline of my study that includes; a general overview of my topic, the purpose, research question, sampling criteria, as well as my contact information. My main priority is to ensure that I maintain a positive rapport with the participants through trust and respect for the information they share by creating a safe and comfortable space for sharing their personal experiences and attitudes (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Provided in this section is some background information about the two participants who contributed to this research investigation. Pseudonyms were assigned to both participants in
order to maintain their privacy. These bios provide some initial background information on the
grades taught, qualifications, and their past and current connection to the topic of discussion.

Participant #1: Sarah

Sarah is a teacher with the TCDSB and has been teaching for seven years. Sarah is
currently teaching Grade 6 but has taught Grades 4-6 and one special education class in the past.
Sarah had completed a primary/junior teaching degree in at OISE and went on to further her
education by then getting her Masters the following year. Sarah has more experience teaching
the junior grades while also experiencing three school environments from LTOs (long-term
occasional teacher) to her recent full time placement as a junior teacher. All of the schools she
has worked at have been at or above average in their academic ranking and have not experienced
any major concerns in the social/academic outcomes of the students. While there has not been a
large concern for address bullying in the different schools she has worked at, Sarah’s interest and
engagement with this particular area stems from her personal and educational backgrounds
addressing bullying within the cooperative learning school context.

From a young age, Sarah believed that students who were victimized and bullied by other
students in school created a change in their character and demeanor inside and outside of the
classroom. Identifying as a victim of bullying, Sarah stated that her experience being excluded
and emotionally targeted played a huge role in her current beliefs and practiced in implementing
anti-bullying methods throughout her career as a primary/junior educator. Sarah’s dedication
from childhood into her teaching career has developed over the years and she continues to
support and implement programs and events that exemplify anti-bullying practices within
cooperative learning activities for students and other teachers. Sarah has noticed that it is
possible to see a change in her students’ behavior when they understand the appropriate
guidelines and measures that are in cooperative learning.

Participant #2: Matt

Matt is a teacher with the TDSB and has been teaching for nine years. Matt is currently teaching a Grade 2/3 split and has taught Grades 2-8 in the past and has remained at his current school for the past four years. Matt has completed a primary/junior teaching degree at OISE and later gained additional qualifications that allowed him to teach Grades 7 and 8. While Matt has his qualifications to teach junior/intermediate grades, most of his experience in teaching is within the primary grades. Matt’s engagement in the area of anti-bullying practices within a cooperative learning context stems from his experience working with primary school children.

Matt encourages and incorporates cooperative learning practices in most areas of the curriculum so to help younger students develop strong social and emotional skills with one another and learn to problem solve in the correct manner. By implement cooperative learning in the younger grades, Matt hopes that by creating a strong sense of community within his classroom and the school that students will be more likely to talk out their problems rather than resort to physical or social types of bullying behaviors. Through continuous professional development from OISE to current programs, Matt engages in programs and seminars that provide him with accurate and applicable strategies that he can use with his students. By using cooperative learning as a way to mitigate bullying behaviors, Matt hopes that all his students, regardless of age, understand the value in one another and use knowledge building to their advantage.

3.4 Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative research is to interpret the data and the emerging themes to facilitate an understanding of the topic being studied (Sargeant, 2012). In order to analyze the
data collected, the interviews were transcribed followed by coding the findings by means of selecting significant sections from the statements to derive and identify themes that stand out among the participants interviews (Tong et al., 2007). I will include descriptions of the coding and memoing to demonstrate how I perceived, examined, and developed my understanding of the data (Tong et al., 2007). The process of interpreting of the data is described by Malterud (2001) and Sargeant (2012) as being conducted through three stages: deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction. First the data is broken down into component parts, codes, or categories that describe the content (Sargeant, 2012); that data then is interpreted by comparing codes/categories looking for similarities and differences (Malterud, 2001). Finally, the reconstruction requires contextualizing the findings, i.e., positioning and framing them within existing theory, evidence, and practice (Sargeant, 2012, p.2).

The process of data analysis in a qualitative research study allows the researcher to interpret the major themes that appear in the deconstruction of the data in order to establish similarities and differences in their responses and relate that back to the research question and background knowledge. What this implies is that knowledge never emerges from data alone, but is formed from the relation between empirical substance and theoretical models and notions (Malterud, 2001). It is also important to pay close attention to what has not been said in the findings as you contemplate what may be lacking from knowledge to practice or influence your next steps in your research by making suggestions for changes and new motions to take place.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

When conducting any type of research study, ethical considerations need to be at the forefront of every researchers mind. In other words, ethical procedures are put in place to protect participates from mental and physical risks, consent and confidentiality, and exploitation. There
are four major ethical considerations that appear throughout the literature, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), Grossoehme (2014) and Ramos (1989) categorize them as: (1) reducing the risk of unanticipated harm; (2) interviewee confidentiality; (3) effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study, and (4) reducing the risk of exploitation. One element that will address these ethical concerns in this research study is through the use of a consent letter (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) which informs participants about; the purpose and nature of the study and state that information will remain confidential as any affiliation with a school board or associations will be removed and a pseudonym will be given to preserve anonymity (Grossoehme, 2014). It is important that participants understand the parameters of the study as well as their rights as a participant that include anonymity and confidentiality to ensure that the information, practices, and beliefs are not traced back to them. This allows participants to speak more freely during interviews as they are less likely to feel that their choice in words or individual beliefs and practices can harm their future careers as teachers.

In addition to maintaining privacy, the consent letter also outlines that all documents and recordings will be stored on my password-protected computer and be destroyed after 5 years of publication. Ensuring that the data collected during the interviews are stored correctly provides both the interviewer and interview a sense of security and trust (Grossoehme, 2014) in one another that the information will only be used for research purposes and not for personal gain. In order to establish an honest connection between the researcher and the participant, Romos (1989) states that,

Trust and mutual respect must be established through the use of honesty and openness,

and as the researcher expects the respondent to value the research process, he or she must
communicate that he or she, too, expects to deal openly and honestly with the data collection process (p.61).

By creating a sense of trust, participants feel more inclined to provide more information, feedback, and advice during the interviews if they feel that they are going to be well represented and protected from any future actions or reactions that come about after the study.

It is also important participants are informed prior to the interview of any possible risks associated in this study (Ramos, 1989) and that during the interview, the researcher is able to gage the participants level of comfort when discussing topics, events, or subject matter that they may not want to address (Grossoehme, 2014) in order to mitigate any harm. Participants also however, have the right to refuse to answer specific questions that may result in risk and the right to cancel their consent to participate within the study without any consequence to them (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). By continually verbally asking participates if they consent before, during, and after the interview has ended then transcribed, gives them the choice to withdrawal at any point, without reason, and without penalties (Ramos, 1989). Participants have offered their time and insights to help provide guidance around the research question and purpose but have no obligation to the researcher or study to maintain a participant as our lives can be busy and unforeseeable circumstances may also be a factor.

Finally, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) states that the final ethical dilemma is reducing the risk of exploitation for personal gain by acknowledging the contributions respondents make to the success of the research process. It is important to acknowledge those who have helped in the foundation of the research study, but should be done in a way that still upholds the participant confidentiality and anonymity. The participants in this research and others have all contributed their stories, beliefs, and challenges they have faced in order to help
guide the research question in order to better serve the educational field and future researchers.

3.6 Methodological Limitations And Strengths

The purpose and research question of this study focuses how elementary teachers diminish bullying behavior in cooperative learning contexts; proactively and reactively and to describe what outcomes (positive or negative) teachers observe from students in a cooperative learning environment. The study has pre-constructed methodological limitations that consist of a small sample of participants and limiting the research procedures to semi-structured interviews. These qualities are the foundation of this research study and represent both the limitations and strengths present from the beginning to end.

While DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) state that semi-structured interviews are often the sole data source for a qualitative research project, I feel that they do not offer enough insight into the importance of this research topic and purpose in the field. I believe this study lacks the inclusion of observational supports to the statements and occurrences of this research phenomenon that teachers refer to during the interviews (Tong et al., 2007, DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The limited number of participants also means that findings are not generalizable to the teaching field.

The methodological strengths within the research study exemplify the significance of interviewing teachers about their prior and currently values, beliefs, and practices. These semi-structured interviews allow the participants to voice their experience, but also help frame and construct what is and is not working in elementary classrooms sounds mitigating bullying behaviours. The small sample of participants allows this research study to focus directly on a common traits and qualities (Palinkas et al., 2015) among the participants through purposeful
sampling to ensure that those participants will maximize the depth and richness of the data to address the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the research methodology that was used in my study of what mitigating behaviours teachers have used and observed to combat bullying in their cooperative learning environments. I began by explaining my research methods and procedures, outlining the developmental differences between quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis which formed the basic foundation for this study. Through using qualitative methods; which is measured through meaning and interpretation of major themes, semi-structured interviews were the primary instrument used in conducting this research as they offered personal insight and lived experiences that could better speak to the research purpose and question. From there, I clarified how I planned on gathering the participants for this study through the use of purposeful and convenience sampling. Participants were chosen based on a sampling criteria that include; teachers who have demonstrated leadership in the area of cooperative learning, have had professional development in bullying prevention/intervention and has implemented these practices over at least five years in a full time teaching position. Through both of these methods, a group of educators were chosen who can speak highly to the topic of this study while also providing some constructive insights to this developing topic.

After the interviews have been conducted and transcribed, I then explained how I will analyze the data among the participants identifying similarities, differences, and concepts or themes that have and have not been raised. I proceed by outlining ethical issues around consent in participation, confidentiality of personal information and associations, and possible risks associated with some interview questions that could cause unforeseeable discomfort. Lastly, I
discussed the methodological limitations and strengths of this research study and how research approach, sampling procedures, and instruments of data collection provide both strengths that support this type of study, but also limit the possibilities to expanding and relating the findings to a greater pressing issue in today’s classrooms. In Chapter 4, I will report on the research findings from this study.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings that emerged from the analysis of two interviews; one conducted with an educator from the TCDSB and one educator from the TDSB. There is a continual push towards cooperative learning environments, and while bullying remains a top priority in school boards across Ontario, educators have shown their dedication and priority to proactively and reactively diminishing bullying behaviors in their classrooms. To further grasp this mode of learning, I posed the research question, “How does a sample of elementary teachers mitigate bullying behaviors in cooperative learning (CL) environments?” While examining teachers’ beliefs, practices, and challenges, it provided ample data to determine what these educators are doing right, and where future implantations for practice can provide greater assistance. In this discussion, the findings are organized into four main findings; verbal bullying students social and academic situations, self-motivated professional development, positive effects of strategies, and outcomes of CL on student accountability and interpersonal skills. In each finding, I provide a summary of the main topics in that theme, next, I delve into the participants’ data followed by the connections to the existing literature within each subtheme, and finally I summarize my findings and their significance.

4.1 Educators Indicated That Students Verbally Bully Their Peers In Response To Their Social And Academic Situations

Within this study, both participants spoke to the behaviors and actions of their students in relation to bullying of social, emotional, and academic situations in variety contexts within the environment of the school. While bullying continues to be a detrimental act to a student’s mental and physical health, educators continue to adapt and learn more methods and strategies they can
use with their students during and after cooperative learning moments. Both educators spoke about various forms of verbal bullying that stemmed from interactions with students during and after classroom times. Furthermore, both participants indicated that students who were being bullied in their class demonstrated lower academic performance and social involvement and engagement in classroom lessons. By first being able to identify the types of bullying behaviors in relation its’ context can assist educators in determining their next set of actions and strategies that can then contribute to appropriate measure to implement in cooperative learning activities.

4.1.1 Educators observed students often engaging in verbal bullying which affected the bullied students’ self-esteem and self-worth in the classroom

Both participants indicated that they observed their students often engaging in verbal bullying that would often alter the demeanor of that student during and after class. Bullying continues to be a widespread presence within our schools. While the literature outlines the continuous presence of bullying within our schools, our students today are still lacking the appropriate abilities required to help diminish those behaviours and limit the amount of harm they can cause one another. Both participates stated that a first priority when addressing these verbal behaviors from students was to identify the difference between bullying and name calling. Bullying was defined as repeated behaviors over a period of time whereas name calling was attributed to as an occasional behavior. Matt spoke about the most common verbal putdowns he had observed in his primary classroom: “There was repeated name calling and students telling other students that they are not welcome because of their ‘weirdness’.” Matt believes that students bully other students because they are not familiar with their way of speaking, actions, or even interests stating that sometimes students fear ‘the unknown’ because it is not something that they might personally do so therefore it is considered strange.
This behavior of labelling peers as weird or strange not only can contribute to them feeling excluded or ostracized by the group, but can also effect that student’s idea of their self-worth/self-esteem. Sarah spoke to the responses she has heard her students say after repeatedly being bullied by their peers: “I’m not as smart as you think I am, I know I’m doing it wrong, and can I please do it alone?” Hearing these types of statements and questions from students makes a direct connection to the literature on the outcomes of bullying on students’ mental health.

Smokowki et al. (2014) and Konishi et al. (2010) found in their studies that bullying victimization is directly associated with decreased self-efficacy, loneliness, poor social and emotional adjustment, depression, and anxiety after repeated attacks. Similarly, Smith et al. (2012) found that students who were victimized were also more likely to be more rejected by peers when attempted to be accepted due to their low prosocial skills.

4.1.2 Educators indicated they observed students verbally degrading students on their academic involvement and abilities in cooperative activities

Students have a variety of qualities and characteristics that make them who they are; while some students excel in certain areas of study or in skills, others may require more assistance to help them reach an average standard. Both participants drew reference to the idea that students are more familiar with the idea of competition rather than cooperation and experience challenges and difficulties when they begin to implement cooperative learning activities and practices into their classroom. Both participants describe how their students were accustom to competitive motivations in academics and found that their students took longer to adapt to cooperative practices which were not individually focused but rather required a group effort. The element of bullying plays a huge role in the students’ ability to make that transition from competitive to cooperative learning.
Matt identified a common theme in his classroom in which students would, “constantly make fun of someone because they either did too poorly or that they aced it.” Matt referenced a variety of strategies he has used to turn students away from the idea that their peers are “too smart or not smart enough” but rather focus on the areas in which they have succeed and can help others such as students taking on the roll as a teacher to their fellow classmates. Matt described what he would say to his students in cooperative learning groups: “You might have individual roles, but you will succeed as a group; help each other, talk, and give constructive feedback. There is no point wasting time on being negative to your peers”. Giving these students a different way of looking at cooperative learning had shown a difference in their behavior but not in all areas.

Sarah continues this notion of student isolation and exclusion from academic opportunities by stating, “Students want out of activities, they feel like they are not allowed to participate. They feel they are ‘burdening’ their peers in their efforts to complete the activity”. The participants believed that it is necessary that students feel accepted, wanted, and needed throughout daily lessons in school and for teachers to implement cooperative learning methods; students learn more about their peers’ strengths and use it to better the group rather than draw attention to their weaknesses. Sarah describes this behavior as “missed opportunities”; when there is a barrier for students in their learning due to their peers degrading their abilities and knowledge, they are missing out on further developing their own knowledge of the material by engaging with multiple perspectives, opinions, and views.

Johnson and Johnson (1998) stipulate that if students are not demonstrating all of the prerequisites of CL they will not be able to function well and cause more harm than benefit. While both participants implemented and guided cooperative learning methods in their
classrooms, their students still struggled with developing the concepts required to successful cooperative learning. Similarly, Baker and Clark (2010) found in their research that students in cooperative groups used their time efficiently but struggled to learn effective group skills. Students who feel this reprisal from students for either not doing well, or exceeding expectations may reduce their involvement in cooperative lessons in the class to withstand comments made by their peers. Therefore, it could be argued that there is a strong connection between the participants and the research that identifies a greater need for more effective forms of cooperative learning that focus on developing and maintaining the prerequisites of CL.

4.1.3 Educators indicated that students who experienced peer victimization demonstrated lower academic performance in individual and cooperative learning activities

Both participants indicated they observed that their students who were victimized demonstrated a decrease in their academic performance in individual and cooperative learning activities. Matt noted to his most recent experience with a victim of bullying and noted, “When a see a student, especially in the older grades, getting bullied, I always see the grades dropping; they become apathetic towards everything and stop caring”. Sarah similarly spoke of the negative effects bullying can cause students on their academic performance by saying, “It can impede their learning…they don’t feel that their voice is valued, encouraged, or supported”. However, both participants found challenges in their methods of grouping students together.

Matt explained that he took a grouping approach that provided space between the bully and the bullied student in the beginning before grouping them together, Sarah acknowledged that her approach to grouping might be different but more worldly applicable. Sarah explained that she instilled a method that brought the bully(s) and victim(s) together so that they could work through their quarrel by incorporating group talks, real world applications, and teacher guidance.
Sarah states that “It is important for them to realize that even if they don’t 100% like working with that student for whatever reason that they need to move past their differences and actually talk with one another to ease the tension.” While both participants invoke a different method in grouping their students to help address the issues of bullying, both still had observed a decrease in the victim’s academic performance regardless of their efforts to mitigate this behavior.

In their study on bullying and academic outcomes, Lacey, Cornell, and Konold, (2015) found that peer victimizing not only lowered students’ enjoyment, engagement, and commitment to learning in school but it directly contributed to a decrease in academic performance. When students lack the exposure and experience of learning through engaging within classroom lessons, it is greatly expected that those students will experience some repercussion in relation to their academic performance. Similarly, Konishi et al. (2010) found in their study, which focused on math and reading achievement that schools’ with high levels of bullying produced lower scores in both math and reading. This finding in the literature connects directly to Matt’s observation of his students’ performance during math periods. Matt shared that his students will not actively try in math and when asked to participate, some students would respond “I’m not good at it” to avoid group work and focus their attention on studying for the individual test. As a result, research suggests that engagement in lessons, group formation, and cooperative learning activities can contribute, if well planned, implemented, and maintained, success in all academic area both individually and as a group.

4.2 Educators Indicated That Their Personal Experiences And Self-Motivated Professional Development Led To Their Commitment To Anti-Bullying Practices In Cooperative Learning Classrooms

Within this study, both participants spoke to the important role educators play in
developing and teaching students to encompass the practices and beliefs needed in creating an anti-bullying classroom. This desire stems from the participants’ prior experiences and interest in advocating for students that have and are experiencing bullying in at home or at school. Both participants spoke to their prolonged exposure to anti-bullying practices and how it has influenced their current values and beliefs in the teaching profession. While continually being an active member in promoting and advocating for anti-bullying practices, both participants found that there was a lack of school board-based resources and workshops readily available. Furthermore, this lack of easily accessible resources and workshops did not impede on either participant’s dedication and integration of self-educated units and guided school assemblies to help inform students and staff of preventative and informative methods they can use. Through continuous and self-motivated initiative, both participants demonstrate the commitment required of educators in the elementary school environment to support students and staff develop positive attitudes to anti-bullying practices.

4.2.1 Educators identify that their prior personal experience had amplified their dedication to implementing anti-bullying practices in their classroom

Both participants in this study outlined the influential impacts of their childhood experiences with bullying on their current interest and engagement in anti-bullying practices. Each participant had both direct and indirect experience with bullying in their elementary schools and outlined the important role educators and adults had in helping students prevent and address bullying happening to them or someone they know. Reflecting back on that prior experience, both participations stated that their current values and beliefs about anti-bullying practices were shaped by their past views and experiences’ about bullying. Both participants
made a personal commitment to their students to advocate for those who may be struggling and have continued to do so over their teaching careers.

Matt identified a moment from his first year teaching in which he was informed about a student suicide in his school. Matt highlighted a specific moment in time that resonated with his dedication the most as it “made him wakeup”. At that time Matt was surprised and shocked that they had no idea that this student was having any problems or had shown any sign of distress. Matt spoke to the effect on himself as an educator by saying, “In terms of my class, it helped me be more willing to listen to students about what is happening at home; it’s helped me more receptive of students behavior and pick up on key things that I might have otherwise ignored.”

Sarah had focused her commitment to anti-bullying practices through being a personal advocate in her younger years and into her teaching practicums. Sarah expressed her frustration in what she observes in her classroom:

You see those kids that are left out and it’s aggravating and frustrating for a teacher to continually watch those kids be excluded. And then, I took the initiative to create clubs for these students to find a positive outlet for these students to be themselves and accepted by others.

The importance of incorporating positive prior experiences and beliefs into the classroom was a finding in the literature that it not only helps construct the students’ values and beliefs in the area of anti-bullying, but others as well. In their study of teachers’ and students’ views regarding self-worth in the elementary school learning environment, Cushman and Cowan (2010) found that teachers needed to be aware of their values and philosophy related to learning as it can create an impact on the students’ experiences. The way in which a teacher creates and maintains an attitude and feeling in their classroom can affect the experiences of students in that classroom;
teachers who enact a sense of community in their classroom can encourage students to speak more freely without judgement or fear of failure. Sarah describes her beliefs from the start of the year by stating, “It was a part of my base foundation for my classroom that I wanted my students to be a part of a different type of learning, and anti-bullying practices contributes to that a lot”. Both participants demonstrated a strong keenness in developing their knowledge and involvement in anti-bullying measures in their school and classroom environments. Therefore, it could be argued that the role of the educator in the classroom contributes the most to the direct and indirect outcomes of their student behavior, values, and beliefs when they are continually adapted and influenced by

4.2.2 Educators identify primarily using self-education to acquire the knowledge and skills on anti-bullying and cooperative learning practices due to a lack of resources

Both participants agreed that there was a lack of support systems and professional development workshops that would better their understanding and abilities in addressing bullying in their school system. While their initial engagement with these practices stemmed from their prior beliefs and experiences, both participants found it difficult to continue developing their knowledge as it was challenging to locate and enroll in various learning opportunities. Due to time constraints and difficulty in locating resources provided from the school boards, both participants felt that they had to “self-educate” and navigate their own learning in their area by collaborating with other educators and building from scratch units.

Sarah spoke specifically to the need in the school board for mandated workshop and seminar time in the area of anti-bullying education. Sarah emphasized, “I think it definitely needs to be a school-wide process… when it already takes so much time to plan and you then have go to research more on an important issue to the board can be very frustrating”. However, Sarah
elaborating on this idea of self-education through research by stating, “I think there was a lot of things that I tried that may not necessarily have worked but through trial and error I think was helpful in the end to be able to see some positive results”. Matt addressed a similar idea to the importance of conducting research and implementing it on a school wide initiative by stating that,

I wish we had more time to attend these workshops, sit down with people like guidance counsellors and behavior specialists, so that way, we would have a bigger arsenal of techniques and strategies to use in the classroom to prevent and address minor and major incidents within our classroom and our school.

So while there may be struggle to find the balance between what is expected of teachers and what they hope to implement, both participants make time to research anti-bullying and cooperative practices even with the lack of guidance. Both Sarah’s and Matt’s statements align with the literature on teacher advocacy in the area of cooperative learning and anti-bullying practices. Mincu (2015) found that school improvement was closely tied to a teachers’ professional development and that research actively promoted school improvements. However, Mincu (2015) also found that there was a lack of funding to provide teacher with adequate time due to insufficient funding in the schools. So while the research outlines the positive contribution teachers researching and implementing their findings within the school is counteracted by the lack of available opportunities to give teachers the time outside of their regular obligations to conduct such research. As this area is continually being studied as an influencing factor, the findings may be not generalizable to all teachers as self-education, resources, and time is dependent on the individual teacher and the school board.
4.3 Educators Recognize That The Strategies Used In Their Classrooms Have A Positive Impact On Students’ Social And Academic Performance

Within this study, both participants spoke of their use of strategies in the classroom that had a profound impact on their students’ social and academic performance when working in cooperative learning groups. Each participant highlighted several strategies that created positive outcomes for students. Both participatees agreed that it was not only important to create strong relationships with individual students to understand their needs and concerns as a learner, but also create a sense of community within their classroom, allowing all students to feel safe and comfortable. Furthermore, both participants spoke to the importance of using preventative strategies and methods to improve students’ peer to peer relations by promoting more effective forms of communication, motivation, and participation to contribute to their academic performance. Understanding the importance of implementing various strategies and methods with students gives educators a common goal to guide students to impact their social and academic performance.

4.3.1 Educators recognize that building strong individual relationships and sense of community with their students creates a resilient trust and comfort in one another

Matt and Sarah noted the importance of building a sense of community within their classrooms to allow students to feel safe and comfortable in that environment so they are supported in their efforts and do not fear reprisal from peers. Matt and Sarah have both taken TRIBES as a professional development course to increase their abilities in creating a positive classroom environment that ensures students are respected, respectful and appreciated by peers and teachers. Matt refers to the TRIBES content as creating “respectful communities” that allows students to build relationships so they can empathize, understand, work in a positive manner with
their peers. In order to instill this process with his students, Matt approaches each new school year by speaking about the difference between a fixed and a growth mindset. By connecting community building and growth mindset, Matt states,

I try to instill the idea of a growth mindset in my students. I explain that we are always learning and expanding our minds and by having opportunities to work with others benefits you as an individual, but can also greatly effect that peer’s learning as well.

Matt spoke to the difficulty of implementing and encouraging his students throughout the cooperative learning process, but found that through perseverance and personal discussion with students, he was able to address issues around bullying behaviours. Through engaging his students with a variety of activities that promote a growth mindset, it established an opportunity for students to build trust, understanding, and comfort around one another. Matt continued by stating that, “It’s important for me to take the time to get to know my kids; what they like, their learning style, things going on at home etc., because all of those things will contribute to how they learn in my class”.

Sarah spoke more to the value in creating and supporting effective relationships between the students slightly more than teacher-student relationships. “When you build those relationships, students feel as if they are part of the group, you want them to encourage each other, feel motivated, and be excited to learn new things about each other and topics in school”. This statement is present in the literature as Konishi et al. (2010) and Cushman and Cowan (2010) found that the teacher-student relationships held the most impact on a student as it created a sense of trust an understanding between both people to allow students to ask for help when they need it. In terms of peer-to-peer interaction and interdependence, Hancock (2004) found that students valued the cooperative learning process in which students were able to contribute
on equal standings due to the grouping style rather than feel that their social abilities were a contributing factor to their inclusion. Therefore, it could be argued that both relationships can contribute to a student’s sense of community, trust, and comfort with each other as both relationships offer students a chance to get to know one another, learn from each other, and feel valued in their abilities and contributions to the group.

4.3.2 Educators recognize the effectiveness of preventative methods and strategies in addressing issues between peers in a group

Both participants believe that it is imperative that teachers implement preventative methods and strategies to address issues that may arise between peers in a cooperative learning environment. Matt states,

In order for students to fully understand what is expected from them in their cooperative learning groups, we reiterate the community agreement from TRIBES and participate in things like role play, book readings, and whole group discussions to determine how we should handle a bullying problem or dispute between peers.

Furthermore, Matt continued by elaborating on how he would observe and interact with groups to elicit deep conversations and problem solving measures that can address issues within that moment but can later help peers problem solve on their own. These types of conversations and activities help students have shared experiences so that they are not fully reliant on the teacher to help problem solve but can attempt to use gained skills and knowledge to address these issues on their own.

Matt ensures that students develop a “constructive mind” that supports active and positive constructive practices between students in his classroom. Matt defines a constructive mind as a preventative method that gets students to stop, think, and then speak. Matt believes that this
method provides students with time to think about what the other person has said, determine whether what they want to say is constructive and not deconstructive, and then say a comment, idea, or thought that can support their peers in that specific context.

Sarah had implemented several of the same preventative methods and strategies as Matt but described a focus on classroom and school wide initiatives to educate students on the effects of bullying on social and academic outcomes. Sarah shared, “I actually ran an assembly on anti-bullying, started and supported a club for excluded students, and taught educators on cooperative learning as it is so important to students’ social and academic skills”. Sarah believes that to address these issues in a school-wide format is more impactful as it demonstrates that this is a real issue and that teachers, staff, and students will address any problems that arise in order to find stable ground.

By creating and developing social supports on an individual and school level, Smokowski et al. (2014) found that students will perceive teachers and students as supporters rather than unwilling bystanders. Research suggests that students are more likely to feel this way as Popp et al. (2014) found that teachers who implemented anti-bullying programs found that they were able to diminish the prevalence of bullying. As a result, these social supports for students can appear in any form as Cushman and Cowan (2010), Ma et al. (2009), and Lacey et al. (2015) found that as long as the intervention strategies are implemented in the moment to address a problem or issue between students it will then relieve any severe concern or outcome. Research suggests that teachers and schools should recognize the effects preventative methods and strategies have on an individual and school-wide level can also affect their students’ interest, engagement, and participation in school.

4.3.3 Educators recognize that importance of peer to peer communication, motivation, and
participation as it can result in a positive impact on academic performance and mitigating bullying behaviors

Both participants believe that it was essential for their students to improve their communication, motivation, and participation if they were to successfully integrate themselves into cooperative learning for it to be effective. Matt referred to this as “affirming deep connections” between peers to strengthen the bond and relationship they have with one another. Matt outlined the key elements that are crucial to cooperative learning, “I believe it is important that students understand that they are being cooperative and not competitive…they need to rely on one another, help one another, talk to one another, and communicate positively to promote interaction and problem solving.” The goal of cooperative learning is to ensure all students not only demonstrate the five principles of CL outlined by Johnson and Johnson (1998), but that they then use those skills in other of individual or whole class learning. The five principles of CL are Positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, face-to-face promotive interaction, and group processing. These principles focus on effective interpersonal connections with peers while also requiring each individual to be responsible, proactive, and effective in their communication and actions with their group members. While it might be unrealistic for educators to implement cooperative learning throughout every lesson, it does help lay the foundation for students in future areas of study.

Sarah describes her cooperative learning environment as “students creating understanding”. Sarah believes that her students, when working in cooperative learning groups, have an opportunity to get excited, be engaged, and learn something new. Sarah has observed students’ excitement, active participation, and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation over the course of her experience implementing cooperative learning. Sarah spoke to the opportunity students get to
guide their own learning, be active learners, and who are motivated to do better, they appreciate
those moment in comparison to “just having the teacher talk all day”. Sarah states that, “By
including things like, interests, student choice, co-constructed expectations, and the correct
language, students will surpass your expectations and surprise you in their abilities”.

Through creating cooperative learning moments in your classroom, the literature states
the positive impacts effective management and guidance of students can improve their academic
performance and bullying behaviors. In their research, Cushman and Cowan (2010) found that
there was a strong connection between the effects of cooperative learning on bullying and stated
the possibility of CL effecting their success, self-efficacy, and school relationships. Research
suggests that teachers who implement and demonstrate an understanding for students’ growth
and development in communication, motivation, and participation, can better support all of their
students to develop positive habits of mind. Sarah, like Matt, believes that with time, dedication,
and some consideration for different students, their abilities in interpersonal communication will
impact their success in cooperative learning environments, their academic performance, and
positive peer relations.

In the literature, Lavasani et al. (2011) and Hancock (2003) both found that students who
participated in cooperative learning groups demonstrated stronger social skills: listening, eye
contact, respectful of others views and opinions, and the ability to accept constructive criticism.
Consequently, it could then be said that the participants who implemented opportunities to
develop students’ communication, participation, and motivation in cooperative learning activities
also could have impacted their students’ academic performance and social skills.

4.4 Educators Identify Positive And Negative Outcomes In Implementing Cooperative
Learning Associated With Students’ Accountability And Interpersonal Skills
Within this section, participants conversed and highlighted the positive and negative outcomes in implementing cooperative learning and how it has effective their students’ accountability and interpersonal skills. By outlining the positive and negative outcomes educators have observed could provide information for future research into developing strong and more accurate methods and strategies of delivering cooperative learning. Understanding where students can continue to develop their skills can also draw reference to their prior knowledge and experience in individual accountability and interpersonal skills. Educators identified that while students demonstrated interest and engagement with cooperative learning, they struggled with developing their interpersonal skills and vocabulary necessary for effective cooperative learning. Furthermore, educators emphasized that their students demonstrated some improvements in their motivation, reliance, and personal self-worth but could improve further with more effective practices and methods.

4.4.1 Educators identified that students required continuous guidance to improve their interpersonal skills through developing their vocabulary, verbal communication, and listening skills

While planning, implementing, and maintaining an effective cooperative learning environment in their classroom, educators found that their students struggled to develop their interpersonal skills and vocabulary needed in effective cooperative learning lessons. Both participants spoke to the notion that their students had difficulty in grasping the five principles of cooperative learning. Without this foundation, their students required more guidance and experiences to continually practice positive communication, listening, and problem solving skills.

Matt explained one of the challenges that teachers face on a daily basis: “I'll be honest, in
the lower grades there isn't really a lot in terms of support, it comes down to the teachers”. Matt explains his frustrations with the school system, outlining the lack of fundamental supports needed for educators to implement successful cooperative learning in their classroom. Matt emphasized that educators want to incorporate more cooperative learning in their classroom, but in a way that students are able to effectively demonstrate all five principles of CL. Matt draws attention to the lack of interpersonal skills and vocabulary his student possess and the methods he has tried to implement in order to develop those areas. Matt stated; “…vocabulary is there to help the students understand that what they're saying isn't necessarily wrong but it's how it's being said that affects a student and how they think”. Similarly, Sarah had a similar experience with a colleague about their students’ lack of vocabulary and interpersonal skills. Sarah stated, …we realized that a lot of our kids didn't have social skills and for whatever reason, and I think potentially could be because of the amount of technology that they're using all the time that they don't know how to say, "I disagree with you" in a nice way. So just very simple things, like language that they could use, making sure you spend time with the kids on constructing some kind of guidelines for the cooperative learning then I think then it can be a successful thing within any classroom. Teachers take into consideration a large about of preparation it takes to plan and implement lessons on the daily basis while also drawing attention to the needs and abilities of their students. Sarah explains, “…no matter how much you try to prepare them, to give them language, to give them things, they will still potentially get into an argument of some sort or some kind of conflict”. So while their efforts to mitigate bullying behaviors in cooperative learning may be slowed, Sarah suggested “putting some time and effort into constructing some guidelines or co-constructing some rules for cooperative behaviour, and then also giving them some time to also
work with some language development”. Cooperative learning and social skills seem to go hand in hand, as Lavasani et al. (2011) established in their research that students who possessed strong social skills are able to be respectful, listen to others, and accept criticism. Similarly, Hancock (2003) found the same results in their study on motivation and achievement by concluding that cooperative learning has the power to alter a student’s disposition towards peers in a positive manner with the appropriate guiding strategies. Furthermore, research suggests that educators should maintain a focus on the development of these social skills. In the literature, Baker and Clark (2010) found that most educators did not have the time to carry out the five prerequisites of cooperative learning with their students. Therefore, research suggests that in order to implement successful CL that fosters and supports positive social skills and communication, teachers require supporting resources and guides to improve their CL knowledge and practices.

4.4.2 Educators identified that improving motivation and self-worth among their students proved to be a challenge due to lack of resources but exhibited positive impacts in cooperative learning groups

Both participants spoke to the responsibility teachers have to their students: to build relationships, teach each other new things, and problem solve together. Applying those social skills with their students, both participants saw that there was an increase in student motivation and self-worth though it took time to get there. Both participants stated that while their motivations for cooperative learning were based on their personal and professional experiences, they believe that effective cooperative learning can mitigate bullying behaviors in their students. By developing those prerequisites such as relationships, community building, and social skills, will in turn have a positive impact on students’ motivation and self-worth in cooperative learning situations.
While there is difficulty in influencing a students’ motivation, self-worth, or reliance, there are some methods both participants have implemented to see that increase in those areas. Matt mentioned, “You want to make learning interesting and engaging. I just don’t give them a project to do unless it requires some type of hands on investigation… I don’t want them to get a sense of sameness, so I change it up”. Matt hinted to the idea that by altering the method of teaching and the type of teaching it is, students may be more inclined to participate and feel motivated to problem solve in order to come to a solution. However, Matt also mentioned that things may not always work out but it can provide an opportunity to take a step back, assess the situation, and try a new way to get that student’s motivation and self-esteem back up.

While Matt took the approach of frequently changing the methods and strategies used in cooperative activities, Sarah choose to increase students’ self-worth and motivation to learn by incorporating their interests and hobbies into the lessons and creating her own lessons on self-esteem to help her students respect and love themselves. Sarah acknowledged that,

Students want to have fun. Sometimes I find that the material is dry and I want to make them more interesting for the students… having student find out what they’re good at and go with it can help address some of these issues.

By incorporating things like students’ interests, choice, and/or areas of study or skill that they are good at can increase that student’s motivation and self-worth when they feel as if they are able to contribute to the group more effectively. Sarah highlighted a past event in which those students who demonstrated low self-esteem were more present in an interest-based project group and recognized that “they seemed finally excited”.

Sarah’s choice in increasing student motivation and self-worth by increasing students’ interests aligns with Cushman and Cowan’s (2010) findings which determined that students’
individual needs and interests was a fundamental part in any type of learning situation. While Hancock (2003), Person (1998) and Lavasani et al., (2011) all found that students’ social skills and self-esteem had improved with the implementation of a cooperative learning environment, each study lacks how bullying behaviours can influence those outcomes. By investigating the practical outcomes of cooperative learning on students experiencing bullying in the classroom, this study identifies the contributing factors that are present prior and during the teacher’s implementation of CL. Both participants felt that cooperative learning was a method of practice that can be used to mitigate bullying behaviours as students develop stronger interdependence and social skills with their peers that they might otherwise develop in an individualistic classroom learning environment. In conclusion, it could be argued that while there are elements that can attribute to increased student motivation and self-esteem within cooperative learning groups, the research has not yet account for or investigated how bullying can play a role in the students development of these skills in this type of learning environment.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed my research findings and categorized them into four main themes that were present in the data and made connections to the existing literature on this topic. In the first finding, I found that teachers observed students verbally bullying their peers based on academic and social performances inside and outside of the classroom. Both participants spoke to how their students often pre-judged their peers before learning more about their strengths as a person and as a learner. The second finding outlined that participants were self-motivated to implement anti-bullying practices into their classroom due to their prior experiences. The participants spoke to their dedication and passion for anti-bullying but stated the struggles of
implementing cooperative learning due to the lack of resources and time allocated in their school; which resulted in a greater focus on self-education.

The third finding looked at the various types of strategies the participants used created a positive impact on their students’ behaviour and actions inside the classroom. Both participants found that implementing preventative strategies such as TRIBES, to create a sense of community, increased their students’ participation, respect, and motivation in the classroom. Lastly, the fourth finding examined the outcomes of CL on students’ accountability and interpersonal skills. While both participants spoke to an increase in their students’ accountability and social skills after a period of time, a greater degree of focus was placed on the continual practices teachers had to implement due to students’ lack of listening, communication, and problem solving abilities. Cooperative learning and bullying are two areas of study that are on the rise. By identifying a possible connection between bullying and cooperative learning, this study draws upon the possibility of using the cooperative learning method to mitigate bullying behaviors as cooperative learning has been known to increase student academic success and social abilities.

Subsequent, in Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of my research study, my recommendations for the educational community, areas for future research, and the significance of my findings in this research to the broader educational community.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the implications and recommendations that have surfaced as a result of my research study. I begin by providing an overview of the key findings of my research and their significance. I then discuss the implications of these findings for the educational community as well as the implications for me as a teacher and as a researcher. After identifying the implications of these findings, I make recommendations for policy makers in the Ministry of Education, school boards, and elementary school teachers to help speak to the research findings. Next, I identify important areas of further research on how cooperative learning can mitigate bullying behaviours in the classroom. Finally, I conclude this chapter by summarizing my findings and discuss how this research will benefit the future of education and the educational community.

5.1 Overview Of Key Findings And Their Significance

In this present study, I organized my key findings in four main themes that address the literature and the participants’ personal experience in implementing cooperative learning into classrooms in conjunction with bullying behaviours. My first theme is: Cooperative learning classroom educators indicated that students verbally bully their peers in response to their social and academic situations. Participants observed that some of their students often experienced verbal bullying in relation to their academic abilities and general personality, which resulted in the decrease of the victims’ participation within classroom activities and lessons. Both participants implemented strategies to combat the idea that even though they believe that their peers may be different, they are still able to contribute something to the groups’ overall learning. While much literature (Konishi et al., 2010; Lacey, Cornell, and Konold, 2015; Smokowki et
al., 2014) discusses the negative consequences of bullying on peers’ academic and social abilities. These findings identify that in order to implement effective cooperative learning, students should be continually developing their communication skills in a variety of contexts.

The second theme found in my research is: Cooperative learning classroom educators indicated that their personal experiences and self-motivated professional development led to their commitment to anti-bullying practices in cooperative learning classrooms. Within this study, both participants spoke to the important role educators play in developing and teaching students to encompass the practices and beliefs needed in creating an anti-bullying classroom. The participants’ dedication, which originally stemmed from their prior experiences in anti-bullying practices within a cooperative learning classroom, lead them to personally self-educate themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to implementing cooperative learning and anti-bullying practices effectively. Both participants spoke to the lack of time, funds, and resources available to them in the TDSB and the TCDSB, which confirmed Mincu’s (2015) findings that there is a lack of funding and time in the schools to support educators’ professional development. Therefore, educators who present interest in implementing effective methods of anti-bullying practices in cooperative learning are limited by the constraints of access and time.

The third theme found in my research is: Cooperative learning classroom educators recognize that the strategies used in their classrooms have positive impacts on student social and academic performance. Within this study, both participants spoke of their use of strategies in the classroom that had a profound impact on their students’ social and academic performance when working in cooperative learning groups. By first creating a sense of community using the guidelines in TRIBES, both participants were able to create meaningful relationships in the classroom that fostered respect and trust for one another and the learning process. Within this
community, participants found that addressing issues when they first arise develops their students’ problem solving and peer communication skills. Research suggests that students who participate in cooperative learning groups demonstrate stronger social skills, respect for others, and the ability to accept constructive criticism (Hancock, 2003; Johnson and Johnson, 1998; Lavasani et al., 2011). As a result, research suggests that engagement in cooperative learning can contribute, if well planned and implemented, success in students’ academic and social abilities.

The final theme within my research is: Educators identify positive and negative outcomes in implementing cooperative learning associated with student accountability and interpersonal skills. While planning, implementing, and maintaining an effective cooperative learning environment in their classroom, both participants found that their students struggled to develop their interpersonal skills and vocabulary. Participants addressed that students are not often able to demonstrate accurate active listening strategies, point of view, and appropriate language use, which are all specific expectations within the Ontario Language curriculum. Both participants found that including students’ interests and engaging topics, in union with developing interpersonal and communication skills, improved students’ social skills and self-esteem. While research supports this finding (Hancock, 2003; Lavasani et al., 2011; Person, 1998), each study lacks how bullying behaviours can influence positive social and communication outcomes in cooperative learning. This study offers insight into this gap in research by addressing how bullying behaviors can not only be diminished by cooperative learning, but can then improve the social and academic outcomes of bullied students.

5.2 Implications

Given these findings, I outline the implications of my research findings for the broader educational community, including school boards, schools, and teachers, and my own
professional practice as an educator and researcher.

5.2.1 The Educational Research Community

The literature on the effects of bullying is quite extensive in highlighting the negative outcomes on students’ social skills, academic performance, and self-esteem inside and outcomes of the classroom. In more recent years, the Ministry of Education (2012) has recognized this as a serious issue that has a significant impact on the students’ safety, mindset, and overall school climate and created a policy to outline how to address bullying called PPM 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention. While this approach demonstrates a strong intention to ensure that students who are bullying are addressed through a progressive disciplinary manner, it remains up to the school boards and schools to enact and maintain that standards outlined in this policy. Both participants highlighted that students continually exhibited bullying behaviours in their classrooms but did not mentioned whether these students’ actions were addressed by the school’s principal. It is important that school boards and schools understand what is expected of them when policies and teams are created in order to address bullying as a serious issue.

This lack of accountability in the schools and school boards is reflected back in the actions of the educators who then outsource knowledge and resources that can help support their efforts in the classroom to address bullying as a growing issue. Educators find that it seems impossible to spend a portion of their planning time to researching and attending professional development courses. Both participants highlighted that each of their respective school boards were either limited or unable to readily provide resources and time away from the classroom. By limiting the funding, time, or access to these resources, educators are also limited in what they can accomplish in their classrooms through cooperative learning methods with students who are exhibiting bullying behaviours.
Continually participating in professional development is key to an educator’s overall and continuous growth in current methods and practices for teaching, the expectations of teachers over the years has grown exponentially. While it is the hope of the Ministry of Education that all of the expectations in the curriculum should be met, this is often not the case. Both participants highlighted that their students had not developed the prerequisite skills in listening, point of view, or vocabulary that would allow them to, first, participate in cooperative learning, and, second, communicate with one another in a positive manner. Effective interpersonal skills should be a priority for all educators to develop with their students in every grade as these skills will be used in real life situations and future practice.

5.2.2 My Professional Identity and Practice

I have always had a strong commitment towards anti-bullying education in schools as my own prior experience comes directly from being a victim of bullying for over seven years during elementary and high school. I continue to be a supporter in developing and sustaining effective anti-bullying practices within the early childhood and formal education years to help students foster and develop effective interpersonal and problem solving skills. In the teaching context, I have become more aware that schools often exhibit an interest or engagement with anti-bullying practices either during Bullying Prevention Week or when the school experiences a major tragedy as a result of bullying. I believe that it is imperative that in order to successfully implement policies or progressive discipline when it comes to bullying, teachers should be continually developing communication and interpersonal skills between their students after first creating a safe and respectful classroom environment. I believe by working with more experienced educators who have been implementing this method of anti-bullying in their classroom would not only provide me with more applicable information, but provide me with an
accurate representation of what to initially expect. Furthermore, each year will bring with it a new set of students and challenges; the extent to which I am aware of the types of learners I have and their individual personalities will determine how my classroom will promote respectful and considerate communication and discussion between the students.

I believe that the role of the teacher is important in many ways. I believe by discussing this topic with current educators who are attempting to implement this method of mitigating bullying behaviours that it should expand to a school-wide approach. In terms of my own research practice, it is critical that I continue to work with teachers, staff, and principals in developing an effective method of learning that not only helps students meet curriculum expectations but also mitigates bullying behaviours in the process. I believe it is important for all educators to continue their learning and research the topics that interest them the most, allowing them to find strategies, methods, and practices they can try for themselves and choose which works best. I believe it is important for me as a future teacher and researcher that I continue to balance these two roles to enhance my capacity as a teacher to meet the needs of all my students.

5.3 Recommendations

After considering the implications of my research study on the broader educational community, this section will consist of the recommendations into three key areas: faculties of education, schools, and teachers.

5.3.1 Faculties of Education

- Implement a mandatory training course that critically examines the negative effects of bullying and the different types of strategies and practices that can be used inside the classroom and in the school to mitigate bullying behaviours.
- It is important that teacher candidates are taught how to implement and engage with cooperative learning in the classroom by taking a training course that demonstrate the multitude of methods, practices, and positive outcomes on students’ social and academic performances in the classroom.

5.3.2 Schools

- Provide resources to each teacher and/or staff member that outlines ways to critically discuss and learn about bullying, suggestions on how to foster and develop good communication and problem solving, and prevention/intervention strategies.

- Implement monthly presentations for staff and students that reflect on a theme of that month in relation to anti-bullying practices (ex. peacemaking, forgiveness, etc.).

- Ensure that each school has a plan readily available to all teachers, staff, and parents that discusses how to address an issue of bullying at school for everyone involved and the possible next steps if students are unable to address this issue.

- Offer teachers and other staff member more opportunities to engage in professional development that include time, funding, and in-school seminars around anti-bullying and cooperative learning in the classroom.

5.3.3 Teachers

- Co-create and sustain a safe and positive classroom environment that supports respect and trust in one another and encourages students to feel confident in participating in a variety of learning opportunities.

- Learn more about your students’ individual needs, interests, and experiences to create authentic and meaningful learning opportunities in the classroom that motivates students to participate and engage with their peers.
- Implementing preventative strategies and methods with students to promote effective and constructive communication and interaction with peers.
- Use the curriculum as a platform to incorporate anti-bullying practices to allow students to make connections in a variety of contexts that may not directly be their own.
- Develop and maintain the necessary language skills to be to ensure that students effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings in a constructive manner.

5.4 Areas For Further Research

In order to maintain accurate representations and methods to combat bullying behaviours in our schools and classrooms through cooperative learning, further research is needed that looks directly into the specific outcomes of bullying on students in cooperative learning. While much of the research in this area of study has looked at the negative outcomes of bullying on a student’s social and academic performances and abilities inside and outside of the classroom, little research has looked at how cooperative learning can mitigate those behaviours if implemented effectively with students. Given the current research on the positive effects of cooperative learning on a student’s social and academic performances, a longitudinal study can determine the outcomes of cooperative learning. While gathering personal testimony from educators who have implemented cooperative learning and have seen the outcomes provides some insight, gathered observations and monthly assessments over the course of the school year could provide further research that directly associates positive outcomes while also reducing bullying behaviours. In order to conduct such research, it would be vital to ensure that the teachers are well trained in cooperative learning methods and have experience in anti-bullying practices. These two avenues would bring deeper insight into the use of cooperative learning to mitigate bullying behaviours and how teachers have witnessed a change in their students.
5.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I provided a short summary of my findings as outlined in Chapter 4, including cooperative learning teachers’ strong commitment to using this method to mitigate bullying behaviors. Research suggests that students who participated in cooperative learning demonstrated stronger social skills, respect for others, and the ability to accept constructive criticism (Hancock, 2003; Johnson and Johnson, 1998; Lavasani et al., 2011). However, teachers who implement cooperative learning often find that their students do not possess the required language skills to successful use cooperative learning (Hancock, 2003; Lavasani et al., 2011; Person, 1998). By possessing the right language capabilities, students will be better equipped to address problems in a constructive and considerate manner. As bullying continues to be a growing issue within Ontario schools, the implications for this study reflect the similar beliefs of the Ministry of Education (2012) which implemented PPM 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention policy.

As a teacher and researcher, I believe it is my vocation to bring more in depth and applicable knowledge and practices to not only enlighten other teachers to do the same, but encourage the Ministry of Education and school boards to increase accountability to make a better learning environment for all students. With that in mind, I provided recommendations for the Faculty of Education, schools, and teachers that included providing resources, school accountability, and building trust and respect for one another. By further addressing this issue in future research; I believe it is possible for all teachers to use cooperative learning as the main platform to combat bullying in our schools, truly making each school a safe and respectful learning environment.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date: _______________________________________

Dear __________________________,

   My Name is Madeleine Savoie and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how elementary school teachers mitigate bullying behaviours in a cooperative learning environment. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have demonstrated leadership in the area of cooperative learning, have had professional development in bullying prevention/intervention and has implemented these practices over at least five years in a full time teaching position. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

   Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. 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. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

   Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.
Sincerely,

Madeleine Savoie

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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Madeleine Savoie and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ____________________________________________

Name: (printed) ___________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. My research study aims to learn how a sample of elementary school teachers mitigates bullying behaviours in a cooperative learning environment.

This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on five categories: your teaching background information, perspectives and beliefs, practices in the classroom, supports and challenges, as well as next steps. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio recorded.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How many years have you been teaching for?

2. What is your current position?
   
   a. What grade are you currently teaching? What grades have you taught in the past?

3. Can you tell me more about your school? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)

4. Does your school run any anti-bullying programming? (E.g. clubs, whole school assemblies, extra-curricular). If yes, please describe the range of programming.

5. What experiences contributed to you developing a commitment to cooperative learning, and to enacting it in your classroom teaching practice?
   
   a. Personal experience?
   
   b. Educational experience?
   
   c. Professional development experience?
6. How long have you been actively engaged with creating a cooperative learning environment?

7. And what about your commitment to anti-bullying. Can you tell me more about what experiences contributed to you develop an interest in this area, and what experiences have helped prepare you for this work in your teaching?
   a. Personal experience? (e.g. own experience with bullying in K-12)
   b. Educational experience? (e.g. university course work, teachers college, additional qualifications, professional development)
   c. Professional experience (e.g. teaching experience, involvement in clubs, prevalence of bullying in classroom/school)

8. How would you describe your current group of students?
   a. What types of learners do you have? (e.g. interpersonal, intra-personal)
   b. How prevalent (widespread) is bullying in your classroom/school?

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**

1. What does bullying mean to you? What do you include and exclude in your characterization of bullying?

2. In your view, what are some of the central reasons why bullying occurs?

3. What are some of the consequences of bullying that you have experienced or observed?

4. How do you think bullying affects a student social and emotional wellbeing?

5. Why do you think it is important to address bullying in schools? Why are schools as an appropriate place for this work?
6. Do you think that schools and/or teachers are doing enough to address the issue of bullying in schools? Why or why not?

7. In your view, what role does cooperative learning have to play in anti-bullying education?

8. What is the relationship between cooperative learning and bullying, in your experience?

9. In what ways, if any, have you seen cooperative learning environments contribute to increased bullying behavior amongst students?

10. In what ways, if any, have you seen cooperative learning environments mitigate bullying behavior amongst students?

Teacher Practices

1. What does cooperative learning mean to you? What does it involve?

2. If I were to spend a day in your classroom, what evidence would I see and hear that you enact a cooperative learning approach in your classroom?

3. Do you tend to enact cooperative learning more often in a particular subject area or do you incorporate it throughout every subject?

4. In what ways do you prepare your students for the implementation of cooperative learning within your classroom?
   a. Do you incorporate anti-bullying awareness into that implementation?
   b. In what ways have you talked or enacted the process of providing constructive feedback, what it means to work together, and how group work implies that each student is expected to do equal work?

5. Do you randomize student groupings or do you specifically choose which students work together?
a. (If you choose) What are some of the criteria you apply and considerations you make in grouping students.

b. Do you tend to create homogeneous or heterogeneous groupings? Why?

c. Are there times you would not place certain students with each other in a group? Why?

d. (If yes) Do you think that it impedes their learning if they are not allowed to work with certain students?

6. How, if at all, do you take into account a student’s learning style when grouping them together?

7. What are some key instructional practices and considerations that you take to mitigate bullying behavior in cooperative learning environments?

   a. Can you provide me with some detailed examples?

   b. What do you consider when planning and implementing cooperative learning in your classroom when it comes to students’ peer relations?

   c. What strategies do you enact in turn and why?

   d. How do students react to these strategies? What outcomes have you observed from students, in terms of their social and academic well-being?

   e. How did you learn about these strategies and approaches?

8. How would you describe the classroom climate that you seek to establish in your classroom?

9. What are some of the goals and expectations you have created around cooperation within the classroom?

   a. Do you co-construct these with your students?
10. Have you included some expectations around mutual respect, constructive feedback, or valuing the views and opinions of others? If so, how, can you give me an example?

11. How do you typically respond to the needs of a student who is being bullied in your cooperative peer learning environment? How do you respond to the perpetrators of bullying?

**Supports and Challenges**

1. What challenges do you confront mitigating bullying in a cooperative learning environment? How do you respond to these challenges?

2. What support services or resources does the school board offer you or your students around bullying and peer victimization?

3. What factors and resources support you in enacting anti-bullying education? (E.g. supportive school climate, leadership, access to material resources, classroom space, access to technology etc.)

4. What resources would further support you in enacting anti-bullying education?

**Next Steps**

1. What goals, if any, do you have when it comes to developing your anti-bullying programming?

2. What advice would you give new teachers who are committed to enacting cooperative learning in their classrooms, but who are concerned about bullying and how it impacts students’ learning experience?

Thank you for your participation.