Bully Prevention

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to share with those interested parties the results of my action research study, which is how best to prevent bullying and promote prosocial interaction among a group of eighth grade students attending an elementary school located on the northeast coast of the United States. The study sprang from the need to increase the children's prosocial behaviors and state and federal mandates that require schools to address the problem of bullying in schools.

In the United States, the state and federal governments recognize that bullying is a problem within the school systems across the county. As such, the department of education in my state, in accordance with the federal government's legislation, No Child Left Behind, is mandating that all public schools, adopt a safe school plan, which, among others issues, specifically addresses bully prevention. In response to these mandates, my school district is following suit, and the Bully Prevention Steering Committee at my school requested that I implement a bully intervention plan tailored to accommodate a group of eighth graders whom staff identified as students most in need of prosocial education.

After identifying bully prevention as something that could be improved upon within my educational institution, I then reviewed the literature regarding bullying before designing and implementing a series of seven lessons to bring about a positive change within lives of my study group participants. I completed the action research cycle by examining the effects of the intervention, which consisted of seven lessons that were conducted one per week for seven weeks.

Area of Focus Statement

The purpose of this action research study was to curb bullying behaviors while promoting prosocial student interactions within a group of eighth grade students that staff had identified as most in need of such an education.

Research Questions

- Do the students understand and recognize bullying behaviors?
- Is there a noticeable reduction in the occurrence of bullying?
- Is there a noticeable increase in prosocial behaviors/random acts of kindness?
- Are the unstructured environments, where bullying is likely to occur, safer now?

- Are the students' school lives improved because of the intervention?

Review of Related Literature

My review of the literature allowed me to learn what experts define as bullying behaviors and the pervasiveness of such behaviors through out society. The literature provided insight as to how to curb antisocial behaviors and promote socially acceptable behaviors thereby improving the school lives of the children.

During the course of reviewing best practices, I found that experts recommended a whole school developmental program be instituted to address bullying behaviors (The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 2001, Rigby 1995, Cleary & Palmer, and Olweus 1993). According to the experts such an intervention plan proved to provide the best results.

Because children have a limited concept as to what constitutes bullying, it is important to begin an anti-bullying movement by providing the students with a definition of bullying, which will help the children identify such antisocial behaviors (Olweus 1993). An all-inclusive definition of bullying provides the children with a uniformed understanding of what constitutes such behaviors (Olweus 1993; Rigby 1995; U.S. Department of Education 1998).

To assist in extinguishing bully behaviors experts recommend promoting a compassionate school climate by creating a Caught You Caring campaign where the students' prosocial behaviors are recognized and rewarded (U.S. Department of Education 1998). Garrity, et al., states, "The caring majority of children must create the climate of the school. This is the foundation and the backbone of [a bully prevention] program. The power balance shifts away from the bullies to the silent caring majority when they have the knowledge and skills to intervene to help victims. These students set the tone that carries the message, 'We treat others kindly in our school'" (1997 p235).

Awaking the silent majority and encouraging bystanders to become involved in bully prevention, is the key to eliminating bullying behaviors (Olweus 1993). As Cleary & Palmer find, "Most pupils (80%) are not actively involved in bullying. They neither bully nor are victims. They know it's wrong but unless they are asked for help, or are made to feel they have a responsibility or duty to act, they will silently collude with the abuse" (p3). If the pupils are taught that school officials value students who report bullying incidences, bystander reporting will increase, which will exert peer pressure on bullies to conform to prosocial behaviors.

School personnel need to provide students with assertiveness training, problem-solving practice, and conflict mediation because such techniques have shown promising results as alternative prosocial responses within the school setting (Studer 1996). Lumsden concurs with Studer and states, [school officials need to take] "a proactive stance by implementing programs that teach students 'social skills, conflict resolution, and character education' because such programs produce prosocial behaviors" (2002 para 18).

Parental involvement is crucial to extinguishing bully behavior (Olweus 1993; Rigby 1995; U.S. Department of Education 1998). Because environmental learning affects children's behaviors, it

is important to have parents reinforcing prosocial behavior while discouraging antisocial behaviors. Parental involvement in the school's bully prevention campaign increases the likelihood of the program's success (Purkey & Juhnke 1994).

Experts claim that unsupervised school environments are the most common places where bullying occurs. Such experts recommend that a survey be administered to determine the children's safety in unstructured school environments like the bus stop, playground and cafeteria (Purkey & Juhnke 1994, Maine Project Against Bullying 1999). This helps identify bully hot spots within the school culture.

Data Collection

The following is a list of the types of data sources used and a description of what they intended to measure:
Pre- and post-tests were completed by the student participants. The pre-test was administered prior to the intervention, and was used to evaluate the students' understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviors. The same test was administered after I implemented the intervention. The pre-test findings were compared to the post-test findings to determine the relative success of the intervention.

Surveys were completed by the teacher and student participants prior to and after the intervention. They were used to evaluate the teachers' and students' attitudes regarding the students' antisocial and prosocial behaviors and the students' feelings of safety in unsupervised environments. The findings from both surveys were compared to determine the relative success of the intervention.

All scores were averaged, based on the value, 1-4, assigned to the response and the total numbers of participants, which were twelve students and four teachers. The findings from the students' pretests and posttests were noted but not charted.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the Pre-Intervention and the Post-Intervention average scores on the Teacher Attitude Scale regarding the occurrence of student prosocial behaviors. Behaviors were scored on a four-point scale: 1 Regularly; 2 Sometimes; 3 Rarely; 4 Never.

Table 1

Behavior	Pre	Post	Direction
Actively including others so they are not socially excluded	1.75	1.50	Increase
Paying others compliments	2.00	2.00	No change
Reporting or speaking up if others are being mistreated or bullied	1.50	2.50	Decrease
Actively listening to others' view points	2.25	2.00	Increase
Participating in random acts of kindness	1.75	2.00	Decrease
Willingness to compromise	2.00	1.75	Increase

Willingness to accept others rights to their point of view	2.00	1.75	Increase
Refusing to listen to or spread rumors	2.25	2.25	No change
Refusing to listen to or partake in gossip	3.00	1.75	Increase
Actively cooperating with others to promote a win-win environment for all involved	2.00	2.00	No change
Willingness to speak out against the use of racial, ethnic or sexual slurs	2.50	1.75	Increase

Table 2 presents a comparison of the of the Pre-Intervention and the Post-Intervention average scores on the Teacher Attitude Scale regarding the occurrence of student bullying behaviors. Behaviors were scored on a four-point scale: 1 Regularly; 2 Sometimes; 3 Rarely; 4 Never.

Table 2

Behavior	*Pre*	*Post*	*Direction*
Teasing in a mean way	1.00	1.75	Decrease
Calling hurtful names	1.50	2.00	Decrease
Social exclusion- left out of things on purpose	2.00	2.00	No change
Threatening-coercing	3.00	3.00	No change
Hitting, kicking or pushing	2.00	2.50	Decrease
Destroying another's possessions	2.25	2.25	No change
Gossiping	1.00	1.25	Decrease
Spreading rumors	1.00	1.75	Decrease
Taking possessions	2.00	2.25	Decrease
Using graffiti	3.25	3.00	Increase
Using racial, ethnic or sexual slurs	2.25	2.00	Increase

Table 3 presents a comparison of the Pre-Intervention and the Post-Intervention average scores on the Student Attitude Scale regarding the occurrence of student prosocial behaviors. Behaviors were scored on a four-point scale: 1 Regularly; 2 Sometimes; 3 Rarely; 4 Never.

Table 3

Behavior	*Pre*	*Post*	*Direction*
Actively including others so they are not socially excluded	2.00	2.25	Decrease
Paying others compliments	1.83	2.25	Decrease
Reporting or speaking up if others are being mistreated or bullied	2.75	2.33	Decrease
Actively listening to others' view points	1.83	2.33	Decrease

Participating in random acts of kindness	2.25	2.33	Decrease
Willingness to compromise	2.25	2.16	Increase
Willingness to accept others rights to their point of view	1.50	2.25	Decrease
Refusing to listen to or spread rumors	2.66	2.58	Increase
Refusing to listen to or partake in gossip	2.83	2.83	No change
Actively cooperating with others to promote a win-win environment for all involved	2.25	2.25	No change
Willingness to speak out against the use of racial, ethnic or sexual slurs	2.41	2.16	Increase

Table 4 presents a comparison of the of the Pre-Intervention and the Post-Intervention average scores on the Student Attitude Scale regarding the occurrence of student bullying behaviors. Behaviors were scored on a four-point scale: 1 Regularly; 2 Sometimes; 3 Rarely; 4 Never.

Table 4

Behavior	Pre	Post	Direction
Teasing in a mean way	1.33	1.41	Decrease
Calling hurtful names	1.58	1.33	Increase
Social exclusion- left out of things on purpose	2.41	2.41	No change
Threatening-coercing	2.50	2.50	No change
Hitting, kicking or pushing	2.66	2.16	Increase
Destroying another's possessions	2.75	2.16	Increase
Gossiping	1.83	1.58	Increase
Spreading rumors	2.16	1.75	Increase
Taking possessions	2.66	2.33	Increase
Using graffiti	3.16	3.50	Decrease
Using racial, ethnic or sexual slurs	2.33	2.83	Decrease

Table 5 presents a comparison of the of the Pre-Intervention and the Post-Intervention average scores on the Student Safety Scale regarding feeling of safety in unsupervised environments. Behaviors were scored on a four-point scale: 1 Regularly; 2 Sometimes; 3 Rarely; 4 Never.

Table 5

Location	Pre	Post	Direction
In Classroom	1.41	1.75	Decrease
On Playground	1.75	1.91	Decrease
In Lunchroom	1.50	1.50	No change
Walking to or from school	1.50	1.58	Decrease
In Restroom	1.25	1.83	Decrease
In Hallway	1.41	1.66	Decrease
On School Bus			

The true or false Student Pre- and Post-Tests provided insight into the twelve students' understanding and ability to recognize bullying behaviors. The Student Pre-Test yielded an average score of 87.8 % for the twelve student participants. This was calculated by totaling the students' individual scores, which was 1054, and dividing that total by 1200, which represents a perfect group score. The average Student Post-Test score was 96.5%. This is an 8.7% increase over the average Student Pre-Test score.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

When the results of the pre-intervention surveys were compared with those of the post-intervention surveys, the majority differed by only a few tenths of one percent. Although there were very slight changes proven out by the findings of the data collection instruments, on the whole, there appeared to be little to no significant change in the students' feelings of safety in unsupervised environments or the students' and teachers' perceptions of the occurrence of antisocial and prosocial behaviors among the student participants. However, when the pre-test findings were compared to the post-test findings there was a significant increase in the participants' ability to conceptualize those behaviors that constitute bullying.

The finding that there was a noticeable increase in the students' understanding of what constitutes bullying, proved by the comparative findings of the student pretest to the student post test, could explain the minute decrease in the students' feelings of safety in unsupervised environments; in fact, the minuscule increases in antisocial behaviors and the minute decreases in pro social behaviors recorded from the comparative findings of the students' pre- and post-intervention surveys could also be attributed to their increased sensitivity to bullying behaviors and their increased ability to recognize those behaviors that constitute bullying. This was an important observation, which could be used to explain any minute changes that ran counter to the objective of the action research study. Because of their increased ability to recognize antisocial behavior, the students appeared to be more sensitive to such behavior and better able to detect it, which may have accounted for any of the minute increases of antisocial behaviors or decreases in prosocial behaviors recorded from comparing the pre-intervention student surveys to the post-intervention surveys.

The comparative findings of the teachers' surveys were not much different from the students in that any changes were miniscule. The teachers' comparative survey findings regarding student behavior found more positive changes, although very slight, than the students' comparative survey findings regarding their own behavior. Although the teachers' analysis of student behavior was more in keeping with the overall goal of the action research project, the findings did not support any claims to significant change.

Action Plan

Based on the findings of my study I plan on making several changes to my intervention before implementing the new improved intervention.

The intervention should be a whole school reform movement.

The experts found that a school wide anti-bullying program yielded the best results; however, during the time of my action research project, the intervention along with its participants functioned in a vacuum within the larger school community. Failure to implement a school wide intervention greatly reduced the chance of attaining the desired outcome because the vast majority of the school community, with whom the students interacted with daily, continued with their same routine behaviors.

My intervention should consist of longer lessons and an increased number of lessons to overcome the obstacle of age and learned behaviors inherent in an older student population.

External factors proved to be obstacles to a successful intervention, which include embedded behaviors that come with age. The group of action research students had years of conditioning. The conditioning of the participants in my study, whether influenced more by family or society, has resulted in a high rate of occurrence of antisocial behaviors. The age of the participants coupled with their deep-seated behaviors was therefore an obstacle to realizing a successful intervention.

In the effort to improve the intervention, I should require parental involvement, thereby attempting to negate environmental factors at home that run counter to the objective of the intervention.

Researcher errors prevented the intervention from succeeding too. I failed to include the participants' parents in the intervention, which according to the experts was a necessity for success (The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 2001, Rigby 1995, Cleary & Palmer, and Olweus 1993). Many of the learned antisocial behaviors that this group exhibited could be traced back to their home lives or society in general, which was why I needed to included as many outside school participants, like parents, as possible.

Final Thoughts

I would like to credit G. E. Mills for the format I used to create this summary and conclude with the following thoughts (2003).

There were many factors that prevented a more successful outcome from occurring. They included the following: the errors of the researcher, the ingrained behaviors that were the byproduct of the age of the participants, the influence of daily social and familial factors that ran counter to the research project, and the duration of the action research project. I provided the preceding not to make excuses for the shortcomings of the intervention but rather, to tailor the intervention to negate those factors before implementing the modified intervention.

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