A Comprehensive Review of Literature

Evaluating the Bullying Behaviors

Affecting Elementary Students

by

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ABSTRACT

Bullying and its various effects have become a serious issue for many elementary
students. The responsibility lies within each of us to end this cycle and ensure each child a safe
and secure environment where they can learn, share, and play every day.

The purpose of this study was to understand and identify the bullying behaviors of
elementary school students, recognize the role that each participant plays in a bullying situation,

increase the knowledge for eliminating the bullying behaviors, and improve the ability to enhance classroom climate by the development of student programming.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted and conclusions and recommendations were reported. The review focused on the roles of the bully, the bullied or the victim, and the bystander or the witness as they relate to bullying behaviors at the elementary school level. It also included an examination of the literature on teacher attitudes and their effects on successful student achievement.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Bullying has become a serious issue for many elementary students. In order for us to break the cycle of this violence, we need to do more than just identify and stop the bully. As Coloroso (2003) has stated, "We need to examine why and how a child becomes a bully or a target of a bully…Bullying is a learned behavior. If it can be learned, then it can be evaluated, and then changed." (p.xvi, xxi) The goal of this study is to research and examine how safe elementary students feel, the impact of each role in a bullying situation, and what we can do to prevent and eliminate these behaviors from our school settings.

We, as teachers, try very hard to create safe, secure, and comfortable environments for our students. Sometimes school is the only place that children can go to feel this safety. However, for many students, school has now become a place of aggression and indescribable fear. It has been estimated that close to one in seven school children has either been a bully or a victim in a bullying situation. (Entenman, Murnen, & Hendricks, 2005)

Our students should be in school to learn together. When they become threatened, or fearful, this learning can no longer take place. Survival then becomes their way of life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the identification of bullying behaviors, recognize the roles that each participant plays in a bullying situation, increase the knowledge for eliminating the bullying behaviors, and improve the ability to enhance classroom climate by the development of student programming.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions.

1. How and why does a child become a bully?

2. What are bullying behaviors at the elementary level?

3. What is the impact of the three roles in a bullying situation?

4. How can we prevent or eliminate bullying situations in our schools?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are included to familiarize the reader with the terminology used throughout the study.

Bullying: a conscious and willful act of aggression or manipulation by one or more people against another person or people. It is any kind of ongoing physical or verbal mistreatment where there is an imbalance of power or a desire to intimidate and dominate (Entenman et al., 2005).

The Bully: generally someone who has a need to feel powerful and in control. They appear to derive satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering on others, seem to have little empathy for their victims, and often defend their actions by saying that their victims provoked them in some way (Banks, 2006-2010).

The Bullied: sometimes referred to as the victim or target, is someone that has been singled out by a bully to be the object of scorn and thus the recipient of verbal, physical, or relational aggression, merely because he or she was different in some way (Coloroso, 2003).

The Bystander: sometimes referred to as the witness, can have many roles depending on the person or the situation. The bystander may take an active part but not actually start the bullying, they may support the bullying but not have an active role in it, they may like the bullying but not display any open support for it, they may watch and never take a stand, or they may dislike the bullying and think they should help, but do not (Coloroso, 2003).

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was that no human subjects were used. Though much of the information gathered and studied came from research with human subjects, without this first hand experience it is hard to fully understand and express the feelings of those involved in bullying situations.

I do believe that the accounts and information included in this study are accurate, however, a human study would have given a voice to each person involved and explain why it is so important for us, as adults, to become involved.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand the identification of bullying behaviors, recognize the roles that each participant plays in a bullying situation, increase the knowledge for eliminating the bullying behaviors, and improve the ability to enhance classroom climate by the development of student programming. The following description will illustrate the importance of each role in a bullying situation and what adults and teachers can do to break this cycle of violence, both with awareness and prevention. Every child has the right to a safe and secure environment in which to learn and it is our job to insist that this becomes a reality.

The topics that will be discussed will be the bullying behaviors that are destroying this reality, each role that our students participate in during a bullying situation, and how to effectively change our classroom climate to reflect a positive result.

Bullying Behaviors

Bullying Statistics (2009) reports that "about 77 percent of students have admitted to being the victim of one type of bullying or another and the American Justice Department bullying statistics show that one out of every four kids will be bullied sometime throughout their adolescence." Additionally, research shows that "the typical curve of bullying behavior peaks during the middle-school years, particularly in eighth grade, and decreases during high school" (Kert, Codding, Tryon, & Shiyko, 2010, page 195). In the classrooms of today, school bullying has created a crisis between our students. Learning is compromised, social relationships are damaged, and the classroom climate is declining (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009). Bullying can take place in many different forms, but most often will be repeated over time (Banks, 2006-2010). If action is not taken to stop these bullying behaviors they have the ability

to progress into adulthood, and more specifically, into the workplace. Bullies can move into positions of authority creating powerful sources of distrust, fear, and dysfunctional behavior, only to continue the cycle (Bullying Basics for K-12 and the Workplace, 2011).

Physical Bullying Behaviors

These behaviors can be easily identified as they are the most visible and are usually in the form of hitting, punching, biting, kicking, pushing, scratching, and any other tangible action. Physical bullying, in the extreme, may also result in severe injury or death (Entenman, et al., 2005).

Nonphysical or Psychological Bullying Behaviors

These bullying behaviors come in two forms: verbal and nonverbal. Remember the old adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me?" Any child on the receiving end of hurtful or damaging words could tell you that that saying is not true (Coloroso, 2003). Verbal bullying usually consists of threatening another person or group of people, name-calling, teasing, spreading rumors, abusive telephone calls, and any other form of verbal intimidation. Nonverbal bullying can also occur in two ways: direct and indirect. Direct nonverbal bullying would appear as a mean face to someone else or a rude gesture. Indirect nonverbal may include manipulating or ruining friendships, purposely excluding others, ignoring another person or group of people, or isolating someone, among other indirect hurtful behaviors (Entenman, et al., 2005).

The most frequent type of bullying behavior is nonphysical. Even though boys tend to be more physically aggressive, verbal intimidation, including teasing and name-calling, is still the most widespread of each type of bullying behavior. Also, while it is true that boys will more often bully one-on-one, girls will usually bully in groups. Girls will also be more verbal and psychological in their bullying behaviors (Entenman, et al., 2005).

Bullying will always include three elements: 1) an imbalance of power, 2) an intent to harm, and 3) the threat of further aggression (Coloroso, 2003). This study will continue to examine these as each role in the bullying situation is further researched.

Role of the Bully

The role of the bully can be performed by anyone. Bullies learn that using aggression is an acceptable way to get what they want (Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana, and Evans, 2010). They act with little regard of other people and their feelings, motivated solely by humiliating and wounding their victim (Coloroso, 2003).

As Coloroso (2003) states, there are seven different types of bullies: 1) the confident bully who usually has a strong personality, a very big ego, an inflated sense of self, and no empathy for his/her victims, 2) the social bully who will use gossip and spreading rumors to accomplish his/her tormenting, he/she can also be very manipulative and insecure, 3) the fully armored bully who shows very little emotion and may be vicious and vindictive towards his victims, 4) the hyperactive bully who will probably struggle in school and will also react quite aggressively to others if provoked, but always with an excuse to blame the other person, 5) the bullied bully who is actually a bully and a victim, he or she will bully others after getting bullied

to get relief from their own hurt, 6) the bunch of bullies who work together to taunt someone even when they know it is wrong and they would never act alone, and finally 7) the gang of bullies who are looking for power in a group, wanting to be respected and will act with no empathy or remorse.

Students who bully others will often have trouble in other relationships, such as those with friends and parents (Science Daily, 2008). They are usually more aggressive and indifferent as they attempt to bond with others. Many have experienced some amount of conflict in their relationships with their parents.

When an effort is made for an intervention, it should focus on the student who is the bully, along with attention to their aggressive behavior problems, social skills, and helpful strategies that can be used when problems arise. A focus on the child alone will not be successful or sufficient (Science Daily, 2008).

Adults can intervene and work with a bully to take responsibility for his/her actions, be accountable for any possible future actions, and begin to understand the harm that has been caused by their actions. Coloroso talks about the three R's in her book that can help lead a bully out of this role: 1) Restitution-being able to fix what you did, working on restoring the trust, assuming responsibility, admitting your wrong, and expressing a strong desire not to do it again, 2) Resolution-figuring out a way to keep the situation from happening again, accepting that it happened, but understanding the consequences of your actions on everyone involved-including yourself, and 3) Reconciliation-the process of healing with the person that you have harmed and

rebuilding the relationship, however this does not always happen since the terms are in the hands of the victim.

Role of the Bullied

The role of the bullied begins with someone who is targeted by a bully because they are different in some way. Coloroso (2003) stated the following about being bullied:

If a kid succumbs to the attack-gives the bully what is demanded by showing distress, fear, or apathy; or fails to respond assertively (or aggressively) he changes both emotionally and physically. He becomes someone he was not before the attack; and all future attacks will be against this ever-weakening target. (p.46)

There are three types of victims: 1) the passive-anxious victim who lacks self-esteem and self-confidence, is physically weak, and is usually unpopular, 2) the provocative victim who is physically stronger and more active than passive victims but may also have more problems with concentration, and 3) the bully/victims which tend to both provoke aggression in others and trigger aggressive acts at the same time (Entenman et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, the likelihood of becoming a victim typically begins around second or third grade (Entenman, 2005). Anxiety levels are high for students who have been bullied. "The relationship between victimization and anxiety is clear: students who were bullied were 3.2 to 4.2 times more likely to report anxiety symptoms compared to noninvolved children." (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003, p.175) Furthermore, victims carry around the terror and fearful memories with them for years. It can even lead to depression and low self-esteem, two serious

problems that can carry into adulthood. These victims often fear school and consider it to be an unsafe and unhappy place (Banks, 2006-2010).

Role of the Bystander

The role of the bystander can look very different depending on the student and the situation. A bystander is someone who witnesses a bullying behavior but may or may not do anything to stop it (Entenman et al., 2005). They play a very important role. They see what is going on and may encourage the bullying without knowing, or helping the victim. They may also be afraid to get involved. They may even blame the victim for the treatment received. Bullying is so detrimental that it may cause fear or anxiety in the bystander. The main reasons students report that they do not intervene in bullying situations that they witness are anxiety about their own safety and social status (Raskauskas, et al., 2010).

However, adults can also empower bystanders into action. First, a bystander needs to realize that when they are silent about a bullying situation, an aggressive student can become more powerful and then there is opportunity for repeated harm to be done to the victim. Also, whenever there is an occasion to model positive behavior, a bully can see what compassionate actions look like. Adults can protect bystanders from retaliation in every situation so each child that has a role in the bullying behavior will know that there will be this interaction. Bystanders, no matter what their age, should always be encouraged to tell adults about a bullying situation that they may witness. Even if the first adult does not listen or does not take action right away, they need to keep trying. Finally, bystanders should be supported in helping their classmates and

finding ways to reach out in friendship to those victims of bullying situations (Stop Bullying

Now, 2002-2009).

Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is to listen and watch for signs of bullying behaviors. Often they

can be the first to create awareness, insist on no tolerance, and model the path to peaceful

relationships. However, students report that teachers rarely or never talk to their classes about

bullying (Banks, 2006-2010). There are many reasons that a student will not report a bullying

situation. They may feel ashamed of being bullied, afraid of retaliation, they are convinced that

there is no one that can help, they believe that there is no one that will help, they have been told

that bullying is just part of growing up, and they believe that tattling on another student is bad.

In addition, school personnel may view bullying as a harmless rite of passage that is best

ignored. The only time many will see the need for involvement is if verbal and/or psychological

intimidation crosses the line into physical assault (Banks, 2006-2010).

Teachers can work with students at the class level to develop class rules against bullying.

Everyone needs to work together to create a school climate where bullying is not tolerated

(Banks, 2006-2010).

Many schools and school districts are now implementing anti-bullying programs to help

break the cycle of bullying behavior and its violence. Bullying Hurts!, founded in 2003 by

Marvin Nash, a rodeo clown from Cheyenne, Wyoming, is one of these programs. In order for

kids to understand bullying better, high school students work with younger students. Each side

listens to each other as they share their bullying experiences (Carney, 2006). The program is used to show kids that they are not alone and what to do if ever involved in a bullying situation.

Bauman, Rigby, and Hoppa (2008) found that students in schools that already had an anti-bullying program in place were less likely to ignore bullying behaviors, as well as find an adult that could help with the situation. Both are positive steps in the ability to move forward in awareness, knowledge, and elimination of bullying behaviors in our schools.

Chapter III: Discussion

Summary

The purpose of this study was to complete a review of the literature about the bullying behaviors affecting elementary students, the role of each participant was closely examined: the bully, the bullied, the bystander, as well as the teacher, and ways to increase the knowledge for eliminating the bullying behaviors, and improve the ability to enhance classroom climate by the development of student programming. Four questions were asked:

1. How and why does a child become a bully?
2. What are bullying behaviors at the elementary level?
3. What is the impact of the three roles in a bullying situation?
4. How can we prevent or eliminate bullying situations in our schools?

Conclusions

School bullying is a widespread problem that is threatening the way teachers conduct their classrooms, students learn together, and the overall social climate is collapsing (Frey et al., 2009). Bullies act with aggression, show no empathy, and have little remorse towards their victims. Their victims, on the other hand, live in terror, afraid to come to school and live out what should be their normal daily childhood. The bystanders are left to witness each bullying event, wondering if and when to step in, and what affect their next move will have on them and each person involved.

Without intervention, bullying behavior will persist over time. Kids who are victimized are just as likely to suffer long term effects. They will exhibit higher levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts than do non-victims (Science Daily, 2007).

There is also a strong correlation between bullying during the school years and experiencing legal or criminal troubles as adults. Unfortunately, chronic bullies seem to continue their behaviors into adulthood, which will most certainly have a negative influence on their ability to develop and maintain positive relationships (Banks, 2006-2010).

As Banks states in his article:

> Bullying is a serious problem that can dramatically affect the ability of students to progress academically and socially. A comprehensive intervention plan that involves all students, parents, and school staff is required to ensure that all students can learn in a safe and fear-free environment. (conclusion)

Recommendations

Effective interventions must involve the entire school community rather than focus on the perpetrators and victims alone (Banks, 2006-2010). There must be an attitude of change from the principal to the recess monitors to the parents. Everyone should know how to respond when they are bullied and when they see someone else bullied (Science Daily, 2007). "Positive peer pressure is an important component of effective intervention. When uninvolved students step up and let the perpetrator know that their behavior is not acceptable, it's a powerful message." (Science Daily, 2007)

In the article by Entenman, Murnen, & Hendricks, several ways to use children's literature have been stated in order to address the problem of school bullying. It can be used to help children resolve problems, model good behavior, encourage students to explore their own feelings, and, of course, teach from a variety of bullying related books. Beyond the use of books in a classroom, they may also be used as part of a school wide effort to introduce a "program of character or life-skills development." (2005, p.362)

In summary, interventions used for bullying behaviors should include the whole school or school district in order to be successful. Proper training of adults, as well as awareness with all involved, is critical. Implementing an anti-bullying program, creating the knowledge and support through literature and character education, and teaching and encouraging our students to respect one another can all have a lasting effect in the steps to end school bullying.

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