Bullying in America's middle schools: identifying factors that affect school environment

Marnie M. L. Leiferman

University of Northern Iowa

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Bullying in America's middle schools: identifying factors that affect school environment

Abstract
The purpose of this literature review is to explore bullying, and to examine how school environment can affect it. Bullying can (a) place a student at harm or fear of harm, (b) have a detrimental effect on a student's physical or mental health, (c) interfere with a student's academic performance, and/or (d) interfere in the student's ability to participate or benefit from activities at school. Many experts think that a positive school environment can reduce the incidences of bullying at school.
Bullying In America's Middle Schools:  
Identifying Factors That Affect School Environment

A Graduate Research Study
Submitted to the
Division of Middle Level Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts in Education
University of Northern Iowa

by

Marnie M. L. Leiferman

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This Review by: Marnie M. L. Leiferman

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has been approved as meeting the research requirements for Master of Arts in Education.

\[\text{Date Approved: } 8/20/08\]

Donna Schumacher Douglas
Graduate Faculty Reader

\[\text{Date Approved: } 8/20/08\]

Rick C. Traw
Graduate Faculty Reader

\[\text{Date Approved: } 8/20/08\]

Jill M. Uhlenberg
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this literature review is to explore bullying and to examine how school environment be effected by bullying. The importance of providing a safe and healthy learning environment at school for students and teachers alike has been recommended for many years (Anafara et al., 2003; This We Believe, 2003). However, bullying has been identified as a major concern in America’s schools. As a result a negative school environment and bullying have been linked by research (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2005). Many experts think that a positive school environment can reduce the incidences of bullying at school (Manning & Butcher, 2005).

Bullying is defined as any conduct toward a student which (a) is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student or (b) creates an objectively hostile school environment. Bullying can (a) place a student at harm or fear of harm, (b) have a detrimental effect on a student’s physical or mental health, (c) interfere with a student’s academic performance, and/or (d) interfere in the student’s ability to participate or benefit from activities at school (Iowa SF 61, 2007). Common forms of bullying include, but are not limited to physical fighting, name calling, teasing, taunting, threatening, intentional exclusion, spreading of rumors, and social isolation (Banks, 1997; Coy, 2001).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In life a person cannot have a new beginning without an ending. This literature analysis of bullying signifies both the end of one journey and the beginning of another. It is the end in the sense that it represents an academic milestone; the last hurdle to cross before obtaining the goal of receiving a master’s degree. It is an end to many years of hard work and dedication to my profession and to a dream, an end to a lifelong goal. Happily, this paper also marks a new beginning. The master’s degree has opened up a new door professionally and has allowed me to spread my wings. It marks the beginning of a new chapter in my life as I embark in a new direction, trading the classroom for an office as a reading consultant for AEA13. But, most of all, it marks the end of being considered a novice in education and the beginning of being a master. I have proven to myself that I can take my dream and make it a reality.

Many people have helped me from beginning to end. The biggest motivators have been my husband and children. My husband, Frank, has allowed me to take a dream, then an idea, and turn it into a reality. He pushed me when I didn’t want to be pushed, and he supported me through the many tears, frustrations, and triumphs encountered on the path to my dream. I thank Thomas, Mariah, and Mitchell, my three children, who suffered through nights and weekends without their mother. They inspired me to persevere. Through example I taught them the value and importance of a college education. Furthermore, it is important to me that they see if a person works hard, she can fulfill a dream.

Finally, I want to thank Lisa, my classmate, colleague, and dear friend. Without her, I would not have made it to the end of this wonderful journey.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"The importance of providing a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for young adolescents has been recognized and promoted for decades" (Anfara et al., 2003, p. 41). Each year school officials and government legislators are placing more and more attention on the development of a positive learning environment at school which has resulted in numerous policies such as zero-tolerance laws (Guidance concerning state and local responsibilities under the Gun-Free Schools Act, 2004) and government mandated anti-bullying legislation (Hunt, 2007). The emphasis on school environment has come about for several reasons: (a) additional research into school environments and how they influence young adolescents and teachers was performed (Manning & Bucher, 2005, p. 203); (b) numerous studies focusing on varying aspects of safe and supportive learning environments including school safety and violence prevention were researched (Anfara et al., 2003); and (c) the federal government demanded increases in school safety and student achievement.

Bullying is a major concern in America's schools (Packman, Lepkowski, Overton, & Smaby, 2005). Schools continue to be one of the safest places for children and youth; predicting and preventing violence on campus remains a serious concern for schools today (Jimmerson, Brock, & Cowan, 2005). School climate not only affects the students, but also affects the teachers, administrators, and other staff members as well.
A safe school environment with limited conflict and violence allows teachers and administrators to focus on their most important job—teaching (Attwood, 2002). Positive school environment is thought, by many educators, to lessen conflicts between teachers and students, reduce incidents of office referrals, and lessen the conflict among students (Manning & Bucher, 2005).

Rationale

As a middle school teacher, I have seen the far-reaching effects of bullying. In my four years of teaching experience, I have seen the incidents of school violence and bullying, particularly among young adolescent girls, rise dramatically. The bullying incidents I have come into contact with range from direct forms of bullying such as physical fights, assaults, threats, and teasing; to less direct forms of bullying, such as social isolation and intentional exclusion.

In my tenure, I have witnessed policies that do not work. I have watched many bullies go unpunished and the victims left frustrated and helpless. Bullying, once seen as a right of passage for young adolescent children, has now escalated into a problem that society and schools cannot longer ignore (National Youth Violence Prevention Center [NYVPC], 2005). Many schools believe they can purchase a solution or rely on external consultants for training. The answer seemed simple to my school’s district administrators—purchase an anti-bullying program for our district. Two years ago my school implemented a newly purchased cure-all program to bullying. However, the district did not educate the teaching staff on how to use the new program nor did teachers buy into the effectiveness or need for the program. Students were not receptive either since they felt teachers were pushing one more thing upon them at school.
Since bullying among adolescents in the middle school years is so extensive (Anafara, Andrews, & National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2003), I asked myself the following question, "What is it about the middle school environment and students that causes this escalation? What can I do to change the pattern?" As a result, I searched for a way that I could create a climate in my school that would promote safety and achievement while reducing the incidences of bullying in my school’s hallways.

**Purpose**

During my research to discover ways to reduce the amount of bullying at my school, I hoped to educate myself on bullying. This education included the definition of bullying, identification of bullies and bullying behavior, methods to increase positive school climate, and reviews of what other schools have done to reduce the bullying problem in their schools. In addition, I reviewed the current laws on bullying and the requirements the federal and state legislature have required schools to enact. I hope to educate the teachers, administrators, and support staff about what I have learned. One day, I hope to eventually develop an effective anti-bullying literature-based curriculum for my school.

**Importance**

In the United States, bullying among children and teenagers has often been dismissed by parents and schools as a normal part of growing up (NYVPC, 2005; Canter, 2005; Feinberg, 2003). Bullying was once seen as a right of passage for young adolescent children or seen as just a part of growing up (NYVPC, 2005; How Adults Can Help Stop Bullying,” 2005; Canter, 2005; Feinberg, 2003). Students needed to toughen up, grow up, and stand up.
However, according to the executive summary of the December 2007 "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007" report (Dinkes, Cataldi, Lin-Kelly, & Snyder, 2007) schools should be a safe place, free of violence and crime, for students and staff. Violence and crime affects everyone at school in some way. Research suggests that crime and violence disrupt the educational process and affects those involved, the bystanders, the school institution, and the local community (Dinkes et al., 2007). Establishing indicators that must be monitored and updated, and assessing the state of school and crime locally and across the nation is imperative to ensure the safety of American schools (Dinkes et al., 2007).

The most recent data available on school crime and violence is the 2007 joint effort of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). According to a 2007 U.S. Department of Education (2007), "54.8 million students" were enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade during the 2005-2006 school year, and preliminary data shows some evidence that safety has improved. The key findings suggest, "The victimization rate of students ages 12-18 at school declined between 1992 and 2005" (Dinkes et al., 2007, p. iv).

Unfortunately, violence, theft, drugs, and weapons were not part of this decline. "During 2005-06 school year, 86 percent of public schools reported that at least one violent crime, theft, or other crime occurred at their school" (Dinkes et al., 2007, p. iv). In addition, during that school year, 8 percent of schools reported that students in grades 9-12 reported being threatened or hurt by a weapon in the previous 12 months, with 25 percent reportedly suggesting drugs were made available to them on school grounds.
More frightening is that "28 percent of students ages 12-18 reported having been bullied at school during the previous six months" (Dinkes et al., 2007, p. iv).

Today bullying has escalated into a problem that society can no longer ignore. In a March 2006 article, "Safe Schools Group Disappointed GOP Blocks Anti-Bullying Bill," Clark states that bullying and harassment impact "school achievement levels, school absenteeism, future college aspirations, and drug and alcohol abuse" (¶6). As a result of escalating violence among youth in America's schools, student achievement has been affected as well (Clark, 2006).

**Terminology**

In order for readers to have a common understanding of this topic, the following definitions have been provided:

**Bullying**—Shall be construed to mean any conduct toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student and which creates an objectively hostile school environment one or more of the following conditions: (1) Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property. (2) Has a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health. (3) Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's academic performance. (4) Has an effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school (Hunt, 2007).

**School Climate**—Shall be considered to be a multi-dimensional and a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of the school that (1) is experienced by the members (students, teachers, administrators, support staff), (2) impacts their behavior, and (3) can
be described in term of the values, norms, and beliefs of a particular set of attributes of the school (Kramer-Clarke, 2004).

**Cyber-Bullying**—Shall be defined as incidents when the bully sends or posts harmful material or engages in other form of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies (Willard, 2007).

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided my search into the literature on the topic of bullying:

What can schools do to prevent bullying?

1. What is the history of bullying?
2. What is bullying?
3. Who are the victims of bullying?
4. How has society responded to bullying?
5. What makes an effective school-based anti-bullying program?
6. What are new trends in bullying?
CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Locating Sources

I began the locating process during my graduate coursework through the University of Northern Iowa. Over the two-year period my professors assigned many education-related research papers. My advisor, Dr. Donna Schumacher-Douglas, advised me at the beginning of my master’s program to do as much research and write as many papers on the topic I was interested in researching for my master’s thesis as possible. So, I began the process of researching the link between bullying and school climate. I proceeded to write seven different papers on bullying and other subjects closely related to bullying such as school climate and school environment.

The first place I searched for sources was in the materials associated with my school’s current bullying policies and anti-bullying program. I found that we already had an anti-bullying policy in effect. In addition, my district also had recently purchased the *Second Step Program* (2007) to be used at the middle school level.

Secondly, I asked for assistance from my school principal and superintendent. Both administrators gave me several articles from professional journals, such as the *Middle School Journal* and *Principal*. Through those articles and the listed sources, I accumulated new leads for locating other references and names of other authors who were experts in school climate and bullying.
I also began to use the Internet to research the sources and authors listed in the articles provided to me from my administrators. By using the search engine Google, I did simple name searches (e.g., Olweus, Banks, and Nansel) and topic searches (e.g., bullying, anti-bullying programs, school violence, school climate, and anti-bullying legislature). I expanded my electronic search to include UNISTAR, UNI'S online library catalog, through which I connected to educational databases such as ERIC. These databases connected me further to professional journal articles. Through the professional journal articles I was able to gain additional sources either named directly or used as sources by the author of these articles. My search continued using key words such as “school climate,” “school environment,” “bullying,” “bullying legislature,” anti-bullying programs,” and “bullying in the middle school”.

Selecting Sources

I used many different criteria for selecting the sources that I used. First I used sources that were connected with education either through educational databases such as ERIC, from the UNI library sources, or from non-profit informational organizations. Second, I only used periodical publications from professional journals. These journals used peer-reviewed or editor-reviewed articles. Another criteria used was recency of source. I tried to keep most sources to a ten-year timeframe, so information was current and accurate. Last, I considered only sources that specifically addressed middle school students and/or adolescents.

Analyzing Sources

Once I gathered professional literature related to school climate and bullying, I limited my literature to those that linked school climate and bullying. As I read, I
highlighted information that was pertinent to my subject. After the information was obtained, I selected the strongest subtopics. Subtopics included current anti-bullying legislation, bullying among young adolescents in middle schools, general anti-bullying education, and school climate/environment. An outline was used to frame the gathered research. Eventually, I focused on literature that drew connections between bullying and school climate. Furthermore, I then used the information to examine the connection between school environment and bullying in the middle school that employs me.
CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

Bullying is a serious concern in schools today (Packman et al., 2005; Brooks, Corder, & Marshall, 2006). Approximately 80% of all middle school students say they have been bullied at school (Brooks et al., 2006). Much research has been done on bullying in other countries such as Norway, Australia, and England (Brooks, Corder, & Marshall, 2006). The United States has now begun to research and examine bullying. Since research says that bullying peaks in the middle school years, prevention and intervention actions are needed (Brooks et al., 2006). Thus the question must be answered, “How can we combat bullying in schools to create a more positive learning environment?”

What is the History of Bullying?

The history of bullying in schools goes back to the one room schoolhouse from the days of Laura Ingalls Wilder and her nemesis, Nellie Olsen. However, the influx of school shootings in the 1990s led to a new look at school violence. Before the 1990s, school shootings were rare and “did not lead to multiple deaths” (Net Industries, 2008, School Violence-School Shootings, ¶1). “A Time Line of Recent Worldwide School Shootings” published by Information Please (Pearson Education, Inc., 2008) lists fifty-five different incidents of school shootings occurring between February 2, 1996, and February 14, 2008.
Marano (1995) found that in many of these incidents, victims of bullying resorted to violence as a way to end the harassment. One example Marano (1995) cites involves honor student, Curtis Taylor in 1993:

He had grown to hate in the Oak Street Middle School in Burlington, Iowa. For three years other boys had been tripping him in the hallways, knocking things out of his hands. They'd even taken his head in their hands and banged it into a locker. Things were now intensifying. The name-calling was harsher. Some beloved books were taken. His bicycle was vandalized twice. Kids even kicked the cast that covered his broken ankle. And in front of his classmates, some guys poured chocolate milk down the front of his sweatshirt. Curtis was so upset he went to see a school counselor. He blamed himself for the other kids not liking him. That night, Curtis went into a family bedroom, took out a gun, and shot himself to death. The community was stunned. The television cameras rolled, at least for a few days. Chicago journalist Bob Greene lingered over the events in his column, and then he printed letters from folks for whom the episode served largely as a reminder of their own childhood humiliations at the hands of bullies (Introduction ¶2).

Hidden and unreported incidences of bullying continued until April 1999, when Eric Harris (17) and Dylan Klebold (18) held a sixteen minute shooting spree at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, that resulted in the most deadly episode of school violence in the U.S. (Net Industries, 2008). The investigation of this incident showed a history of bullying.
In 2005, Pepler of York University (Marano, 1995) conducted a study of bullies, taking a video (with audio) of a school playground. The video “documented over 400 episodes of bullying, from brushes of mild teasing to 37 solid minutes of kicking and punching (the average episode, lasting 37 seconds)” (Marano, 1995, An Underground Activity ¶4). Pepler (Marano, 1995) stated that

In showing other kids the tapes, I confirmed what I felt--it's so important for children to be members of a social group that to receive negative attention is better than to receive no attention at all. It's actually self-confirming. There's a sense of who I am; I am at least somebody with a role in the group. I have no way of identifying myself if nobody pays attention to me (An Underground Activity ¶5).

This behavior does not end at the elementary playground but continues at the middle school level. According to the National Middle School Association (Lorimar, 2006), many teens view “name-calling, teasing, shoving, and other actions” as pranks. Unfortunately, most victims will not report bullying (Lorimar, 2006). Probably because bullying was such a covert activity, schools seemed to have a hard time figuring out what to do about it (Marano, 1995). However, efforts are changing. In The Misfits (2003), a novel by James Howe, teens confront behavior (verbal bullying and name-calling) that attacks students because of weight, height, intelligence, and sexual orientation/gender expression (Schroeder, 2004). Investigations into these shootings and other occurrences of school violence have led a new look at bullying in schools (Net Industries, 2008).
What is Bullying?

Bullying can contribute to a negative school climate. In schools across the United States, bullying has been identified as a major concern (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simmons-Morton, & Schmidt, 2001; Banks, 1997). Bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences for the general school climate and for the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear (Banks, 1997). “A successful school for young adolescents is an inviting, supportive, and safe place, a joyful community that promotes in-depth learning and enhances students’ physical and emotional well-being” (Anafara, et al., 2003, p. 12).

“Bullying is a pervasive and serious problem in today’s schools” (Packman et al., 2005, p. 546). Because of this, a call for states and their public schools to address bullying in school policy is being demanded by both parents and community members nationwide (Kopel, 2006). In addition to policies, many schools have developed and/or adopted anti-bullying intervention programs to education both staff and students on bullying (Coy, 2001; Lumsden, 2002; Packman et al., 2005). In Iowa, along with other states, recent legislation is requiring school districts to review current policies regarding bullying (Lumsden, 2002; Dorman, 2007). Legislature is demanding schools get tougher on school-wide bullying. In addition some states, including Iowa, are requiring schools to have stiffer penalties for bullying and a clear harassment policy for students experiencing bullying (Coy, 2001; Lumsden, 2002). The 2007 Iowa SF 61 anti-harassment and anti-bullying bill requires schools to publically clarify bullying policies (Dorman, 2007).
Types of Bullying

Bullying can be classified into two types of behavior: direct or aggressive, and indirect (passive). Behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, damaging another person's things, and stealing that are initiated by one or more students against a victim are called direct or aggressive behaviors (Nansel et al., 2001; Coy, 2001; Lumsden, 2002; Anafara, et al., 2003). “Aggressive bullies are seen as individuals who are belligerent, fearless, coercive, confident, tough, and compulsive” (Coy, 2001, p. 2).

Bullying can also be more indirect or passive by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion, through words such as rumors, gossip, and sayings or writing inappropriate things about another (Nansel et al., 2001; Coy, 2001; Lumsden, 2002; Anafara, et al., 2003; Wiseman, 2002). “While boys typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are more apt to utilize these more subtle, indirect strategies such as spreading rumors and enforcing social isolation” (Banks, 1997, p. 2).

What are the Effects of Bullying?

Students who exhibit bullying behaviors have a need to feel in control, powerful, and display dominance over another (Coy, 2001). They appear to derive pleasure from causing injury and suffering on others, seem to have little, if any, empathy for their victims, and often defend their bullying actions by blaming their victims (Banks, 1997; NYVPC, 2005). “Potential bullies oftentimes come from homes where physical discipline is used, where children are taught to handle their problems by fighting back physically, where the involvement of parents is limited, and where compassion is lacking” (Banks, 1997, p. 2). Furthermore, girls tend to be bullied by both girls and boys, while boys tend to be primarily bullied by other boys (Nansel et al., 2001; Wiseman, 2002).
In addition, the behaviors associated with bullying do not stop after adolescence (NYVPC, 2005; Brooks et al., 2006). Research suggests some startling facts about adults who were once bullies. According to the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center,

Bullying is often a warning sign that children and teens are heading for trouble and are at risk for serious violence. Teens (particularly boys) who bully are more likely to engage in other antisocial/delinquent behavior (e.g., vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and drug use) into adulthood (NYVPC, 2005, p. 2).

Renowned bullying expert, Dan Olweus reported that by age 24, men who were identified as bullies in middle school were “four times more likely than their non-bullying peers to have multiple criminal convictions (Brooks et al., 2006, p. 52; NYVPC, 2005). Also, 60% of these adults have at least one criminal conviction by that same age (NYVPC, 2005). Furthermore, research concludes that childhood bullies were more likely to own a firearm as adults than non-bullies (Brooks et al., 2006; Little, 2005).

Victims

Traditionally bullying has been perceived to be primarily a physical problem among young boys (NYVPC, 2005). Little attention had been paid to the devastating effects of bullying on its victims or to the connection between bullying and other forms of school violence. “15-25% of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency, while 15-20% report that they bully others with some frequency” (NYVPC, 2005, p. 1).

According to the Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007, students reported several different types of bullying when responding to the question of whether “they had been bullied in the previous 6 months” (Dinkes, et al., p. 34). The 2005 iteration said
“bullying includes being made fun of; subject of rumors; threatened with harm; pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; pressured into doing things did not want to do; excluded; or property destroyed on purpose” (Dinkes et al., 2007, p. 34). The report delineated the data as follows:

- 79 percent said that they were bullied inside the school.
- 28 percent said that they were bullied outside on school grounds.
- 53 percent said that they had been bullied once or twice during the period.
- 25 percent had experienced bullying once or twice a month.
- 11 percent reported being bullied once or twice a week.
- 8 percent said that they had been bullied almost daily (p.34).

In recent years racial/ethnic groups, grade level, and sexual orientation have further divided the problem of bullying. In “Bullying Among Young Adolescents: The Strong, the Weak, and the Troubled,” (Juvonene, Graham & Schuster, 2003), the study reported that while Asian students were the least likely to be bullies, Blacks were “most likely to be classified as bully-victims (p. 1233).” Furthermore, Whites were more likely to be victims, while Latinos represented the least likely. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007* supported that finding with “White and Black students (30 and 29 percent)” reported being bullied compared to only 22 percent of Hispanic students (Dinkes et. al., 2007, p. 34). In addition, the NCEA reported in 2001 “77 percent of middle and high school students in small mid-western towns have been bullied” with “more in middle or junior high schools” (Coy, 2001, ¶1).
Finally, several surveys focus on harassment due to sexual orientation. The Iowa Pride Network (Clark, 2006-2007) reported the following results of a 2005 Iowa School Climate Survey:

- 92.3 percent reported hearing homophobic remarks frequently in their schools.
- 83.3 percent reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation.
- 61.2 percent do not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation.
- 33.6 percent reported some incident of physical harassment (being pushed or shoved) because of their sexual orientation (¶5).

School Climate

The U.S. Department of Justice looks at the problem of bullying and the effect on the social environment of a school (Ericson, 2001). Bullying is widespread and a common occurrence (Crawford, 2002). They found in a report by the National Institute of Health and Human Development (NICHD) that studies show that bullying can create “a climate of fear among students, inhibiting their ability to learn, and leading to other antisocial behavior” (Ericson, 2001, Abstract). UCLA researchers (Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005) examined the effects of bullying and found that almost 50 percent of sixth graders in two Los Angeles-area public schools were bullied on a daily basis. The UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies questioned students at the end of the day about the day (Nishina et al., 2005). The study reported that 66 percent of sixth grade students at one school, and 42 percent at the other observed someone being bullied
Students reported being bullied, seeing classmates bullied, and feeling more sympathy for the victims of verbal harassment (Nishina et al., 2005).

Student achievement can be directly linked to a positive school climate. Willard (2007) educator, attorney, and parent, stated that bullying "threatens the core of our educational mission—student academic achievement" (p. 13). Some factors contributing to higher achievement can be directly attributed to perceived school climate ("Positive School Climate: Making the Connection," n.d.). "When a school meets students' basic psychological needs, students become increasingly committed to the school's norms, values, and goals" (Schaps, 2003, p.3). In a study "School Social Climate and Individual Differences in Vulnerability to Psychopathology among Middle School Students" (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001), 230 female and 230 male sixth- and seventh-grade students' psychological vulnerabilities and perceptions of school climate were analyzed "to explain the emergence of behavioral and emotional problems during the middle school years" (Abstract). The study showed that schools must focus on school climate and that a positive climate can help with "internalizing and externalizing problems" (Kuperminc et al., 2001, Abstract). In schools where students perceive the climate to be positive and caring, there are fewer incidents of bullying, fighting, and other forms of violence; a perceived positive environment allows students to concentrate on learning ("Positive School Climate: Making the Connection," n.d.). Ericson (2001) believes that schools that do not tolerate bullying create a more positive climate, with a learning environment that focuses on safety and inclusion. The focus on positive school climate has arisen for many reasons. Research has become available on how school climate affects students and educators (Manning & Bucher, 2005). The NICHD study
(Ericson, 2001) reiterated the negative risks of bullying; however, schools that have implemented The Olweus Prevention Program, showed a 50 percent or more reduction in bullying, with an improvement in school climate. Students who feel safe and connected at school perform better on standardized tests and obtain higher course grades than those who do not ("Positive School Climate: Making the Connection," n.d.). “Students learn best and achieve their full potential in safe and orderly classrooms” (National Education Association [NEA], 2003, p. 3).

When teachers see their students excel, their morale is raised as well (Attwood, 2002). Researchers and educators agree that when family and community members are involved in education students put forth a greater effort and achieve more at school (Maynard & Howley, 1997). Morale can be directly linked to job performance and attendance (Attwood, 2002; North Carolina Character Education Partnership [NCCEP] 2001). The higher the morale amongst staff, the better the job performance (Attwood, 2002). A positive work environment fosters effective teaching practices (NCCEP, 2001). Respectfulness toward other staff members and to the students is evident in work environments with high morale and positive climate (Maynard & Howley, 1997). In addition this benefits the students as teachers act as positive role models; the staff can model behavior of a successful and friendly work environment (Attwood, 2002).

Just like students, teachers and other staff are less likely to miss as many days of work due to illness and personal reasons if there is a positive school climate (Attwood, 2002). It is always more beneficial to the students to have their teacher present as opposed to a frequent substitute (Attwood, 2002). Educators are more effective when they perceive their work environment to be positive and they feel respected (Attwood,
2002). A pleased and content staff also leads to more positive behavior toward work assignments and added responsibility (Attwood, 2002).

**How Has Society Responded to Bullying?**

In response to an increase in school related violence, Congress passed the *Gun-Free Schools Act* in 1994 (Martin, 2000). Originally enacted on March 31, 1994, as part of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (Public Law 103-227) and authorized again on October 20, 1994, as part of the *Improving America’s Schools Act* of 1994 (Public Law 103-382) (“Guidance Concerning State and Local Responsibilities,” 2004) this legislation required states to approve zero-tolerance laws on weapons or risk losing federal funding (McAndrews, 2001). This act “placed an automatic one-year expulsion on weapon-carrying students and demanded referral of offenders to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system after due-process procedures are carried out” (Noll, 2007, p. 307).

Public response and opinion reflect a demand for swift and drastic measures to prevent further incidents (Joiner, 2002; Net Industries, 2008). Thus, it is only natural for the public to react to the highly emotional media coverage of events such as the Columbine shootings (Joiner, 2002; Net Industries, 2008). The early reaction to rising school violence was the implementation of zero-tolerance policies (McAndrews, 2001). Dowling-Sender (2001) stated “Zero-tolerance policies call for mandatory disciplinary sanctions for students caught with weapons regardless of the circumstances” (p. 1). In addition, Black (2004) added “It protects law-abiding students and staff members by allowing for the swift and easy removal of dangerous students” (p.1). Not everyone embraced the zero-tolerance policies as the solution to school violence (McAndrews, 2001; Dowling-Sender, 2001; Martin, 2000; Black, 2004), including incidents such as the

Moreover, implementation of these policies did not prove to be an effective way to deter school violence (McAndrews, 2001; Dowling-Sender, 2001; Martin, 2000; Black, 2004). According to Kohn (2004/2007) “Safety comes from human relations” (p. 319) not zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance policies have caused a new rash of problems that include exclusion of students through suspensions, increased student dropout rates, district lawsuits, and inconsistent application and interpretation of the law (McAndrews, 2001). Some, like Kohn (2004/2007), believe that going back to more traditional approaches to school safety are more effective than these unforgiving policies. In addition, according to the National Center for Educational Services, zero-tolerance policies are not working. Furthermore, zero-tolerance policies have not been found to be effective in schools that were previously unsafe (McAndrews, 2001). Focusing on school climate and addressing underlying issues may be a viable option to zero-tolerance policies (Martin, 2000; Black, 2004; Kopel, 2006).

While zero-tolerance provides immediate consequences, it does not fix what is wrong with the student committing the offense (Kohn, 2004/2007). One drawback of zero-tolerance policies is that the policies shift the focus on the behaviors instead of the underlying problem (Kohn, 2004/2007). This preoccupation takes away from the root of the real reason behind the incriminating behavior (Kohn, 2004/2007). Finding the cause should be the goal of any policy. Administrators, teachers, and parents need to look
beyond just dealing with the behaviors alone and start identifying underlying problems (Kohn, 2004/2007). The policy is essentially a reaction to the behavior. According to Kohn (2004/2007), "We offer behavioral instruction in more appropriate ways to express anger, but the violence continues because we haven't gotten anywhere near where the problem is" (p. 320).

Government Legislation

In response to the failure of federal zero-tolerance policies, many states have adopted their own more proactive policies on harassment and bullying at school. A number of states (including Iowa) have proposed laws requiring schools to have anti-bullying policies and programs, and more recently a federal legislator even proposed national legislation on bullying (Trump, 1996-2008, p. 1). Violence against certain groups such as gay and lesbian students has increased thus prompting new legislature further holding school districts accountable for bullying at school (Clark, 2006-2007). In January 2007 the Iowa legislature approved a new anti-bullying bill (Dorman, 2007). This bill established "A statewide policy for school districts, protecting all students from bullying and harassment, including but not limited to real or perceived race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics" (Clark, 2006-2007, p. 1). The bill forces schools to be more accountable and adds credibility to existing bullying prevention plans (Clark, 2006-2007). Schools in Iowa are now required to stiffen bullying rules by using specific wording to protect these groups targeted and are provided specific guidelines as to the set up of these new regulations (Dorman, 2007).

Many schools already have policies at the local level. In fact, Representative Jack Drake (2007) opposed the passing of the Iowa bill stating, "Most of the superintendents
in the district indicated this legislation is not needed as they had policies in place and this
would add more regulation, record keeping, and costs money to keep the records” (Drake,
2007, p. 5). In addition, some research suggests that anti-bullying legislation should be
only one component of a safe school program (Trump, 1996-2008).

*What Makes an Effective Anti-Bullying Program?*

**Anti-bullying Education**

Effective programs have been developed to reduce bullying in schools. Bullying
has been linked by experts such as Olweus to serious school violence, shootings, and
hazing (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2005). In fact,
“Research has found that bullying is most likely to occur in schools where there is a lack
of adult supervision during breaks, where teachers and students are indifferent to or
accept bullying behavior, and where rules against bullying are not consistently enforced”
(NYVPC, 2005, p. 3). According to a study conducted by Dr. Ronald Pitner, Ph. D.,
assistant professor of social work at Washington University in St. Louis, “…bullying and
school violence in general typically occur in predictable locations within schools,
specifically unmonitored areas such as hallways, restrooms, stairwells, and playgrounds”
(Trump, 1996-2008, ¶4). Concentrating on these “hotspots” where bullying takes place is
another way to reduce bullying and elevate school climate (Trump, 1996-2008; NYVPC,
2005).

Establishing a safe school environment is one alternative to zero-tolerance
policies. In the article *Life--Saving Lessons*, Joiner (2002) states that in 75 percent of
school shootings, the attackers had told someone of their plans. In addition, schools need
to focus on relationships with students; students learn more in a safe environment where
they feel connected (Joiner, 2002; Trump, 2008; Jimerson et al., 2005). When students feel safe they are more likely to bring issues to the attention of a teacher, principal, or other adult at school (Joiner, 2002). In a school where students feel safe, the doors of communication can be opened and violence can be prevented; thus lessening the need for harsh discipline practices (Joiner, 2002). Rasicot (1999) agrees that obtaining a safe school environment requires trust, and states, “Fostering strong relationships and open communication between students and staff can be a more effective deterrent to school violence than installing metal detectors and guards at the door” (p. 48).

Because bullying has been directly linked to school climate, everyone in the school environment will benefit from implementation of an effective bullying prevention program (HRSA, 2005; Teicher, 2006; Starr, 2005; Murphy, 2004; Feinberg, 2003). An anti-bullying program can reduce the number of behavior incidents and referrals for administrators (HRSA, 2005). Moreover, teachers and students both will benefit from a positive school environment where everyone feels part of a safe and connected community (Jimerson et al., 2005).

Before implementing a formal bullying prevention program, the committee should research existing plans (Starr, 2005). Administrators should ask other schools’ administrators who have bullying programs for their input and opinions (Feinberg, 2003). The committee should carefully pick out a plan within the school’s budget and one that will work for their school (HRSA, 2005). Crawford (2002) says schools should consider introducing research-based programs like The Olweus Prevention Program (2003).

Bullying does not stop when students leave the school grounds (HRSA, 2005). A successful anti-bullying program cannot take place without the support of the parents and
community (HRSA, 2005; Starr, 2006). Crawford reports (2002) “Many psychologists agree that to design effective bullying-prevention and intervention programs, they need to understand that a child’s tendency toward bullying is influenced by individual, familial and environmental factors” (p. 3). Research and educators concur that when parents get involved, children are more successful and feel safer at school (Maynard & Howley, 1997). According to the HRSA (2005), “Anti-bullying messages are likely to be more effective if they come from many adults in a community—not just from educators and parents” (¶12). A unified definition for bullying must be established because not all community members understand what constitutes bullying; others may believe the myth that bullying is just a rite of passage that all children must endure (HRSA, 2005). Furthermore, there are many resources already available through health and safety organizations, mental health facilities, faith-based institutions, and law enforcement agencies in communities to help with the anti-bullying campaign (HRSA, 2005).

**What are New Trends in Bullying?**

Once schools have implemented an anti-bullying program, the issue is often not resolved. School must consistently stay aware of the newest trends in bullying. According to a March 7, 2008, *Los Angeles Times* article, schools need to look at new tactics to combat online harassment and outright violence (Mehta, 2008). In addition, schools are facing a deluge of lawsuits filed against them for “failing to protect their [parents’] children,” despite the fact that according to the experts, “underreporting is rampant” (Mehta, 2008, ¶5). One of the newest areas of concern is modern technologies such as cell phones, instant messaging, and Internet social sites have lead to the birth of a new, much faster, and often anonymous medium for bullies. Willard (2007), expert on the use of technology and social violence, stated:
It [cyber-bullying] can include harassing others by sending offensive or insulting messages through instant messaging, posting cruel gossip and rumors on social networking sites, sending embarrassing photos via cell phones, or impersonating someone online for the purpose of humiliation. As the use of the Internet and other technologies has increased, so has the use of these technologies to harass and bully others (p. 19).

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, as of 2008 over half of American youth have access to or own a cell phone, while 90 percent are online (Anti-Defamation League Curriculum, 2008). The result is a shift from face-to-face bullying to cyber-bullying [a term coined by educators (Mehta, 2008)] that has allowed harassment to spread from school to homes and beyond (Brookes et al., 2006). Willard (2007) further discusses the differences and the movement of bullying to outside the school:

Just as in all bullying incidents, the impact varies based on the incident. But it is possible that the impact of the more egregious incidents of cyber-bullying is even more harmful than the impact of in-person bullying. Online communications can be extremely vicious and ongoing, 24/7. Cyber-bullies can be anonymous. Harmful material posted online has the potential to be widely distributed and very difficult to ever remove. Teens are very reticent to discuss any online issues with adults--fearing that adults will overreact or respond to the situation in ways that will ultimately make matters worse. Online retaliation for reporting can be significant and can involve individuals who do not even know the target (p. 19).

As a result, schools have a more difficult time with detection and discipline (Brookes et al., 2006). The biggest concern is that this new forum has resulted in
interpretation of the law over free speech (Brookes et al., 2006). When dealing with incidents that occur outside of school, schools face a problem with discipline codes that are too vague, and thus, “a court can find students’ activities rude and offensive, however, and still not uphold a school’s decision to discipline students for their behavior off campus” (Brookes et al., 2006, Inability to Discipline, ¶1). The underlying court decisions seem to revolve around whether or not “true threat as defined by law” as in the landmark cases: Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District (1969), Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser (1986), and Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier (1988) has been established (Brookes et al., 2006, The Shift, ¶2).

In 2008 Maryland legislature took on this issue. Lawmakers “approved a bill that requires the state board of education and local boards to come up with policies that fight bullying, harassment, and intimidation by physical, verbal, written, or electronic means to combat “concerns over cyber-bullying have rocketed because of the easy access children and adolescents have to the Internet, including e-mail and instant messaging” (Honawar, 2008). Willard (2007) adds that changes in technology also add to the problems:

The age issue is a moving target. The initiation of involvement in cyber-bullying is dependent on when young people gain access to the technologies that make cyber-bullying possible. This age has been going down for the last several years. Tweens (pre-teens and young adolescents) are not supposed to register on social networking sites like MySpace, which has an age limit of 14. But activity on this site among middle school students has been growing exponentially over the last several years, along with increased reports of cyber-bullying. How many 6th grade students had cell phones two years ago, as compared to today? The ability
to write and communicate electronically appears to be the operative factor. Any research related to age that is over a year old is already outdated, based on the rapid adoption of the use of these technologies by younger and younger people (p. 19).
CHAPTER FOUR

Recommendations and Conclusion

As policies regarding “cyber-bullying,” conflicts with students’ rights to freedom of expression and the schools’ responsibility for providing a safe, bullying-free environment for students and staff members, the question remains: Can schools connect parents, teachers, and community in a cooperative effort to curtail this nationwide problem?

The purpose of writing this literature review was to study, examine, and identify the factors of bullying that affect a positive school climate. In this final chapter, I discuss my research findings and make recommendations for what I have found to be factors that affect bullying. I also reveal what schools can do to combat bullying and the steps to create a positive school climate.

Recommendations

Effective programs require strong administrative leadership; someone who offers support for teachers and staff through educational opportunities, models expected behavior, and enforces anti-bullying policies (Feinberg, 2003; Starr, 2005). Efforts by administration and other school staff should begin early (HRSA, 2005; Jimerson et al., 2005). Effective plans should not have an end date, but instead, should become part of the life of school (HRSA, 2005). “A strong sense of school community is developed by teaching students how to manage anger, resolve conflicts peacefully, and prevent hateful or violent behaviors” (Anafara, et al., 2003, p. 32).
School administrators take several steps to help with the successful implementation of a bullying prevention plan. Initial steps should include

- Forming a committee to assess the extent of bullying at school (Jimerson et al., 2005; Feinberg, 2003; Starr, 2005).
- Asking students and staff to fill out a questionnaire on bullying and school climate can help better assess the problem (HRSA, 2005; Feinberg, 2003; Starr, 2005; Teicher, 2006).
- Have the committee establish a clear policy, with specific consequences for bullying (Jimerson et al., 2005; Starr 2005; Feinberg, 2003).
- Other initial steps could be talking with staff about bullying, teacher in-service to inform staff, and including the community in efforts (Feinberg, 2003; Starr, 2005; Jimerson et al., 2005).

Conclusions

"Bullying persists in schools because of a tolerant culture created by adults and perpetrated by children. Preventing bullying requires changing this culture as much as identifying and intervening with its perpetrators and victims" (Cantar, 2005, p. 43). One crucial piece is for administration to communicate, educate and work with their staff, parents, community, and students to create and maintain a culture where bullying is neither accepted nor tolerated. Adults and students of all ages need to learn that bullying is unacceptable, that they have a role in stopping it, and that effective strategies exist to protect victims against bullying. Furthermore, comprehensive anti-bullying plans can establish a school environment that discourages bullying (Cantar, 2005). Ultimately everyone in a school with positive culture must work together to eliminate harassment,
stop verbal abuse, halt bullying, and work together to reduce name-calling (Lorimar, 2006).
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