Creating School Climates
That Prevent School Violence

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Many programs whose purpose is to prevent violence or inappropriate behavior are also programs that might prevent disaffection, dropping out of school, drug and alcohol abuse, and poor academic performance. In other words, many prevention-oriented interventions are interventions that are not specific to violence or behavior and that address universals that affect a variety of possible negative outcomes related to schooling. In this article, we will identify and discuss some of the intervention options that are intended to prevent violence and inappropriate behavior in school by directly or indirectly affecting the social climate of the school.

School climate might be defined as the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time. These feelings may have to do with how comfortable each individual feels in the environment and whether the individual feels that the environment is sup-

portive of learning (or teaching), is appropriately organized, and is safe. Climate may also address other positive or negative feelings regarding the school environment. We would hypothesize that comfortable and supportive feelings would support effective and efficient learning and teaching as well as positive student behavior and attitudes. Conversely, negative feelings such as concern, fear, frustration, and loneliness would negatively affect learning and behavior. Therefore, school climate is a reflection of the positive or negative feelings regarding the school environment, and it may directly or indirectly affect a variety of learning outcomes.

The typical measures of school climate are surveys of students, parents, staff, and sometimes community members regarding what they think about the school. They include judgments about issues such as teacher-student relationships, security and maintenance, administration, student academic orientation, and student behavioral values (Kelly et al., 1936). These surveys usually use some form of Likert-type rating items and attempt to identify both specific strengths and weaknesses regarding these issues. Recently, a variety of safety-oriented surveys have attempted to identify the degree to which conflict, violence, and other disruptions contribute to a negative school climate as well. Data from these surveys may be useful in assessing and intervening to positively affect school climate.

Many have identified three components to a comprehensive approach to violence prevention in schools. These include (a) prevention, (b) identification and intervention for students at risk for having difficulty, and (c) effective responses once inappropriate behavior has occurred. Although all three components must be implemented simultaneously and effectively in a truly comprehensive

approach, the focus here is on the first of these components, basic prevention. Almost all programs that focus on basic prevention of violence, drug abuse, dropping out, or whatever also focus on creating a positive school climate. Whether at the school or the individual level, effective intervention requires a wide spectrum of options that move significantly beyond a narrow focus on punishment and exclusion, which themselves can contribute to a negative school climate.

Security measures, video cameras, locker searches, and metal detectors, which are clearly intended to reduce school crime and violence, may also affect school climate. In some cases, and for some students and staff, these measures may improve the safety element of school climate, but for others they may negatively affect climate by creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation.

A vast array of ideas have been proposed regarding how schools can affect and improve their social climate. Many of these ideas and programs emphasize a similar set of ideas. Many emphasize creating "caring in schools" or "caring learning environments" (Noddings, 1992); others stress "building a sense of community" in schools (Sergiovanni, 1994; Whelage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989); and many others emphasize the development of adult-child relationships (Feedman, 1993; Charney, 1998). Mentoring programs, peer- and cross-age tutoring programs, school-within-a-school programs, cooperative learning, home base/homeroom programs, looping (in which teachers advance grade levels each year to remain with students), programs emphasizing welcoming and belonging in schools: All could be considered programs emphasizing these principles and the idea of small, close-knit learning communities. Although these certainly focus on improving climate and all probably have a role in violence prevention as a result, they have not generally been viewed as violence-prevention programs. Perhaps they should be viewed that way.

Instead here we will focus on several prominent approaches for schools to improve school climate, in part to prevent violence or at least to improve student behavioral conflicts. These will include (a) parent and community involvement, (b) character education, (c) violence-prevention and conflict-resolution curricula, (d) peer mediation, and (e) bullying prevention.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement promotes a healthy and consistent learning environment by establishing mutual goals between parents and educators and by developing activities that cut across home and school (Christenson, 1995; Weiss & Edwards, 1992). Parent involvement programs actively engage parents through a variety of activities that enable them to participate more fully in their children's education both at home and at school. Although most of the emphasis is placed on parent involvement, increased involvement of a variety of community members and volunteers may also be important and may have similar benefits.

Family-school collaboration is a cooperative process of planning that brings together school staff, parents, children, and community members to maximize resources for child achievement and development. Although connections between parent involvement and school violence have rarely been studied, increased parent involvement can result in home environments that are more conducive to learning and that improve communication and consistency between home and school. These changes can lead to safer, more responsive schools.

Strategies for Creating Involvement

Traditionally, parent involvement roles have been limited to activities such as Parent-Teacher Organization meetings and parent-teacher conferences. Parent involvement experts have identified six ways that schools can promote parent involvement in learning (Epstein, 1992). The first three ways take place in the home setting. First, schools can help parents increase involvement by teaching them better child-rearing skills through parenting components. One New Jersey middle school taught parents to use home-school contracts to better manage their children's inappropriate behavior (Smith, 1994). Second, schools may also assist parents by stressing learning at home. In the Parents Assuring Student Success (PASS) program, parents learn how to supplement schoolwork by instructing their children at home in academic tasks such as reading and time management (Ban, 1993). Third, all parent involvement programs include an element of increased communication. The Parents As Teachers of Children (PATCH) program, for example, provides numerous support contacts for both parents and staff and holds regular staff, training, and supervision meetings during which concerns can be addressed (Williamson, 1997).

Fourth, providing opportunities for volunteering can increase parental and community involvement. New Haven's School Development engages a Parent Program team to promote parent volunteers in social activities, as classroom aides, and as members of the school development committee (Haynes & Corner, 1996; Warner, 1991; Lloyd, 1996). Fifth, parents may develop a higher degree of ownership in programs that include a component of decision making. The Parent in Touch Program in the Indianapolis

Public Schools, for example, involves parents in planning the academic curriculum (Warner, 1991). Sixth, and last, collaborating-with-community components use community resources to strengthen school programs. The Utah Center for Families in Education, a community center developed specifically to meet the needs of school-aged children and their families, is run jointly by state officials, school administrators, school families, and members of the community (Lloyd, 1996).

Some programs have been directed at parents of students with challenging behavior. For example, one elementary school in California required parents of students at risk for expulsion to attend regular meetings to develop a solution regarding their child's behavior. The collaborative team approach used in these meetings was rated highly successful by both parents and teachers (Morrison, Olivos, Dominguez, Gomez, & Lena, 1993). Parent management training, which teaches parents effective methods of behavior management to decrease their children's aggressive behavior, has also been used with families of students exhibiting aggressive or disruptive behavior.

Outcomes of Involvement

Parent involvement is positively associated with student success, higher attendance rates, and lower suspension rates. One Iowa high school increased attendance rates by improving communication with parents about stricter attendance rules and involving parents in the implementation process (Kube & Ratigan, 1991). Increased parent involvement has also been shown to lead to greater teacher satisfaction, improved parent understanding and parent-child communication, and more successful and effective school programs.

Parent involvement provides an important opportunity for schools to enrich current school programs by bringing parents and community members into the educational process. Increased parent involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, increased parent and teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate. Schools can encourage involvement in a number of areas including parenting, learning at home, communication, volunteering, decision making, and community collaboration. Effective parent and community involvement programs are built on a careful consideration of the unique needs of the community. To build trust, effective approaches to parent involvement rely on a strength-based approach emphasizing positive interactions. Though specifics may vary, all parent involvement programs share the goal of increasing parent-school collaboration to promote healthy child development and safe school communities.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

Many schools have looked for ways to provide proactive guidance for students to learn the positive behaviors and values that should be a part of the education of all people. Many experts have called for schools to be more active in teaching the moral and civic values that are an essential part of our social fabric and sense of community. These calls are not new, and they reach back to philosophers such as Kant and Buber and to educators such as Dewey, who published his book *Moral Principles in Education* in 1909 (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 1999). "A successful school, like a successful business, is a cohesive community of shared values, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. The community celebrates its saga by telling the stories of heroes and heroines who embody the core values of the community" (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990, p. 31). These efforts at creating and teaching a core group of values could be called *character education*.

Character education is a broad term that is used to describe the general curriculum and organizational features of schools that promote the development of fundamental values in children at school. Although both family and religious institutions may have more primary roles in this process, few deny that the schools may also have a role here. Many have said that schools and classrooms exude values whether consciously or not (Henley, Ramsey, &, Algozzine, 1999). According to London (1987, p. 671), character education includes two primary components: (a) education in civic virtue and in the qualities that teach children the forms and rules of citizenship in a just society; and (b) education in personal adjustment, chiefly in the qualities that enable children to become productive and dependable citizens.

Implementing Character Education

Character education may include a variety of subcomponents that can be a part of a larger character education program or that can be self-standing components. These include social skills instruction and curriculum, moral development instruction and curriculum, values clarification instruction and curriculum, caring education and curriculum, school values statements, and perhaps others as well. In addition, other programs such as cooperative-learning strategies, participatory decision making for students, and service learning are sometimes also classified as components of character education. At the same time, character education itself is often viewed as simply one component of some larger school reform and improvement strategies. For example, the "Basic School" as proposed by Boyer, has four components: The School As Community, A Curriculum With Coherence, A Climate for Learning, and A Commitment to Character (Boyer, 1995).

In some schools value statements become almost part of the school logo and identity.

According to Lickona (1988, p. 420), the moral or character education of elementary students is designed to accomplish three goals:

1. To promote development away from egocentrism and excessive individualism and toward cooperative relationships and mutual respect;
2. To foster the growth of moral agency—the capacity to think, feel, and act morally; and
3. To develop in the classroom and in the school a moral community based on fairness, caring, and participation—such a community being a moral end in itself as well as a support system for the character development of each individual student.

To accomplish these goals, Lickona advocates four processes that he feels should be going on in the classroom: building self-esteem and sense of community, learning to cooperate and to help others, moral reflection, and participatory decision making.

Specific qualities sought in children are

1. Self-respect that derives feelings of worth not only from competence but also from positive behavior toward others;
2. Social perspective taking that asks how others think and feel;
3. Moral reasoning about the right thing to do;
4. Moral values such as kindness, courtesy, trustworthiness, and responsibility.

Examples

Two examples of different kinds of programs within the framework of character education might be "Character Counts!" and school value statements.

Character Counts. "Character Counts!" is an ethics and character-building curriculum program designed for students aged 4–19 (Character Counts, 2000). The program teaches and develops a consensus regarding a set of ethical values that transcend race, creed, politics, gender, and wealth. The Character Counts! curriculum and the coalition that supports it work to overcome the false but surprisingly powerful notion that no single value is intrinsically superior to another; that ethical values vary by race, class, gender, and politics; and that greed and fairness, cheating and honesty, all carry the same moral weight (Anderson, 1999). The "Six Pillars of Character" that form the core of ethical values for the program are

1. *Trustworthiness.* Be honest; don't deceive, cheat, or steal. Be reliable—do what you say you'll do. Have the courage to do the right thing. Build a good reputation. Be loyal—stand by your family, friends, and country.
2. *Respect.* Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule. Be tolerant of differences. Use good manners, not bad language. Be considerate of the feelings of others. Don't threaten, hit, or hurt anyone. Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.
3. *Responsibility.* Do what you are supposed to do. Persevere: Keep on trying! Always do your best. Use self-control. Be self-disciplined. Think before you act. Consider the consequences. Be accountable for your choices.
4. *Fairness.* Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded; listen to others. Don't take advantage of others. Don't blame others carelessly.
5. *Caring.* Be kind. Be compassionate and show you care. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.
6. *Citizenship.* Do your share to make your school and community better. Cooperate. Stay informed. Vote. Be a good neighbor. Obey laws and rules. Respect authority. Protect the environment.

School Value Statements. Many schools, particularly elementary schools, have chosen to identify a set of school-wide value statements that are intended to provide a schoolwide base of expectations for student behavior. In some cases, these value statements are a part of a larger character-education program that includes citizenship education, social-skills instruction, and service learning (for example, the Character Counts! program), but in other cases the set of values may not be part of such a program and may be self-standing.

The value statements tend to be a list of positive characteristics that all faculty and students can accept as desirable goals for student behavior. The values are usually prominently displayed in key locations in the school and are sometimes included on stationery, newsletters to parents, and assembly programs. In some schools these value statements become almost part of the school logo and identity, and they are referred to and used in a variety of situations.

These value statements are distinguished from school or classroom rules in that they identify positive traits and goals rather than specific appropriate or inappropriate behaviors. For example, these three simple values or goals: "Be safe; Be respectful; and, Be responsible" can be distinguished from the following three rules: "Be in position; Keep hands and feet to self; and, Start work on time," which are much more specific and focus on particular behaviors regardless of their motivation. As a result, schools often use the value statements as the justification for the creation and implementation of more specific rules for various situations or locations in school.

An example of one such value statement might be the seven virtues identified by Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1995). These seven virtues are

1. Honesty
2. Respect
3. Responsibility
4. Compassion
5. Self-discipline
6. Perseverance
7. Giving

Although the exact wording may vary, there tends to be considerable overlap in the values content identified by various schools. This is not unexpected if the values identified truly represent a core of values to which the larger community ascribes.

To implement these value statements, many schools have established a "values committee" of students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and clergy from various faiths to attempt to devise a list of values. Sometimes these are then discussed in school assemblies, homerooms, and in public hearings to obtain input and to develop a sense of community and school consensus around the values; such a discussion also permits parents not only to be informed but to support these values in their children. In an era when the boundaries between school and religious as well as family responsibilities for values may be controversial, most schools have attempted to develop and include only those values that all faiths and families are likely to be able to fully endorse.

In addition to simply being posted or distributed, most schools that implement these value statements also encourage all teachers to employ these values in working with students in their classes, and many suggest that class instruction be devoted to ensuring that students understand the values and related rules and also to building consensus on the importance of the values.

Most schools also attempt to recognize students whose behavior exemplifies one or more of these values.

This is often done by posting names prominently in the school hall near the office, recognizing these students in honors or awards ceremonies or assemblies, and providing recognition certificates, and also by providing special privileges such as lunch with the principal or a special parking spot, or by distributing tangible awards such as small prizes or other items donated by local businesses and citizens or certificates for free or discounted food items. Additionally, many schools code these values into their overall district "Codes of Conduct" and school discipline systems, by reinforcing behavior in accord with the values and by creating other consequences for violations of these values.

Outcomes of Character Education

Character-education programs, as with many practices in schools, have logical and common-sense value. If violence and inappropriate behavior in school are among the causes of deteriorating home and community values as well as poor moral judgment by the student perpetrators, then character-education programs directly address these causes. Although character-educa-tion programs are widely accepted and have been advocated by a wide array of prominent organizations and individuals, there is little or no research evidence for or against the effectiveness of these efforts to prevent violence or to reduce other kinds of behavior problems. Although local evaluations of some programs, such as Character Counts!, have been conducted, there have been no major national studies of these specific types of programs, let alone character education more generally. Part of the difficulty arises because character education is a general philosophy and does not prescribe specific practices. As a result it is not easy to evaluate the effectiveness of such approaches because they are difficult to define, and the outcomes are hard to pin on such a general program or philosophy. Even individual examples of such programs, such as Character Counts!, which identifies the character goals and provides some curriculum materials, do not provide specific practices regarding how the program is to be instilled throughout the school environment; thus they challenge evaluation.

There is virtually no empirical evidence about the measurable outcomes of having school value statements. Again, they have logical and common-sense value and may serve to supplant deteriorating home and community values. It is not clear that these school value statements can compensate for larger community value deficits, but such efforts by schools are viewed with a "can't hurt" attitude and with the belief that this is the right thing for schools to do. Although these value statements may not change the attitudes or behaviors of chronically disruptive students, they may positively affect many other students in a preventative way and provide meaning for their prosocial behavior.

VIOLENCE-PREVENTION AND CONFLICT-RESOLUTION CURRICULA

Violence-prevention and conflict-resolution curricula teach students to use alternatives to violence when resolving their interpersonal and personal problems. These programs rely on ongoing instruction and discussion to

change the perceptions, attitudes, and skills of students. A number of violence-prevention curricula have become available since the mid-1980s. Such programs typically strive to provide knowledge about violence and conflict, to increase students' understanding of their own and others' feelings, and to teach students the personal and interpersonal skills necessary to avoid violence.

Curricula vary in their emphasis. Conflict-resolution curricula focus on understanding conflict and learning negotiation-based responses to conflict. Violence-prevention curricula emphasize increasing students' knowledge about violence and teaching students alternatives to fighting. Social problem-solving curricula tend to focus on understanding feelings and on teaching students problem-solving strategies for dealing with their personal and interpersonal problems.

Peer mediation can substantially change how students approach and settle conflicts.

Lessons cover a variety of topics, including the prevalence of violence or conflict, identifying and expressing feelings, managing anger, using conflict resolution, appreciating diversity, and coping with stress. Instructional formats include teacher lecture, class meeting, or discussion. Students are encouraged to explore their own reactions and responses, often through videotaped scenarios and self-reflection worksheets. Finally, most programs include a role-playing component to provide opportunities to practice alternative skills and behaviors.

Violence-prevention and conflict-resolution curricula are most often part of a broader program. Instruction in conflict resolution is typically presented in conjunction with a classroom or schoolwide peer-mediation program. Some programs provide guidelines for school discipline or classroom management that are consistent with the curricula. Others focus on building family relationships and parent involvement in the school community.

Outcomes for Violence-Prevention Curricula

The use of schoolwide violence-prevention or conflict-resolution curricula is very recent; there have been few evaluations to date. This does not mean that such programs are ineffective. Rather, it suggests that any school that commits to using a violence-prevention curriculum may wish to undertake its own evaluation of the effectiveness and usefulness of the approach.

A number of programs have documented positive changes in student attitude and behavior. Among the most successful has been the Resolving Conflict Creatively program. In a large-scale evaluation of the program, a majority of teachers reported less physical violence and increased student cooperation in their classrooms. Other documented benefits of such curricula include improvements in

classroom climate and student self-esteem, reductions in fighting and other disciplinary violations, and lower rates of both suspension at the middle school level and dropping out at the high school level. Teachers in successful programs have reported that they find themselves listening more attentively to students.

Some curricula emphasize social cognition or social problem solving in attempting to change student thinking about social interactions. Students exposed to such programs often learn to identify a greater variety of prosocial responses to hypothetical conflict situations. It is important to note, however, that improved ability to describe solutions to hypothetical situations does not guarantee improved behavior.

The effectiveness of violence-prevention curricula may well depend on how extensively the program is implemented. Teachers in successful programs are highly committed to the program and teach it regularly. In one study, student gains were directly proportional to the number of lessons they had received. Comparisons of different approaches have found that a teacher-directed approach might be best for decreasing the isolation of at-risk students. A comparison of violence-prevention with conflict-resolution curricula found that both are effective but that conflict-resolution programs seemed more successful in reducing the most serious types of violence.

In the face of a culture of violence that seems to pervade our schools and society, curricula that teach students the attitudes and skills they need to avoid violence seem to provide one sound strategy for violence prevention. Although differing in their emphases, violence-prevention, conflict-resolution, and social problem-solving curricula all attempt to increase student knowledge, to improve their awareness of feelings, and to teach new skills that can provide an alternative to violence. Because the field is young, schools seeking to implement the program should carefully evaluate the curriculum and plan implementation. The most important challenge in adopting such a curriculum may be to find an approach that is appropriate and can be fully accepted by faculty to ensure a high level of commitment and consistency in implementation.

PEER MEDIATION

Peer mediation is a negotiation-based strategy that teaches student mediators strategies to help resolve conflict among their peers. The student mediators then use these strategies to help keep minor school conflicts from escalating over time into more serious incidents (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). More important, peer mediation teaches students (mediators and disputants) an alternative set of skills that they can apply in conflict situations. Over time, students in

schools with effective peer-mediation programs learn that there are alternatives to violence for solving personal problems or resolving interpersonal conflict.

In mediation, an impartial third party attempts to help others in a dispute come to a "win-win" rather than a "win-lose" resolution of conflict (Fisher & Ury, 1991). In peer mediation, student mediators are taught an interest-based negotiation procedure, along with communication and problem-solving strategies, to help their peers settle disagreements without confrontation or violence. Inter-est-based negotiation attempts to identify the interests that lie beneath the surface positions in a dispute. In the process of training, mediators learn that conflict can be resolved constructively and that their role as mediators is not to judge or to force an agreement or solution. Rather, students come to mediation voluntarily and are guided by peer mediators to move from blaming each other to devising solutions acceptable to all parties.

Peer-mediation programs grew out of programs such as the Community Boards program in San Francisco or Resolving Conflict Creatively in the New York City Public Schools that were developed by attorneys and child advocates in the mid-1970s (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Some programs teach all students in the school processes to mediate disputes (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Others select and train a cadre of students who act as the school's conflict managers....

Peer mediation has been used in a variety of situations. Although in some peer-mediation programs students learn arbitration only in informal situations such as the playground, in other programs, students learn to bring peer mediation into the classroom for resolving disputes. Some more formal programs may even establish a mediation office in which all peer mediation occurs. Although it can be implemented as a stand-alone program, most conflict-resolution programs recommend that peer mediation be used as one piece of a broader curriculum of violence prevention and conflict resolution.

Outcomes of Peer-Mediation Programs

The spread of peer-mediation programs around the country has outpaced research on their effects; as a result, there is much we still need to know about the effectiveness of peer mediation. Yet a wide variety of studies conducted in different locations and situations have found that peer mediation appears to be a promising strategy for improving school climate. A well-conducted peer-mediation program can be successful in changing the way students approach conflict. Students appear to be able to learn the steps of peer mediation as well as to use and retain them over a period of months. The use of peer mediation can substantially change how students approach and settle conflicts. In one middle school, 83% of students trained in peer mediation reported "win-win" settlements whereas 86% of untrained controls reported that conflicts resulted in a "win-lose" outcome (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

These changes in turn appear to lead to other positive outcomes. Student attitudes toward negotiation may become more positive, with students more willing to help friends avoid fights and solve problems and less likely to believe that certain individuals deserve to be "beaten up." Although some studies have found no overall differences in perceptions of school climate, a number of others have reported that both students and teachers believe that peer mediation significantly improved their school climate. There is also evidence that implementing peer-mediation programs can be associated with fewer fights, fewer referrals to the office, and a decreased rate of school suspension (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Finally, for the student mediators themselves, learning the mediation process has been shown to increase self-esteem and even to improve academic achievement.

Thus, peer mediation can have positive effects on student-conflict resolution and school climate. Yet the incompleteness of our knowledge, combined with occasional failures in peer mediation, suggests that success is not automatic. Rather, the benefits of peer mediation may depend on how well the program is planned and carried out. To be most effective, peer mediation should be part of a whole school effort. Teachers, administrators, and other staff need to understand and support the goals and processes of such a program. Although peer mediation is often implemented independently of other components, integrating peer mediation into a broader program that includes life-skills or violence-prevention curriculum appears to increase the effectiveness of the program (Lantieri & Patti, 1996).

Without training in negotiation, students appear to resolve most conflicts by either withdrawing or forcing a solution. A well-conducted peer-mediation program can teach students alternative strategies to aggression and withdrawal for settling conflicts. In particular, student mediators learn communication and problem-solving strategies that can enable them to help their peers find mutually satisfying solutions to disputes. This can lead to improved school climate, and even decreased office referrals and suspensions. Yet peer mediation is complex; to be successful, a program must be adequately planned and the mediators well trained. A facilitator or a team must attend to logistical details, must ensure that peer mediators are trained in both the assumptions and processes of mediation, and must monitor the success of mediators. With adequate attention to these details, peer mediation appears to be a promising tool that, used as part of a broader program, can help teach students methods to settle their conflicts without resorting to violence.

BULLYING PREVENTION

In the last three years, incidents of violent retribution have led to an increased awareness of the problem of bullying. Although often overlooked in schools, a large number of students report having been bullied. Bullying has detrimental psychological effects on children, such as low self-esteem, depression, and suicide.

A student is being bullied or victimized when exposed, repeatedly over time, to intentional injury or discomfort inflicted by one or more other students. This may include using physical contact or verbal assault, making obscene gestures or facial expressions, and being intentionally excluded. Bullying implies an imbalance of power or strength in which others victimize one child.

Surprisingly, large proportions of students are bullied in schools. In the United States, approximately 20% of students are bullied (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Most bullying occurs in places with little adult supervision, such as playgrounds and hallways. Bullies are typically larger than their victims and have more positive attitudes toward the use of violence than other students. Victims are less popular and often without a single friend in class; they tend to be more anxious and insecure than other students and commonly react by crying, withdrawal, and avoidance when attacked. Such reactions may be reinforcing to bullies.

Bullying has serious consequences for the victims, the perpetrators, and the school. Victims report feeling vengefulness, anger, and self-pity after a bullying incident (Borg, 1998). Left untreated, such reactions can evolve into depression, physical illness, and even suicide. In addition, students who engage in aggressive and bullying behaviors during their school years may engage in criminal and aggressive behavior after adolescence. In classrooms exhibiting high numbers of bullying problems, students tend to feel less safe and are less satisfied with school life (Olweus & Limber, 1999).

Bullying is often tolerated and ignored. Some have estimated that teachers rarely detect this problem and only intervene in 4% of all incidents (Craig & Pepler, 1997). In addition, students tend to believe that bullied students are at least partly to blame for their victimization, that bullying makes the victims tougher, and that teasing is simply done in fun (Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994). Students who report such incidents believe that nothing will be done.

Bullying prevention programs are a whole school effort designed to send a message that bullying will not be accepted in school. Well-designed and well-implemented programs can create an overall climate of warmth and adult involvement and can educate students to recognize instances of bullying.

One program incorporating intervention decreased bullying by 50%.

Effective bullying prevention programs rely on a number of components to reduce and prevent bullying problems. Through improved supervision, classroom rules against bullying, positive and negative consequences for following and violating rules, and serious talks with the bullies and victims, prevention plans strive to develop a school environment characterized by warmth and positive adult involvement. Other programs include a school conference day to discuss bullying, meetings with parents of bullies and victims, and regular classroom meetings. At the elementary level, worksheets, role plays, and relevant literature may be incorporated into existing curriculum. Such measures give the message that "bullying is not accepted in our school, and we will see to it that it comes to an end."

Individual interventions (e.g., keeping a victim close to a teacher at all times) are somewhat effective but may not significantly reduce bullying behavior. Comprehensive prevention programs have been implemented and evaluated in many cultures with encouraging results (Olweus & Limber, 1999).

Outcomes of Bullying Prevention Programs

There is an extensive knowledge base showing that well-designed bullying prevention programs can reduce, eliminate, and prevent bully-victim problems as well as improve overall school climate significantly. One program incorporating school, classroom, and individual interventions decreased bullying by 50% and reduced the reported intensity of bullying incidents (Olweus, 1993). Prevention programs have been shown to reduce general antisocial behavior such as fighting, vandalism, and truancy while increasing student satisfaction with their school.

Effective programs have two key prerequisites: awareness and adult involvement. To create a school climate that discourages bullying, school staff and parents must become aware of the extent of bully-victim problems in their own school. In addition, effective prevention also requires a commitment on the part of all adults to reduce or eliminate bullying. All bullying prevention programs recommend a prevention committee at the school level and a coordinator of prevention activities and curricula. The committee typically assesses the extent of the problem by designing and administering an anonymous student questionnaire. Using these data, the committee can make recommendations about which components are to be implemented and what materials are needed.

Most bullying occurrences are undetected or ignored, leading to detrimental effects for victims, bullies, and school climate. A well-conducted prevention program teaches students that bullying is unacceptable behavior and will not be tolerated. Effective programs have significantly reduced the occurrence of bullying and have improved school climate.

CONCLUSION

There appear to be a variety of programs that could be categorized as approaches intended to positively affect school climate and that also may be promising strategies for violence reduction. In addition to the five programs discussed briefly in this article, there may be a variety of other curricula that are of positive value. Although the evidence for the impact of these programs is not yet as strong as would be desired, each has enough evidence to conclude that it is at least a promising approach. Clearly other factors could negatively affect climate, even where one or more of these programs were in place; however, the existence of these curricula would be likely to positively affect school climate and also to reduce the likelihood of school violence. In addition, the compound effect of having more than one of these programs in place simultaneously has not yet been studied, but such an effect could be promising and could strengthen further the positive outcomes.

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