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AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF

THIRD GRADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

By
Laura N. Burns

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of the Science of Teaching
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
June 29, 2007

Approved by

Date Approved _June 29, 2007_

Laura Burns
AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING
2006/2007
Dr. Marjorie Madden
Masters of Science in Collaborative Education

The purpose of this study is to investigate students' views regarding a variety of

topics related to bullying. Different methods were used to gather information regarding

the students' opinions. The students shared their ideas through the use of surveys,

writing samples, and interviews. This study's results determined students' beliefs about

bullying as well as their awareness of its occurrence. Students were able to provide

accurate definitions of bullying. Students were also able to discuss several appropriate

ways to react to bullying. Results of this study contribute more to the understanding of

students' perspectives about the topic of bullying in the school setting.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all the members of my family for their continued love and support. Without you behind me, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for your constant encouragement and guidance.

I would like to also thank my friends for their support and assistance as I wrote this. If you did not make frequent trips to the library, listen to me complain, and assist me in the editing process, this project would not have been completed. Thank you for putting up with me!

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Madden for being exceptionally patient and understanding during the completion of this project. If you had not allowed leniency on deadlines and provided constant feedback, I would have been unable to successfully finish. Thank you again for being an amazing advisor.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

And his soul ... oh, his soul. He was choking back his tears, hurrying, fumbling to get his clothes from his locker, resolving to remain silent, desperately hoping no one would see him crying-but deep inside, his soul wailed in anguish, and there were no words or thoughts to heal it. Parental advice came to his mind, but it carried as much weight as a cookie fortune: "Just ignore them." Ignoring was only acting. It didn't stop the arrows from cutting through his heart. He even believed the taunts and stinging words. *Dear God, am I that ugly? Am I that weak and worthless?*

This quote is from Frank Peretti's <u>No More Bullies: For Those Who Wound or Are Wounded</u> and provides a window into the thoughts of a victim of bullying.

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Purpose Statement

Based on personal experience, most adults would agree that bullying has always existed and is a common occurrence in schools. It is not a new phenomenon in our schools, but rather an issue that has been brewing for years. Statistics help paint the picture of the seriousness of bullying. Between 15 and 30 percent of students are bullies or victims in the United States (NASP, 2003). This means that about one third of students deal with bullying in one way or another. Bullying has a tremendous effect on students today. Research shows that about 160,000 children skip school each day

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because they fear the intimidation of their peers ("Personal Safety," 2006). The fear of bullying should not be a deterrent for children attending school. School is a location in which children should feel safe and be able to focus on their education. This being said, I hope to investigate the severity of the bullying problem within schools. I hope to add to the research on bullying and provide further insight concerning the topic.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

My research question is: "Do students perceive bullying to be an important and serious issue?" The purpose of this study is to investigate and study students' perceptions of bullying. There has been a great deal of research conducted on the topic of bullying and its effects. However, this study gathers information from those who are directly affected by bullying: the students. Unlike other studies that may have analyzed data from teachers and administrators, this study will be a result of research conducted using students and their perspectives.

Story of the Question

I originally wanted to focus my thesis on school violence. This was at the height of a season in which school shootings kept taking place. As I began my research process, a similar event kept occurring. As I searched the terms "school violence" in various research databases, bullying was a common headline of the articles that were produced. As I began to read some of the articles to see if they related to my topic, I became more intrigued by bullying. After not finding many research articles that specifically focused on school violence and shootings, bullying became my new focus.

I decided to research bullying because I realized that there was an abundance of research that had already been conducted concerning the topic. The other aspect of the

topic that interested me as a future educator was the fact that bullying is an issue that teachers will have to face despite the location of their schools or the grades in which they teach. Regardless of whether I am teaching in an upper-class district, a lower-class district, a special education classroom, a general education class, kindergarten or middle school, bullying is an issue everywhere.

As a former elementary student, I cannot say that I remember any specific anti-bullying campaigns that my school endorsed. Morally, I understood that it was wrong, but that is about as far as my knowledge went at the time. No one ever spoke to me about the issue or asked me my opinions. These realizations helped me to understand the importance of talking about bullying with children.

As I constructed my literature review, I became interested in investigating the prevalence of bullying amongst elementary students. I had read what the experts said about the subject, and I ad their analyses; however, I wanted to learn what students in a local town had to say about the issue of bullying. Whether students are bullies, victims, or bystanders, they have something to say about the issue. If they are not directly involved in an incident, then they surely know of someone who is and have something to say about it.

In this study I focus on the question of whether or not students perceive bullying to be an important issue. Statistics and research lay out the consequences, but actual students in a real classroom are what interest me. Through this paper, I hope to discover how students feel about bullying and I hope to investigate if they understand the magnitude of bullying.

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<u>Thesis Guide</u>

Chapter two of this paper explains what current research says about bullying. Chapter three is divided into two parts: the methodology of the study and the context of the study. This chapter describes the research design that will be used, includes the sources that will be used to collect data, explains the school in which this study takes place and it describes the subjects that participated. Chapter four reveals the findings of the study including the results of the surveys and highlights from the discussion groups. Chapter five summarizes the information that was gathered and draws conclusions and recommendations concerning the results of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This literature review highlights the major areas of research that have been conducted concerning bullying. This section will provide definitions of bullying as well as an explanation of the various forms of bullying that exist. Following that is a section entitled "Who the Bullies are" which analyzes frequent characteristics of bullies. Appropriately following that, is a section devoted to the victims of bullying and their typical profiles. This literature review will also explore the gender differences concerning bullying and the long and short term effects for those involved. Lastly, the literature review discusses research concerning teachers' and the government's roles in regards to the issue of bullying.

Bullying Defined

One generally accepted definition describes bullying as "a conscious and willful act of aggression and/or manipulation by one or more people against another person or people" (Sullivan, 2000). This definition clearly lays the foundation for the purpose of bullying. There is an aggressor who knowingly acts with the intent to hurt another.

Dan Olweus (1993), proposes that bullying is when a student is "exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Page 9). Olweus points out that bullying is a repeated act against the victim. A comment or action here or there on the part of a bully is not typically going to permanently harm a student; however, the problem with bullying is that it is repeated

time and time again. Research shows that bullying can be committed by one individual or a group of individuals (Olweus, 1993 and Sullivan, 2000).

<u>Various Forms of Bullying</u>

Bullying is no longer confined to punching the boy with the glasses or making fun of the girl whose outfits never match. Along with every other aspect of our lives, bullying has become more complex and difficult to limit to one form. One type consists of physical bullying, "which includes biting, hair-pulling, hitting, kicking, locking in a room, pinching, punching, pushing, scratching, spitting or any other form of physical attack. It also includes damaging a person's property" (Sullivan, 2000, p. 17). From an adult's perspective, it is easier to witness and see the ramifications of physical bullying.

Non physical bullying, verbal or non-verbal, is a second type that also occurs (Sullivan, 2000). Verbal bullying includes threatening phone calls, name-calling, spreading rumors and teasing. Non-verbal bullying may include isolating someone, ignoring, making faces and excluding (Sullivan, 2000).

Two other types of bullying that research recognizes are racial bullying and sexual bullying (Hathorn, 2006 and Sullivan, 2000). Racial bullying involves a bully who specifically targets a student based on his/her race and proceeds to make racial slurs, mock the victim's culture or make offensive gestures (Dupper and Whitted, 2005). Sexual bullying occurs more often with females than males and includes making remarks about another's body, making sexual demands or inappropriate touching (Sullivan, 2000).

Given the knowledge that there are numerous forms of bullying, one must take this into consideration when studying the topic (Hathorn, 2006 and Sullivan, 2000). An

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open mind and open eyes are needed to properly examine the events leading up to bullying and its ramifications.

Who the Bullies are

Generally speaking, bullies are those students who terrorize the victims. They typically have little empathy toward their victims and tend to have a positive view of violence (Hathorn, 2006). Despite popular beliefs, bullies do not act out due to low self-esteem. Rather, bullies are those students who have positive views of themselves and consequently those views are reinforced by those around them (Juvonen, 2005). Bullies frequently have an entourage of students who look up to them and follow their leads. Furthermore, bullies do not typically feel regret after victimizing a fellow student, but rather they feel happy or experience satisfaction (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Just as there are similarities among bullies, similarities exist amongst the families to which they belong. Sullivan (2002) states that there are common links between bullies and their families that may play a role on their behavior. If a bully's behavior is not addressed or if he/she lacks adult supervision, then the bullying is more likely to reoccur (NASP, 2003). Batsche and Knoff (1994) list five common characteristics of the parents of bullies:

1. They prefer physical means of discipline (authoritarian)

2. Are sometimes hostile and rejecting

3. Are described as both hostile and permissive (inconsistent parenting/little supervision)

4. Have poor problem-solving skills

5. Teach their children to strike back at the least provocation (Batsche and Howard, 1994)

Bullies are usually brought up in households where the mentality is that aggression is acceptable and necessary. Without others to tell them differently, these students frequently believe what they hear and see at home and mimic the behavior of their parents while at school.

Profile of Typical Victims

Olweus' (1993) extensive research into bullying provides much insight into the characteristics of victims. He suggests that victims of bullying tend to be more anxious and insecure than most students. Also, unlike their bullies, the victims suffer from low self-esteem and already have a negative view of themselves. Victims are likely to display signs of withdrawal and avoidance (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). Consequently, victims tend to be children who are often found alone and not playing with others (Sullivan, 2000). Coincidentally, that isolation makes them easy targets for bullies (Sullivan, 2000).

There are two main types of victims that have been identified and researched (Olweus, 1994). The passive or submissive victims are anxious, lack self-esteem, are physically weak and are unpopular (Sullivan, 2000). Bullies pick on these types of victims because they know that the victim will not fight back. The other type of victim is labeled as the provocative victim. These students have problems with concentration and cause agitation and irritation to those around them (Sullivan, 2000).

Gender Differences

Although similar variables and outcomes exist in bullying, the way in which females and males bully is very different. Boys are three to four times more likely to be

more physical when bullying fellow students (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). Males consider their victim's physical weakness, short temper and their friends (Harris and Petrie, 2003). Female bullies take into account their victims' emotional instability, looks, weight and academic standing. (Harris and Petrie, 2003). Girls tend to use more subtle methods such as social isolation or spreading rumors (Sullivan, 2000).

Just as the ways in which males and female bullies act, their victims have varying reactions. Female victims tend to feel more hurt and sad, whereas boys usually feel anger afterwards (Rigby, 1998). Girls are more likely than boys to tell someone, and they are more willing to work with an adult to find a solution (Rigby, 1998).

Effect of Bullying

Those students who are consistently bullied tend to have a sense of permanent anxiety and insecurity as well as low self-esteem (Olweus, 2000). Prolonged exposure to any type of bullying is bound to have physical and emotional effects on the body. Victims tend to feel unattractive and incompetent as well (Sullivan, 2000). Physical bullying may result in bruises, broken bones, bite marks, cuts or scratches. The most extreme physical effect is suicide. Olweus (1993) states, "It is not surprising that the victims' devaluation of themselves sometimes becomes so overwhelming that they see suicide as the only possible solution." Emotionally, victims may feel afraid, angry, ashamed, depressed, stupid and useless (Sullivan, 2000).

Bullying appears to have long-term, negative effects on the bully as well. "Sixty percent of boys who were identified as bullies between the sixth and ninth grades had at least one criminal conviction by age twenty-four, and forty percent of these individuals

had more than three arrests" (Dupper and Whitted, 2005). The behavior that those individuals exhibited was not just a phase and affected them outside of the school doors.

Even those students who are not the specific victim or bully suffer from the effects of bullying. Students who witness bullying tend to feel unsafe and insecure at school. They have trouble focusing on their school work due to their fear of becoming a target of bullying. Bullying creates an atmosphere that suggests the school is unsafe and invokes fear in students (Dupper and Whitted, 2005).

How Educators are Responding

One third of middle schools students do not feel safe at school due to bullying and fail to report cases of bullying to the staff because they are scared and feel that nothing will be done ("Personal Safety", 2006). Not only is the act of bullying an issue, but so are teacher prevention and intervention. Unfortunately, 25 percent of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying or putdowns and consequently intervene in only four percent of bullying incidents ("Bullying: Facts", 2006). So, even when students do choose to speak to an educator, little is done. Research does not speak highly of teachers when it comes to their reactions concerning bullying (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). Most teachers are not trained to deal with issues such as bullying because their main role in the classroom is teaching, which, in itself, is a highly demanding job (Sullivan, 2000). This research demonstrates that the problem of bullying is an unsettled issue among teachers as well as students.

The Role of the Government

Recent legislation has put pressure on schools and teachers to address the issue of bullying and provide suggestions on how to prevent the problem. The passage of the No

Child Left Behind Act of 2001 brought pressure on schools to improve the quality of education as well as their safety (Dupper and Whitted, 2005). Each state is required to define what qualifies as a "persistently dangerous" school. The students who attend those schools will then have the option of transferring out of the school into a different one in the same district. Those schools that are labeled as persistently dangerous therefore risk losing federal funds. Therefore, issues such as bullying would increase the likelihood that a school would be defined as persistently dangerous (Dupper and Whitted, 2005).

Similarly, in 2003, New Jersey Law adopted a policy that addresses "harassment, intimidating or bullying" (New Jersey Anti Bully Law, 2006). The law states that districts must adopt a policy that prohibits all three. The district is also required to inform students of what is expected of them and the possible consequences of failing to adhere to the rules. Although it is not mandated, school districts are encouraged to develop anti-bullying programs. Legislature like this demonstrates that the state of New Jersey is making it a priority to address bullying. Holding schools accountable for the safety of their buildings is a brilliant way to ensure the protection of students.

Conclusion

This review of the research highlights the major issues surrounding the topic of bullying. Bullying is a willful and conscious effort on the part of an individual or group with the intent to harm another (Olweus, 1993 and Sullivan, 2000). Categorizing bullying is important, yet it is also difficult because it may appear in various forms (Sullivan, 2000). Research shows that bullying is also remarkably different with males and females. Even with a tremendous amount of research and statistics, teachers and the government are still trying to figure out ways to battle bullies.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter includes the details of the research design and methodology for this study. The description of the research design, the sources of data, and the ways the data are analyzed are discussed. The second part of the chapter looks at the context of the study. Included in part two is a description of the school district, the school in which the study takes place, and the participants of the study. The timeline and procedure of the study are also described.

Context of the Study

District

Washington Township is located in Gloucester County, New Jersey. The school district is comprised of 10 schools that serve students in grades k-12.. There is one kindergarten school, six elementary schools, two middles schools, and one high school.

The population of Washington Township in 2000 was 47,114 people (www.Wikipedia.org). The population included 15,609 households and 12,658 families (www.Wikipedia.org). The population was 90.20% Caucasian, 4.85% African American, 3.31% Asian, 2.03% Hispanic,1.01% two or more races, 0.53% other, and 0.08% Native American (www.wikipedia.org).

The household median income for the township was $66,546 and for a family it was $74,661 (www.wikipedia.org). About 3.2% of the population was below the poverty line.

School Community

Birches Elementary school is one of six elementary schools in the district. There are 580 students enrolled at the school (www.greatschools.net). There are about 24 students in each homeroom. There are five different classes for each grade 1-5.

The student population is 85% white, 6% Asian, 6% black, and 3% Hispanic (www.greatschools.net). About 8% of the students participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program (www.greatschools.net). Students with disabilities comprise 13% of the student population. There are no English language learners at this school.

Classroom

Classroom Demographics

Students' Initials	Gender	Race	Basic Skills	Special Education
AH	boy	Caucasian		x
JY	girl	Caucasian	x	
ST	boy	Caucasian		x
MH	girl	Caucasian		
CD	girl	Caucasian		
SD	boy	Caucasian	x	
WQ	boy	Caucasian		
PL	girl	Caucasian		
IN	boy	Phillipino	x	
BY	girl	Caucasian		
FV	boy	Caucasian		
RF	·boy	Caucasian	x	
TH	girl	Caucasian		x
GF	boy	Caucasian		
TS	girl	Caucasian		
ST	girl	Caucasian	x	
MN	girl	Caucasian		
GH	girl	Caucasian		x

The classroom where the research took place was a third grade class comprised of 10 girls and 8 boys. The students had one general education teacher and two in class-

support teachers for reading and math basic skills students. Four students spent the majority of the day in a resource room.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

<u>Research</u>

The research gathered in this study is both quantitative and qualitative. The majority of this study involves qualitative research, which is research that is not numerical. Also, since the study is being conducted in a classroom it is defined as teacher research. The data were gathered without interfering with class time, and collection of the data was not too demanding upon the teacher researcher. Qualitative research is more useful in this study because students' perceptions and thoughts about bullying are being investigated. In order to gather information, surveys, focus groups, and writing responses will be used. During parts of those activities I will used a tape recorder to be able to accurately obtain information.

After the surveys are collected I made a chart to compare the data collected. Several conclusions were drawn after totaling up the information gathered. In order to do so, the students' responses were totaled and transformed into percentages for raw data. Although, the survey is only one component of the survey, this data proved useful in shaping other parts of the research.

<u>Procedure of the Study</u>

The students voluntarily took part in the components of the study. Consent forms were sent home to the parents and guardians of the students describing the research study. Students were given the option to either participate or choose not to. All 18 of the students in my class chose to take part in this study. All aspects of the research for the

study were conducted in Mrs. Wert's third grade classroom at Birches Elementary. The data were gathered during March and April of 2007.

During March students were asked to complete surveys in order to gather preliminary information. These surveys were completed independently by each student on a specific day. The students each received a survey and were instructed to answer honestly. To encourage honesty, students were instructed not to place their names on the surveys. Additionally, students will be instructed to place folders on their desks so that they do not have to worry about classmates glancing at their papers. At the end of the survey students will place their surveys in an envelope to ensure anonymity.

Another main aspect of research collection that occurred was discussion groups that took place between me and the students. These focus groups took place during the school day in the classroom. Only the researcher and several students were present at these discussion groups. The familiar atmosphere and limited amount of people provided an open forum for honesty. Various topics concerning bullying will be discussed in a relaxed atmosphere. Although there was no true structure for these discussions, the topic had a connection with bullying and no specific questions or answers were required. During the interviews I tape-recorded the results and took notes to have a record of the data.

Students also took part in an activity that focused on bullying. During this activity, the students were introduced to a "new" student (a silhouette) to the class. Students were instructed to treat this student as an outsider and imagine that they are teasing this student. Students were able to see how easy it is to become involved in bullying and they learned how their words can be hurtful. At the end of the lesson

students were encouraged to apologize to the student. After the activity we had a group discussion which was tape-recorded. After the group discussion students will be given the opportunity to write a personal response to the activity.

Data for this study are also being collected through my personal notes and reflections during my time at this location. Any specific events which occur or any class discussions that have a connection to the topic of bullying were noted and reflected upon in relationship to the topic of this study.

Sources of Data

There are several sources of the data collected in this study. Studying results from various sources insures that the information obtained can be supported and allows for triangulation of information. The first data source is student questionnaires. These questionnaires were created by the researcher and completed independently by each student. The second data source consists of audio-taped conversations of student focus groups. Also used is the audio-taped lesson that addressed bullying and the students' writing responses to the activity. Data for this study are also being colleted in a teacher journal where I record personal notes and reflections during the study. Any specific events which occur or any class discussions that have a connection to the topic of bullying will be noted and reflected upon in relationship to the topic of bullying.

Description of Data Analysis

Once the surveys are collected and the interviews completed, the data was analyzed accordingly.

The information from the surveys was reported and recorded in different ways. The data was initially entered into a spreadsheet so that it could be more easily studied.

The data was also separated so that the male and female responses can be studied to compare and contrast the information.

The notes from the discussion groups will also be typed up for reference purposes. Reoccurring thoughts or ideas from the focus groups will be linked together. In order to recall specific points that were made during the discussions the researcher listened to the tape-recordings and made notes of key ideas that were shared. Finally, the researcher will analyze the relationship between the questionnaire results.

Students also participated in a lesson which focused on bullying. The researcher tape recorded the activity in order to gain a better understanding of the results. Upon completion of the activity students wrote a response in which they reflected on the activity. This artifact was used to study their reactions and thoughts.

Finally, any notes that I have taken during the study were compared to the surveys and the results of the interviews. The common themes or gaps in information were compared and contrasted so that conclusions could be drawn.

Through the use of these methods, I hoped to gain a stronger sense of how third graders perceive bullying. These various methods will provide insight into student feelings and thoughts surrounding the topic of bullying.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

The following chapter discusses the data collected during my research, the analysis and the central themes that were discovered. This chapter provides summaries of students' perceptions concerning bullying. The first part of this chapter includes the students' understanding of the term bullying and possible ways to define the term. Following that section are the students' opinions concerning where bullying typically occurs and what they should do when faced with the problem. The final section is a review of students' ideas concerning why bullying happens and its results.

Definitions of Bullying

Many in-school experts in the field of bullying, such as Dan Olweus and Keith Sullivan, provide in-depth definitions and discuss multiple forms of bullying. After talking with and interviewing students, their definitions were many. However, a common thread among all of the various definitions showed that the students have a concrete idea of what bullying is and the various forms it can take.

In order to get a simple definition and check for understanding of the term bullying I administered a survey to the students. The survey covered several key ideas regarding to the topic, but it was also used to examine how knowledgeable the students were about bullying. One of the questions asked the students to define bullying. This survey was administered without probing or prompting in order to get accurate feedback.

Some of the answers that were recorded for the question, "In your own words describe what a bully is" are as follows:

- A mean kid that does bad

- A person who pushes people around and takes lunch money

- Someone who always makes you sad and teases you

- Someone who pushes you around and calls you names

- Someone who picks on you

- Someone that can hurt you in anyway

Many of the definitions that were provided were very specific however, they illustrated the different beliefs that students have concerning bullies. All of the definitions portrayed bullies in a negative light. Students are aware that the term bully has a negative connotation and that bullies typically take part in behaviors that are inappropriate.

Although these are just a sampling of the definitions, all 18 participants were able to provide an accurate definition of a bully. Some were more specific than others, but none of the students were unaware of the term's meaning. This information shows that students have an accurate picture of what a bully is and what it entails.

In addition to the survey, interviews were used to allow the students to frequently talk about bullying. During the interviews, the students were asked again to explain exactly what a bully is and what behaviors such a person would exhibit. Students expressed similar ideas and shared that a bully is not someone who is liked by others. The students were aware of the fact that bullying is not a desired behavior but rather an action that is looked down upon.

In talking with the students during the interviews, many of them came to their own conclusions. After discussing the definitions of a bully the students were asked if they would be friends with someone if they knew that person was a bully. Every student replied that they would not be friends with someone if they knew that that person was a bully. When I pushed the question and asked the students why, a common reply was "I don't want to be friends with a mean person." Although, it seems like a simple response to a simple question, it hits at the heart of bullying. These students knew what a bully was, what bullies do, and they know that being friends with a bully is not desired.

In situations such as the surveys and the interviews it was easy for the students to identify bullying. However, an activity that was presented to the students seemed to change their perceptions of bullying. The activity was a mini-lesson that investigated what would happen if a new student was introduced to the class. The scenario required all of the students to participate. As a class, they pretended a new student, a silhouette in the activity, was joining the class. Upon entering the class the students were instructed that they had to say something mean to the student. This was because typically, a new student finds it difficult to be accepted into a new group of peers. The object of the lesson was to set the students up in a situation where they had to take on the role of the bully.

At the end of the activity the students were asked to write a brief response to the activity. The purpose of the activity was to show the students how a class could easily become a group of bullies and the effects bullying could have on the victim. After reading their responses it became apparent that the students did not really see name-calling as a drastic problem. Although they did discuss that it was awful behavior, they

expressed that it was something that occurred naturally and frequently at their age. In effect, they did not view it necessarily as bullying but rather just a behavior that kids do from time to time.

Where Bullying Occurs

In order to get an accurate idea of where bullying occurs at a typical school I asked questions related to the topic in the survey and during the student interviews. Students have varying views on where bullying occurs and their ideas as to the reasoning behind this.

One question in the survey provided students with a list of locations and asked students to check which places bullying typically occurred. The choices that were provided were on the "bus, at the bus stop, lunchroom, elective areas, classrooms, recess, or other". Students were asked to check off or write the names of the locations in which bullying usually occurred. After reviewing the surveys several common responses were seen. Eighty percent of the students chose recess as one of the locations. The other most frequent spots for bullying were the lunchroom and elective areas.

These data were not incredibly surprising having been a student myself and previously completing a literature review. Bullies take advantage of situations in which adults are not present. The locations in which the students checked off are places where adults watching over them are not very familiar with the students and where there is a high number of other children.

At this particular school, recess, lunch, and elective areas are places in which bullies can easily get away with picking on someone. The lunchroom typically holds about 100 students where five adults were present to make sure the students had their

lunches, purchased the correct lunch, ate their lunch, cleaned up after themselves, and got along with each other. Coincidentally, the adults who were supervising these children were not certified teachers and had a high turnover rate. The lunch aides received very little respect from the students and did not know very much about the individual students.

During the interviews I asked students to provide me with insight as to why bullying typically occurred at lunch time, electives, and recess, rather than in the classroom. One student's reply was,

> "Usually the lunch aides don't know what's going on at our lunch table. There's too many children in the cafeteria to be watching everyone. And when we go outside they usually stand by the building and we go out into the fields and play. Bullies usually say things or do things to kids when the adult isn't around."

Even though that answer helped me gain a student's perspective in regards to activities in the lunchroom, there was still no explanation as to why bullying was a frequent occurrence in the electives such as art and music. I then asked the students why the situation in electives was different if there is the same amount of students and adults as in the general classroom. One girl's, immediate response was,

> "Bullying happens all the time in places like art and music. Those teachers don't usually know who the bullies are in each class and aren't always watching them. Those teachers don't really have any type of punishment for bad kids anyhow. The teacher usually just warns that person and then the teacher pretty much goes on with what she's doing."

Students, especially bullies, who have the desire to pick on or bother someone else know that what they are doing will cause them to get reprimanded. Therefore, they will not willingly get themselves in trouble. They will purposely wait for an opportune time to bother another student. Places such as the lunchroom, playground, and electives are locations in which it is easier for them to "get away" with doing wrong. These are areas in which the teacher is not familiar with every student and there are frequent mishaps. These teachers typically do not have behavior management systems set up because they only see groups of students once a week for less than an hour. All of these factors increase the likelihood of a bullying situation.

Reasons Bullying Occurs

There are many reasons as to why bullying may occur. However, the purpose of this study was to investigate students' beliefs as to why bullies behave the way that they do. For this answer I looked toward the result of question number 11 of my survey in which the students were asked "Why do you think that bullies pick on other students." This was an open ended question for the students to answer on paper. The students' responses varied greatly but were extremely insightful as to why children believe others bully.

- People do things to them
- They think their cool
- Because they have no one that likes them
- Because bullies might have something bugging them so they pick on other people
- To get attention

- Because they have no friends or someone's bullying them

The students' responses, although in elementary terms, were very accurate compared to what experts in the field say. The children seemed to have a general idea of possible motives for bullies. Out of the 18 surveys administered only two students were unable to respond to this question. Those students' who did answer the question all had varying, yet accurate responses to the question. The fact that the students were able to list reasons for bullying shows that the students believe bullies have a driving force behind their actions. The students realize that bullies act the way they do for a specific reason; there is something driving them to act.

In order to see what would happen when the students were faced with their own bullying situation the students participated in a lesson concerning bullying. The lesson, previously mentioned as a data source, forced the students to step into the shoes of a bully. The situation involved the introduction of a new student to the class which caused the class to band together and tease this one particular student. Although the students were instructed to act like bullies, and say something negative there was no script for the actual words that were said or their reactions.

This activity gave the students the ability to look at the situation from a different perspective, and allowed the students to register some reasons why students bully. After we completed the activity, I asked the students to provide reasons as to why students may choose to bully others. The students realized that in a situation such as the scenario, there were factors that improved the likelihood for bullying. When asked why bullying may occur, they thought that there were two main reasons. The first, being that since the

entire class was participating in the teasing students did not want to be the one person who decided not to participate, and thus be an outcast. Also, they realized that there were more "bullies" in the scenario than victims. They said that they felt more powerful because there were more of them and they knew that their friends were on their side.

Who the Bullies are

Although there is no specific mold for bullies, research shows that there are common characteristics that exist. Students in this study were asked to provide their impressions and thoughts of bullies and their personalities. The data for characteristics of bullies relies heavily on the information gathered during the discussions.

One of my questions for the students asked if bullies were all similar or if there was a vast difference among bullies they knew. The students shared that from their experiences anyone could be a bully. However, a common characteristic was that the bully was older than the victim, or in this case, the participants. They stated that this was because it provided the bully with the advantage of being older and typically physically bigger. Students shared that they were never bullied by anyone who was remarkably younger than they.

The other main aspect that was explored was the gender of bullies. The discussions showed that bullies usually victimized someone of their own gender. The one variation was that at times, older males picked on younger females. Students shared that in such areas as the playground and lunchroom, the sexes are typically segregated. Therefore, the bullies would pick on those around them, who would be those of a similar gender.

A question asked the students if they were familiar with a bully in their class. More than half stated that they knew of someone who was a bully either in their class or in their school. This means that they are aware that this person has the label as a bully. When asked to elaborate, students stated that there were just certain students in the school who were known bullies. Since those students had the label other students knew to stay away from them. Since the participants were in third grade, they acknowledged that these known bullies were students in either fourth or fifth grade who picked on those students in the lower grades.

Even though the students are unable to provide a clear picture of who bullies were, they can pick out such students in their own way. They know that older students commonly pick on younger students. They also are aware that these students usually are of the same gender. Lastly, these students are typically not well-liked by their peers because of their known bullying behaviors.

Effects of Bullying

Bullying has a tremendous effect on the victims, bullies, and even bystanders. In order to study this effect, the topic was heavily discussed during the interviews. Based upon the surveys it had been determined that all of the students had either been bullies themselves or witnessed a bullying incident. Therefore, each student was able to provide insight into the effects that bullying had on those involved.

The participants were generally aware of the negative results of bullying. For those who had been victims they recalled several instances in which they were bullied. Recalling those memories allowed students to reflect on the results. Students were all in unison about feeling either distraught or frustrated after the incident. Whether the

students were the sole victim or part of a group they remembered specific instances in a very negative light.

After hearing several students talk about instances in which they were bullied, questions in my mind began to surface. I asked specific students who shared, where exactly the bullying had taken place. For those who were able to recall, I then asked them how they felt about returning to that location. Many of them replied that they are hesitant to return to certain places after having experienced bullying. Others stated that they prefer to go with others to those locations in order to feel safer. A feeling of fear is felt in students who were bullied at a location when the opportunity arises for them to return there. The bullying incident was not a one time event, but rather something that remains with them.

Even though bullying is a broad term, it encompasses a variety of behaviors. Hearing the students' share their personal experiences provided insight into what common behavior may be for a bully in third grade. Further questioning on my part provided a clearer picture of typical actions of a bully. The most common behaviors were name-calling and physical abuse. The name calling was either done in person or through the use of written notes. In regards to physical abuse, students recalled such instances in which they were pinched repeatedly, had small objects thrown at them, had their hair pulled, or were tripped. Although at some degree physical abuse from a bully can be more severe, the third graders did not seem to experience such severe behavior.

Without much difficulty students were able to explain the results of bullying when in the position of the victim. Only one student admitted to participating in bullying on the survey. However, either unknowingly, or possibly unwilling to admit, many others

at one point possibly acted as a bully. Nonetheless, during the activity that we completed as a class, each student had the opportunity to play the role of a bully. Without asking for names or even specific instances, during the discussions I asked the students about the effects on the bullies themselves. The students were somewhat surprised at my question and first and seemed shocked that I was questioning how the bully faired in the end. The students were able to come up with several ideas about how bullies may feel.

Most importantly is that they witnessed and understood that bullies did not have many close friends. They decided that this was because bullies typically end up bullying anyone close to them. Coincidentally, the students noted that students do not befriend a well-known bully. Bullies become very unpopular because of their personality and frequent negative behavior. The children also stated that bullies are frequently reprimanded by teachers and have to face various repercussions. The students discussed that although bullies are sometimes able to avoid punishment, they typically are caught and reprimanded.

During the scenario the students participated in, students were required to take on the behaviors of the bully. After they completed the part in which students had to say something negative to the "new student", students were then required to apologize and make a positive comment. After the entire activity we talked as a class about how the students felt about their role. At the time, many of the students were laughing and high-fiving each other because of their ability to make a negative comment. Even though the students were prompted to say something negative the specific comments were up to the students. Such comments that were made were, "Go back where you came from", "No one likes you", "You aren't going to make any friends because you have funny clothes".

They became caught up in the moment and forgot that this could have been a real person they were talking about. However, after having some time to think through the situation and then say something positive, they really changed their views. Many students admitted they felt horrible after acting like a bully. Some even went as far as to say that they put themselves in the shoes of the student being picked on and realized how wrong it was. Being given the opportunity to then say something positive encouraged the students. Several admitted that having permission to say something rude was fun and exciting, but that they actually felt happier and better about themselves after saying something positive. When asked about the relationship between this activity and the feeling of bullies, students were able to make the connection. They concluded that at the time bullies may feel as if they are being funny or harmless, but that in the end the bully does not feel content about their behavior. They understood that bullies may feel a temporary high, but that it is only a fleeting feeling. The students suggested that bullies only know the temporary comforting feeling of bullying someone rather than the long-lasting feeling of being kind to all.

Learning About Bullying

The final aspect of bullying that I studied with the students was the knowledge students had acquired concerning bullying. I was interested in what type of education the students had received concerning bullying. I also wanted to find out who they had spoken to regarding bullying.

One question from the survey asked the students how many assemblies they had attended that addressed bullying. The choices ranged from 0-5. There was no consistency in the responses. Rather their answers seemed to vary greatly. This could be

for several reasons; the first being that they may not have understood the question. The students may also have had different experiences throughout their schooling. Still, others may have had doubts about what qualified as an assembly that addressed bullying. Nonetheless, most students answered between 1-4, for the amount of assemblies they attended that talked about bullying.

In order to clear up the confusion concerning this question, I addressed it during the discussion groups. Once I stated what I meant by my question I asked the students if they had attended any assemblies that taught them about bullying. All of the students acknowledged that the school had several different assemblies over the years that had talked about bullying and what to do if it occurs. The students reported that the assemblies were very educational and provided them with advice on how to respond to a bully.

Another program that the school had was one offered by the guidance counselor. This particular program reinforced previous knowledge that these students had acquired. During third grade the guidance counselor spends several days with each third grade class in order to address bullying. They talk, watch a video, read an article and complete a survey. The purpose of the survey is to gather data specifically about third graders and to investigate if the third graders are bullied. The program continues in fourth grade. The difference being that the purpose of the survey is to investigate if the participants are the bullies. This effort on behalf of the school provides a solid program that addresses bullying and helps to provide data about bullying issues that may be occurring.

The final aspect of addressing bullying in schools that was investigated was the students' comfort in speaking to others about a bullying issue. A question on the survey

asked the students to check off various people in their lives, such as teachers, friends, or parents that they feel comfortable talking to if they were students was being bullied. Most students checked off multiple choices which showed that the students all have several different people that they would talk to about bullying. There were no students who did not check any of the choices off, which suggests that every student had at least one person they could talk to about bullying. It is important for the students to realize there are many people in their lives with whom they could confide in.

Based upon their responses to the survey question I wanted to deepen this information. During the discussions the students were asked who they normally talked to if they were having an issue with bullying. Almost every student said either their parents or a teacher. If the incident occurred at school, they went to their teacher. Similarly, if the incident occurred elsewhere they spoke to their parents. The students did not hesitate about bringing the topic up to an adult. However, one concern was that the students complained that even though they told an adult they felt as if the adults frequently did not do anything concerning the issue. Several students complained of having spoken to a teacher about a bullying issue and the only result being a verbal warning to the bully. The students said they prefer adults to take them seriously when it comes to bullying and for the adults to stay on top of the issue.

Conclusion

These third grade students seemed to have an excellent understanding of the concept of bullying. Even though the topic is very broad and there are many different aspects of bullying, the students were knowledgeable about a great deal. They seemed very confident in responding to questions on the survey and during our discussions. They

are aware of the negative ramifications of bullying and understand the importance of character education. Most importantly, they are open to new ideas and the opportunity to talk openly about bullying.

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of bullying. By providing them with a variety of forums to share their knowledge they provided me with a wealth of information. If students have a solid support group surrounding them they have the power to combat bullying. With the help of their school and parents these children should continue to learn about of bullying and ways to address this problem.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion of Results

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the importance of this study and the information it includes. It also identifies who might benefit from reading this study. The results of the study are revisited and summarized. Finally, the implications of the study for further research are suggested.

Importance of this Study

As previously stated, when I began this project I was unsure as to where I wanted to pinpoint my research. As my thinking and research narrowed I decided to focus on bullying in an elementary school. As a prospective teacher, I understand that I will undoubtedly face this subject. But rather than just gathering knowledge from what I have read in books and seen on charts, I wanted to hear what students thought about bullying.

The people who would benefit most from this information are parents and teachers. The adults in a student's life should know the extent of knowledge that their child has on bullying. Teachers should be aware of the warning signs of bullying and maintain open lines of communication with their students. Parents as well need to be willing to listen to their children and provide support for instances that may occur in school. The more often students hear about bullying, the more they can take an active role in preventing it.

<u>Summary of Results</u>

After conducting this research, several conclusions can be made. First of all, the third grade students were well aware of what constituted as bullying. This is a concept in which they had much education and personal experience. The students were able to name several different techniques they could use if they were being bullied. If they do not feel comfortable taking an active stand against a bully themselves, they understand that they can talk to someone about the issue. Also, the students realize the unpleasant results of bullying and understand that it is an undesired behavior. Consequently, for their young age, these students had a great deal of knowledge concerning bullying.

<u>Suggestions for Further Research</u>

After reading this study, there are several implications for future research. One aspect that would be interesting to study is an ongoing, across time look at how students progress. It would be helpful to follow this particular group, for example, or any other group for that matter, and continually investigate their knowledge of bullying. This research would provide insight into when and how students acquire knowledge about bullying. If research was gathered over several years, school educators could evaluate the success of anti-bullying programs.

Another area that could be further studied is how students react in bullying situations within a certain time frame. A researcher could take a group of students and follow them throughout a school year. These students would be asked frequently to discuss their daily encounters with bullying. This information would help gather more information about the frequency and details of bullying.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the Collaborative Education Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Midge Madden as part of my master's thesis concerning students' perceptions of bullying. The goal of this study is to investigate third grade students' knowledge of bullying.

All research conducted during the study will take place in the classroom under the supervision of Mrs. Wert. Students will initially take anonymous surveys to gather preliminary data. Students will also participate in focus groups to discuss various topics concerning bullying. Finally, students will part in a lesson that addresses bullying and then write a response. All of the information gathered in this study will be used strictly for research purposes. Students' names will not be linked with their responses at any time during the study.

Your decision whether or not to let your child participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. Permission is voluntary and can be removed at any time. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at (609) 781-0861 or Dr. Midge Madden at (856) 256-4500 ext. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Laura Burns

_____

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this to your child's teacher by February 19, 2007.

_____ I grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

_____ I do not grant permission for my child_____to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Parent Signature   Date

Student Questionnaire

1. How old are you:_____

2. Circle one: boy or girl

3. In your own words describe what a bully is:

4. Have you ever been picked on by a bully? (Circle yes or no)

   YES   NO

   (If you circled yes, then write what happened)

5. Have you ever seen someone else being picked on by a bully?

   YES   NO

6. Have you ever picked on someone else?

   YES   NO

7. Do you know what to do if someone picks on you or if you see someone else being picked on?

   YES   NO

   (If you circled yes, then write what happened)

8. How many assemblies have you been to that talked about bullying? (circle the number below)

     0   1   2   3   4   5 or more

9. Have any of your teachers talked to you about bullying?

    YES   NO

(If you circled yes, then write what you learned)

10. Can you think of any bullies in your class or in your school? (Please <u>do not</u> list their names)

    YES   NO

11. Why do you think that bullies pick on other students?

12. Please check off the people you would feel comfortable talking to about a bullying situation. Check any or all that answer the question.

_____Teacher

_____Guidance Counselor

_____Principal

_____Friend/Classmate

_____Family member

_____Other:_____

13. Where does bullying usually occur? Check the one place where it occurs most often.

_____On the bus

_____At the bus stop

_____Lunchroom

_____Specials area (gym, library, music, art, computers)

_____Classroom

_____Recess

_____Other:_____

14. If you were principal for the day, what would you do to stop bullying in your school?