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Assessing Bullying Behaviors and the Efficacy of Bullying Prevention in Fourth Grade Classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying has recently gained notoriety as a serious concern across all countries. Bullying is generally acknowledged to be a repeated pattern of abuse communicated to a victim by physical, verbal, or written means which results in bodily harm or emotional injury. Victims of bullying have been shown to be at increased risk for suicide, depression, anxiety, headaches, or difficulty sleeping.

Puppets in Education (PiE) is a non-profit organization that uses interactive puppet shows and workshops to educate more than 8,000 children per year about disabilities, cultural diversity, and a wide variety of other issues. By performing its shows in classrooms throughout the state, PiE works to model realistic, challenging situations for children and to provide simple and practical strategies for dealing with them. Focusing our attention on the effects of bullying behaviors in schools, our team worked with PiE and several local fourth grade classes to determine the amount of information children retain from the organization's bullying prevention program, the effectiveness of the program in addressing and preventing bullying behaviors, and the students' overall perception of the program.



"Anyone can be a bully, and anyone can be bullied"

METHODS

- Three fourth grade classrooms at a Burlington, VT elementary school were selected for study (n = 55)
- Students and families were given the option to opt out of the surveys and focus groups
- Two written surveys were administered by school teachers prior to and after the bullying prevention puppet presentation
 - Surveys contained 10 questions in which students could circle multiple answers or indicate yes/no/I don't know
- Two focus group interviews were conducted after the puppet presentation to assess learning
 - Students were randomly assigned into groups of 3 or 4
 - Focus groups were recorded for analysis
 - Focus groups took place 2 days post-presentation and 2 weeks post-presentation
 - Responses were analyzed based on how many times an answer was mentioned
- Surveys and focus groups were analyzed using Microsoft Excel

RESULTS

A. Survey: Assessing Knowledge

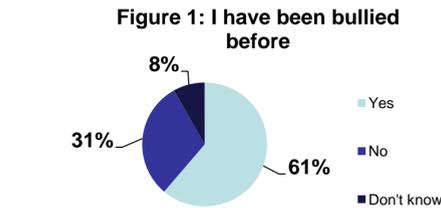


Figure 1. A majority of students reported experiencing bullying. This shows that the bullying prevention presentation is warranted

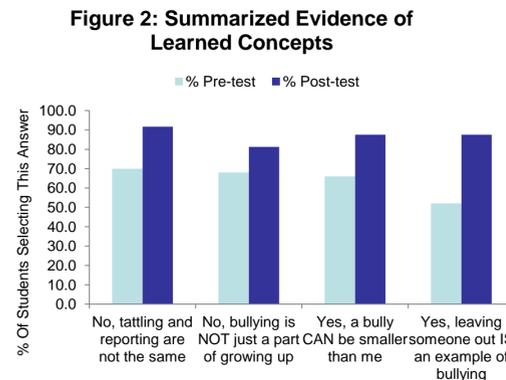


Figure 2. Pre- and post- test analyses show that more students indicated the correct answer following the puppet presentation. This demonstrates that the presentation was successful in teaching concepts

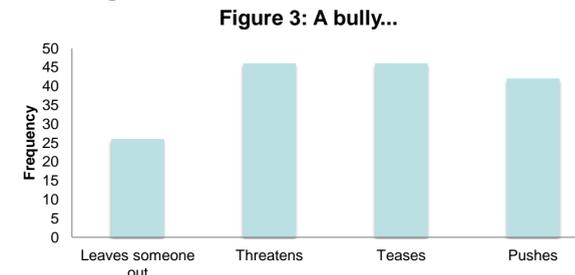


Figure 3. Students routinely identified "threatening", "teasing", and "pushing" as examples of bullying behavior; notably, they identified "leaves someone out" as a bullying behavior less frequently

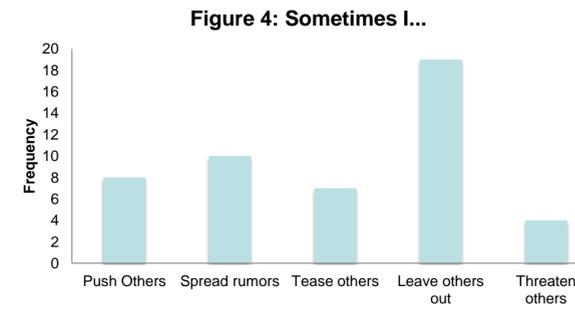


Figure 4. When polled about bullying behavior in which they have engaged, students identified "leaving others out" at almost twice the frequency of any other behavior.

B. Focus Groups: Exploring Behavior and Attitudes

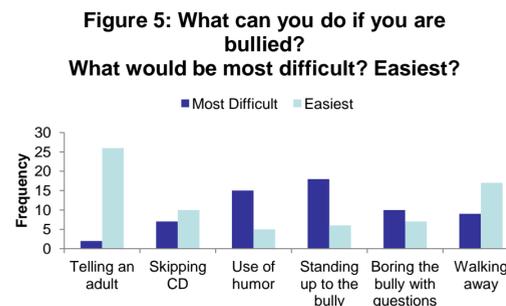


Figure 5. When asked what methods would be hardest when confronted with bullying behaviors, children most frequently voiced telling an adult to be easiest. Standing up to the bully would be the most difficult.

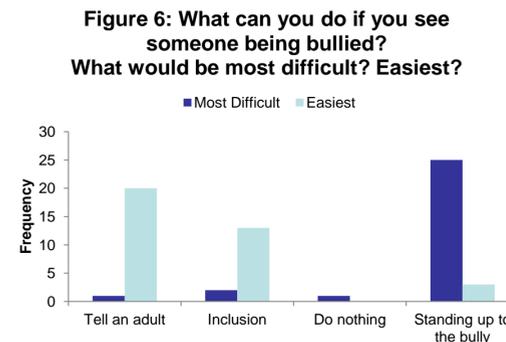


Figure 6. Most students thought that standing up to the bully would be the most difficult strategy to employ. In contrast most students found that telling an adult or including the person being bullied would be the easiest approaches to helping someone being bullied.



Figure 7. Children most frequently felt that fear of physical harm and being the victim would be an obstacle in helping stop bullying behaviors.

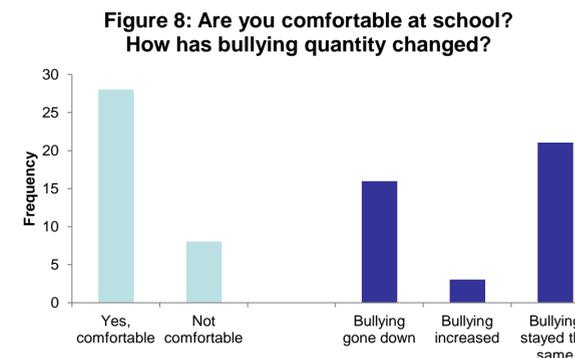


Figure 8. Children reported a decrease in bullying and an increase in comfort in dealing with bullying behaviors after the presentation.

"I think the way they did the presentation was good because if it was a bad presentation it wouldn't inspire you to use those tactics...it inspired people to use it and do it more often and stand up for themselves and their friends and others"



CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the post-test demonstrated that an increased percentage of students expressed the desired or correct answer about bullying behaviors, indicating that the presentation was received

Students most frequently cited "Telling an Adult" and "Walking Away" as strategies they could and would use when faced with a bully, a finding consistent with recent literature in which 9-13 years olds suggested that telling a parent or adult was the most effective way to stop bullying.

Elements that would make them less likely to intervene were fear of becoming the victim or a fear of physical violence. The data from the pre and post surveys suggest that a large majority of students do feel that there are safe ways they can help when bullying behaviors occur

Students were able to recall all of the strategies introduced during the puppet presentation during both focus groups. Also of significance, a large majority of students reported that they felt more comfortable dealing with bullying after the presentation.

"Now I know, if I ever get bullied or my friends are being bullied, I know what to do"

