

Exploring Teachers' Beliefs about Bullying Prevention, School Support and School Climate

Heather Woods

M.Ed Candidate, Faculty of Education, Brock University

INTRODUCTION

The efficacy of bullying prevention programs (BPP) in North America have had mixed reviews. That is, while some programs appear to have a small effect on decreasing bullying within the schools, others have been shown to be ineffective (Smith et al., 2004). Previously, student outcomes have been the focus in evaluating antibullying programs, but most recently there has been a shift to also assess the teachers' beliefs about bullying, the antibullying programs, and their role in them (Ahtola et al., 2012).

The current research, seeks to explore teachers bullying prevention efficacy; that is, the teachers' confidence in their ability to prevent and effectively cope with bullying within their classroom. As training has been found to be influential in BPP success (Ahtola et al., 2012), participants were asked whether they had received any formal training and how effective they felt a BPP would be.

Additionally, the school climate has been a growing area of research (Noddings, 2006; Opatow et al., 2005). In regards to bullying prevention, all members of the educational community (i.e., school board, administration, teachers and students) influence the effectiveness of a program (Ahtola et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2004). The current research seeks to explore whether teachers' perceived school climate, as influenced by administration, teachers, and students, is related to their confidence in addressing bullying behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is approached from a combination of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; 1976) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Ecological systems theory posits that development is influenced by not only the internal (i.e., biological, personality) and external contexts (i.e., family, school, culture, etc.). While Social Learning Theory posits that self-efficacy is influenced by social context. In the current study, social learning theory is applied to teachers' efficacy beliefs about their ability to intervene. Four types of experiences influence self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) physiological/affective states, (c) vicarious experiences, and (d) verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1997).

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Principal Student Investigator: Heather Woods (hw13dc@brocku.ca)

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Sandra Bosacki (sbosacki@brocku.ca)

Research Questions

The current research sought to explore the following questions:

1. How supported do teachers feel in addressing bullying behaviours within the school?
2. How might teachers' bullying intervention efficacy beliefs be related to how they perceived the school climate, as influenced by the administration, teachers, and students?
3. How might teacher beliefs regarding the efficacy of BPPs be related to the school climate and teachers bullying prevention efficacy beliefs?

Methods

The current research is part of my ongoing M.Ed Thesis project, supervised by Dr. Sandra Bosacki. Participants consist of 28 elementary school teachers and teacher candidates (23 female, Age 22-54 years old, $M = 32.83$, $SD = 8.95$; in-training-32 years of experience, $M = 6.46$, $SD = 8.02$) recruited via email through their school boards or university. Participants were asked to complete an online survey regarding their beliefs and experiences with bullying and BPPs

School Support and Climate. Questions were adapted based on research conducted by Noddings (2006) and Opatow et al. (2005). Participants responded on a 5-point likert scale (not at all - very much) to the following questions:

- how supported do you feel by your school board in addressing bullying behaviours?
- Do you believe that your school administration/other teachers/student population creates a culture where bullying is deemed unacceptable?
- Do you believe that there is a kind, caring and respectful culture amongst the school administration administration/other teachers/student population?

Teacher Bullying Intervention Efficacy (adapted from Ahtola et al., 2012; TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Participants responded to seven questions regarding how much they can do to prevent or intervene in bullying situations within their classroom on a 9-point likert scale (not at all - a great deal; e.g., To what extent can you use a variety of strategies to address bullying behaviour? How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom to address bullying?).

Bullying Prevention Program Efficacy (adapted from Ahtola et al., 2012). Participants responded on a 5-point likert scale (very little - very much) to the following questions:

- To what extent do you believe that an antibullying program will decrease bullying/cyberbullying incidents?
- To what extent do you believe that an antibullying program will enhance the well-being of victimized students?

Preliminary Results

Table 1

Percentage of teachers who have received bullying prevention training and feelings of support

	Percentage
Received bullying prevention training	
Yes	32.1
No	67.9
Supported by School Board	
Not at all Supported	3.3
Not really Supported	13.3
Somewhat Supported	46.7
Supported	20.0
Very Supported	16.7

Table 2

Correlations between Teachers Bullying Prevention Efficacy (TBPE), Perceived School Climate, School Board Support, and Beliefs about Bullying Prevention Program Efficacy

	TBPE	Program Efficacy	Admin Climate	Teacher Climate	Student Climate
Program Efficacy	.700**				
Admin Climate	.409*	.323			
Teacher Climate	.164	.262	.432*		
Student Climate	.357	.203	.437*	.143	
Board Support	.492**	.546**	.443*	.265	.352

Note: * denotes significance at $p = .05$, ** denotes significance at $p = .01$

Implications

The majority of the teachers reported they had not received any form of bullying prevention training. This may be cause for concern, as programs with more teacher training appear to be some of the most effective at reducing bullying within the school (e.g., KIVA; Kärnä et al., 2011).

Finally, it appears that teachers' sense of efficacy to address bullying is positively related to their beliefs regarding program efficacy, the climate created by the administration, and board support. This further supports that BPPs need to address the whole school community in order to be effective (Ahtola et al., 2012).

Future research should continue to explore teacher's support networks as they specifically relate to bullying (e.g., school board, administration, students, and parents).