NEW PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING PREVENTION: WHY ARE CURRENT PROGRAMS NOT WORKING?

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University of Illinois Anti-Bullying Program

- **Indiana University Teen Conflict Survey** (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999; Espelage et al., 2000, 2001)

- **University of Illinois Bullying Research Program**
  - INTERVIEW STUDY (Espelage & Asidao, 2001)
  - EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE STUDY (Espelage, 1998)
  - SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS STUDY (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Espelage, Green, & Wasserman, 2007; Espelage, Green, & Polanin, in press)
  - SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DATING VIOLENCE, & BULLYING STUDIES (Holt & Espelage, 2003; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Espelage & Holt, 2006)
  - ATTRIBUTION, COPING STYLES, & BULLYING (Kingsbury & Espelage, 2006)
  - THEORY OF MIND, EMPATHY, & BULLYING (Espelage et al., 2004; Mayberry & Espelage, 2006)
  - HOMOPHOBIA, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, & BULLYING (Poteat & Espelage, 2006; Espelage et al., 2008)
  - Sexual Orientation, Bullying, & Mental Health Outcomes (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009)

- **CDC Federally-funded Grants:**
  - Bullying & SV Overlap (2007 - 2010)
  - Randomized Clinical Trial of Middle School Second Step Program (Committee for Children, 2008) in Reducing Bullying & SV (2009-2013)
Definition of Bullying (Swearer, 2001)

- Bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose and the person being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself. Usually, bullying happens over and over.
  - Punching, shoving and other acts that hurt people physically
  - Spreading bad rumors about people
  - Keeping certain people out of a “group”
  - Teasing people in a mean way
  - Getting certain people to “gang up” on others
  - Use of technology
Bully/Victim Continuum

- **Bully** – reports bullying others
- **Victim** – reports being bullied by others
- **Bully-victim** – reports bullying others & being bullied
- **Bystander** – reports observing others being bullied
- **No Status/Not involved** – does not report any involvement with bullying
Bullying Prevalence

- Among 3rd – 8th graders:
  - 15% Chronically Victimized
  - 17% Ringleader Bullies
  - 8% Bully-Victims
  - 60% Bystanders
  - Only 13% intervene to help victim

(Espelage & Swearer, 2003)
“Cyber-bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.”

(Bill Belsey: www.cyberbullying.ca)
Cyber-Bullying Prevalence

- National Statistics (Lifetime):
  - 10% - 33% youth (ages 11 to 19) have been the target of aggression/ bullying online
  - 15% perpetrate the aggression/ bullying online
  - 15% have been victims of sexual solicitation online (asked to talk about sex, perform a sexual act, or provide personal sexual information)

(Finn, 2004; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004)
Cyber-Bullying Prevalence

- Illinois Middle School Students

- Online Victimization in Last Year:
  - 14.9% received rude comment
  - 7% had rumor spread about him/her
  - 2% threatened by a student
  - 11% received rude text message
    - 13% girls; 7% boys
  - 6% received sexually related text
  - 1% received sexual picture text
  - 1-3% rarely did someone solicit sex online
Homophobic Language & Bullying

- Approximately 22% of middle school students (n = 4,302) report teasing another student because he/she was gay (16.6% girls, 26.1% boys; Koenig & Espelage, 2003)

- 17.7% of high school students (n = 4,938) reported teasing another student because he/she was gay (9.2% girls, 26.2% boys; Koenig & Espelage, 2003)

- Bullying and homophobia perpetration strongly related among middle school students (r = .61; Poteat & Espelage, 2005)

- Homophobia victimization was reported more by males than females (Poteat & Espelage, 2007)
Bullying and homophobia are strongly interrelated for males and females. 

Homophobic content and empathy

- Similar to past findings for attitudinal homophobia and empathy (Johnson, Brems, & Alford-Keating, 1997)

Homophobic content and school belonging

- Similar to past findings for LGBT students and isolation, stigmatization (Uribe & Harbeck, 1991)

Homophobic content and anxiety/depression

- Negative consequences to “harmless” banter?
Bullying Prevention -
Meta-analysis (Merrell et al., 2008)

- Evaluated effectiveness of 16 bullying efficacy studies across some six countries (six studies in US).
- Only two of six US studies published.
- All showed small to negligible effects.
- Small positive effects found for enhancing social competence and peer acceptance, and increasing teacher knowledge and efficacy in implementing interventions.
- Reality—No impact on bullying behaviors.
- Farrington & Tfotí (2009) – programs that are effective in European country include parents, use of multimedia, and target teacher’s competence in responding to bullying.
Majority of the programs fail to recognize that bullying co-occurs with other types of aggression, including sexual violence, dating aggression, and homophobic banter.

Programs often fail to address basic life and social skills that kids may need to effectively respond to bullying.

Only one program directs prevention efforts at the key context that promotes and sustains bullying perpetration – the peer group.

No programs consider the impact of family and community violence on bullying prevalence.

All programs fail to address the extent to which demographic variables (such as gender and race) and implementation levels impact a program’s effectiveness.
Social-Ecological Perspective

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swearer & Doll, 2001; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Espelage & Horne, 2007)
Individual Correlates of Bullying Involvement

- Depression/Anxiety
- Empathy
- Delinquency
- Impulsivity
- Other forms of Aggression
- Alcohol/Drug Use
- Positive Attitudes toward Violence/Bullying
- Low Value for Prosocial Behaviors

For review (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Espelage & Horne, 2007)
Family & School Risk Factors

**FAMILY**
- Lack of supervision
- Lack of attachment
- Negative, critical relationships
- Lack of discipline/consequences
- Support for violence
- Modeling of violence

**SCHOOL**
- Lack of supervision
- Lack of attachment
- Negative, critical relationships
- Lack of discipline/consequences
- Support for violence
- Modeling of violence

For review (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Espelage & Horne, 2007)
Sibling Bullying

- Sibling bullying is tied to school-based bullying in many countries (Espelage & Swearer, 2003 for review)

- Study of 779 middle school students, association between bullying perpetration and sibling aggression perpetration was strongly associated (girls $r = .52$, boys $r = .42$; Espelage & Stein, in prep)
Relation Between Bullying & Other Victimization Forms

- Child maltreatment has been associated with difficulties in peer relations (Jacobsen & Straker, 1992; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001).

- Exposure to domestic violence has been linked to bullying perpetration (Baldry, 2003).

- Study of 779 middle school students, association between bullying perpetration and family violence victimization was moderately associated for females ($r = .31$) and bullying perpetration was also related to neighborhood violence victimization ($r = .40$; Espelage & Stein, in prep).
Bullying Perpetration: Peers Matter

- **Unconditional Null Models:**
  - ICC indicated homophily; peer group homogeneity
  - 22% variance in bullying perpetration between peer groups
  - indicated multilevel modeling appropriate

- **Level-1 Models:**
  - Wave 1 and Wave 2 self-reported bullying positively related
  - Deviances indicated better model over the null model

- **Level-2 Models:** Peer-level bullying significantly predicted individual level perpetration at Wave 2 when controlling for Wave 1 Bullying. 91% of variance explained.

  (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Espelage, Green, & Wasserman, 2008)
Second Step

Committee for Children, 2008
Second Step: Addresses Multiple Issues

- Prevalence of aggression and bullying in middle schools
- Substance abuse is a middle school prevention priority
- Bullying program for middle school
- One program that focuses on multiple issues
Program Goals

- Decrease aggression and violence
- Decrease bullying behaviors
- Decrease substance abuse
- Increase school success
Program Goals

Research Foundations

- Risk and Protective Factors
- Bullying
- Brain Research
- Positive Approaches to Problem Behavior
- Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents
Prevention Research Supports One Program Targeting Multiple Issues

- Risk and protective factors are at the heart of Second Step: Student Success Through Prevention
  - Many of the same factors predict substance abuse, violence, delinquency and school failure.
Risk and Protective Factors Addressed in the Second Step Program

**Risk Factors**
- Inappropriate classroom behavior
- Favorable attitudes towards violence or substance use
- Friends who engage in violence or substance use
- Early initiation of violence or substance use
- Peer rewards for antisocial behavior
- Peer rejection
- Impulsiveness

**Protective Factors**
- Social skills
- School connectedness
- Adoption of conventional norms about substance use
Levels and Lessons

- Grade 6
  - Stepping Up
  - Handling new responsibilities
  - 15 lessons

- Grade 7
  - Stepping In
  - Decision making, staying in control
  - 13 lessons

- Grade 8
  - Stepping Ahead
  - Leadership, goal setting
  - 13 lessons

- 50 minutes to teach a complete lesson
- Each lesson is divided into two parts that can be taught separately
Teaching strategies

- Use of DVD with rich multi-media content to accompany each lesson
- Carefully constructed approach to partner and group work
  - Class discussion and activities
  - Partner or group exchanges
  - Individual, partner, or group activities
  - Partner or group skill practices
- Individual reflection
- Frequent review of core skills and concepts
Increasing Student Exposure to Lesson Content

- Additional practice activity
- Reflective writing assessment
- Homework
- Integration activities
- Journal page
Five Program Themes

- Each level includes the following five themes:
  - Empathy and communication
  - Bullying prevention
  - Emotion management
    - Coping with stress (grades 7 and 8)
  - Problem-solving
    - Decision-making (grade 7)
    - Goal-setting (grade 8)
  - Substance abuse prevention
Bullying Prevention

- Recognizing bullying (all grades)
- Bystander responses (all grades)
- Grade 7
  - Sexual harassment
  - Cyberbullying
- Grade 8
  - Labels, stereotypes and prejudice
  - Bullying in friendships
  - Bullying in dating relationships

Bystander Power
Be part of the solution:
- Don’t take part in bullying.
- Offer support—Be an ally to someone being bullied.
- Take action against bullying.
  You can make a difference!
Problem-Solving, Decision Making and Goal Setting

- Using the Action Steps for
  - Problem-solving (All levels)
  - Decision-making (Level 2)
  - Goal-setting (Level 3)
Emotion Management

Staying in Control

- Steps for Staying in Control (All grades)
- Focus on anger and checking assumptions (grade 7)
- De-escalating tense situations (grade 8)
Taught in grades 7 and 8

Coping with Stress

Coping means doing something positive.

- **Use positive self-talk to change your attitude:**
  - Say, “I can cope.”
  - Ask, “What can I do?”

- **Three things to do:**
  - Use calming-down strategies.
  - Get support.
  - Use the Action Steps.
  Sometimes you do all three.
Substance Abuse Prevention
Tobacco, Marijuana, Alcohol and Inhalants

- Health, personal and social consequences of using alcohol and other drugs
- Preferred future
- Making good decisions about friends
- Normative education
- Resistance skills
- Making a commitment
Applying Lesson Content to Academics

- “Using lesson Content Every Day” section
- Self-regulated learning
- Integration activities
  - Language arts and social studies
  - Health/science
  - Media and technology
- Reflective writing assessment
- Alignment with numerous academic and life skills content standards
Implications for Prevention Programming

- Need to give kids life and social skills, not just knowledge about bullying
- Need to develop secondary and tertiary programs, not just primary prevention programs
- Bullying programs need to consider incorporating discussion of sexual harassment and (homophobic language; Birkett & Espelage, 2010).
  - 67 bullying prevention programs in US, only five discuss sexual harassment or sexual orientation issues.
- Peers influence has to be considered in developing and evaluating prevention/intervention programs
  - 67 bullying prevention programs, only one attempts to target and shift peer norms.
Implications for Prevention

Programming

- Recognize that students are witnessing and involved in violence in their homes. We need to give them alternatives to violence for solving problems and conflicts.

- Consider how the use of technology is influencing relationships and talk to kids about responsible use of technology.