Consultation in Bullying Prevention: An Elementary School Case Study

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Abstract

This manuscript outlines a consultation with a public elementary school that was aimed at assessing and strengthening the school's antibullying programs. We gathered consultation data through interviews and observations and also reviewed existing program evaluation data. We evaluated these data in light of current research on bullying prevention to identify the school's strengths in addressing bullying and to develop recommendations to fill any gaps in its antibullying efforts. An overarching strength of the school's model was its integration of a bullying prevention program within an existing behavioral management system. Our suggestions to the school span multiple levels of bullying prevention, including assessment, implementation, and specific programming. This manuscript highlights the role for professional consultants in collaborating with school communities in the prevention of bullying and provides a model for this consultation process.

Key Words: bullying prevention, consultation, elementary, collaboration, intervention program integration, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS), Olweus

Introduction

Bullying among children is not a harmless rite of passage. Effective programs are desperately needed to prevent bullying and assist youth in coping with its impact, particularly in the school setting. In the current manuscript,

we first provide an overview of bullying and bullying prevention in schools, while emphasizing the importance of individualizing prevention programs to meet school communities' unique needs. Next, we explain the potential role for professional consultants in helping schools strengthen and personalize their antibullying efforts and, finally, describe a pilot consultation with one public elementary school.

Background on Bullying

Bullying refers to an abusive pattern of repeated aggression within a social relationship in which there is a clear imbalance of power (Olweus, 1991). Roughly 30% of youth are involved in bullying on a frequent basis (Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying emerges as early as preschool and becomes an increasingly chronic experience for many children throughout childhood (Monks, Smith, & Sweetenham, 2003; Perry, Hodges, & Egan, 2001). Research links bullying to a wide range of correlates, including social, emotional, behavioral, medical, and academic difficulties (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kumpulainen, 2008; Nakomoto & Schwartz, 2010). Bullying is also associated with long-term consequences in adulthood; bullying behavior is linked to later criminality (Sourander et al., 2007), and peer victimization is connected to poor health, lowered wealth, and problematic relationships (Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013).

When examining bullying and its effects, it is critical to consider the larger school context. Bullying is most likely to occur at school (Olweus, 1993) and frequently takes place in locations that are difficult to monitor (e.g., playgrounds, cafeterias, hallways, restrooms), as well as in classrooms (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Bullying that takes place off school grounds (including cyberbullying) can also impact students' functioning at school (Tokunaga, 2010). Moreover, students who simply witness school bullying (without direct involvement) are also at heightened risk for mental health difficulties (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). Furthermore, the ways in which student bystanders respond to bullying is related to the frequency of bullying in their classrooms (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011).

In particular, it is important to consider the links between bullying and the school community, defined as the composition of individuals (e.g., students, parents, staff, faculty, administrators), groups, and agencies associated with the school and its welfare. A sense of school community arises from the relationships among members and their shared values and goals (Redding, 1991). High-community schools are characterized by respectful and supportive relationships among community members, and these schools tend to emphasize prosocial and civic values, such as fairness, concern for others, and personal

accountability (Schaps, 2009). In addition, high-community schools are likely to foster positive school climates, which typically place high value on learning, school spirit, opportunity for student autonomy, and quality relationships among school community members (Emmons, Comer, & Haynes, 1996).

In terms of bullying and school community, students who are bullied tend to have more problematic relations with peers and report more negative attitudes toward their schoolmates (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005). Bullying is also linked to less supportive student–teacher relationships, in which students feel less empowered and less encouraged by teachers (Nation, Vieno, Perkins, & Santinello, 2008). Compared to their non-bullied peers, bullied students also report feeling less safe at school (Varjas, Henrich, & Meyers, 2009) and a more negative school climate (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008), along with lower levels of school commitment and attachment (Cunningham, 2007). Thus, bullying is linked to the various relationships and attitudes likely to influence each school's sense of community.

Overview of Bullying Prevention

Multiple prevention programs have been developed and utilized around the world to address bullying in schools (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004), and many employ a schoolwide or whole-community approach. While these programs share similar features, they also vary in numerous ways, most notably in their specific components (e.g., institutional policies, staff training, student education, reporting procedures, targeted interventions, parent involvement, ongoing evaluation). Several reviews have been conducted to evaluate the general effectiveness of bullying prevention programs, offering mixed findings about their impact (e.g., Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). For instance, Vreeman and Caroll (2007) suggest that many schoolwide interventions do indeed reduce bullying behavior, whereas Merrell and colleagues (2008) conclude that these programs are more likely to impact students' thoughts and feelings about bullying than their bullying behavior.

In one of the most rigorous reviews, Farrington and Ttofi (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 44 controlled studies evaluating the effects of bullying prevention internationally. Overall, they found modest support for reductions in bullying and victimization (20–23% and 17–20%, respectively) across programs. Moreover, the authors conducted a comprehensive analysis of the specific components in these programs and found that certain features were linked to better outcomes, such as parent involvement, discipline for bullying, longer program duration, and higher program intensity for students and teachers. In sum, this meta-analysis reveals great potential for antibullying programs, as well as substantial room for improvement, while also pointing toward several potentially key elements for bullying prevention systems.

Individualizing Bullying Prevention Programs

It is important to acknowledge that bullying prevention programs may operate quite differently across distinct schools (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). A specific program could lead to dramatic reductions in bullying and victimization in one school community yet have very limited impact within another. For instance, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has garnered noteworthy support for its effectiveness and is named as a promising program for violence prevention (Blueprint for Healthy Youth Development, 2014). While originally developed for Norwegian schools, it has been evaluated in several regions of the U.S. Although it appears generally effective in U.S. schools, its impact varied across studies (Olweus & Limber, 2010). While some of this variability clearly stems from methodological differences, it is also likely that the schools studied differed in important ways that moderated the program's impact.

According to Swearer and colleagues (2010), many prevention programs fail to address the broader social ecology of school bullying (i.e., the individuals and systems that promote and perpetuate bullying), along with important demographic and cultural characteristics of students and staff (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, special needs). Schools are also likely to differ in terms of challenges associated with adopting any new program (e.g., staff resistance, time constraints, limited parent involvement, lack of technical assistance, unstable funding). Given the tremendous diversity across school communities, it appears critical to consider the various local factors that make each school unique and have the potential to influence the outcomes of adopting and sustaining new policies and programs (McLaughlin, 1990). Accordingly, theorists have begun to discuss adapting bullying prevention programs to meet school communities' varied needs (Cross & Barnes, 2014).

Several theorists recommend selecting an evidence-based program and modifying it in ways that fit with a particular school's culture (Black, Washington, Trent, Harner, & Pollock, 2010; Cross & Barnes, 2014). For example, Black and colleagues (2010) assessed the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in an urban U.S. school district and documented numerous challenges during its implementation. Based on their impressions, they suggested several adaptations, such as mandating a standard time for Olweus class meetings (i.e., teacher-led lessons on bullying) and recruiting experienced teachers to model meetings for less seasoned staff. Accordingly, with appropriate modifications, it may be possible to tailor antibullying programs to function more effectively across diverse school communities.

Role for Professional Consultants

Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine exactly how and how much to modify any intervention or prevention program while still maintaining its integrity (Black et al., 2010). To accomplish this, it is necessary to have expertise on several levels, including strong knowledge of relevant theory and research, as well as practical experience with pertinent programs and populations. While school members are obvious experts of their own community, many school staff lack expertise in the theoretical and empirical research base on bullying and its prevention. With that said, it is important to note that the bullying literature has expanded exponentially over the past four decades (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, 2011), which makes it difficult to maintain up-to-date knowledge for not only educators but also the theoreticians and researchers of bullying. Thus, professional consultants could play a key role in collaborating with schools by combining their expertise to develop bullying prevention programs that are firmly grounded in a solid evidence base yet personalized to meet a school community's precise needs (Black et al., 2010).

The Current Consultation

We provided ongoing consultation to one public elementary school as a community service. Our consultation team included a psychology professor and licensed clinical child psychologist (first author), an education professor and former school principal (second author), and a graduate assistant in counseling and public health (third author). We were referred to this school by an adjunct professor with strong ties to local school districts. Through conversation with the school's principal, we learned that he was looking for an evaluation of the school's bullying prevention program by professionals outside of the school community who were not connected to their existing programs in any way. More specifically, he hoped to learn of the strengths of their programming and areas for improvement, along with possible strategies, interventions, and programs of which the school community was not aware.

Notably, this school was known to have a relatively low rate of disciplinary problems, an existing bullying prevention program, and a cohesive school community. Accordingly, their need for consultation was likely lower than many other schools. However, since this was our first consultation, we believed that this school was conducive to piloting our work in that we hoped to not only assist the school in assessing its antibullying programs but also evaluate the consultation process itself. After assessing and refining our consultation model, we plan to assist schools with higher levels of need. At the time of consultation, this school used a combination of two programs to prevent and manage bullying: a Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS)

program and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). Before proceeding, it is important to offer general descriptions of each system.

As outlined by Sugai and Horner (2002), SWPBIS includes three tiers that include increasing levels of supports for students with problem behavior. The first tier targets all students with schoolwide education on behavioral expectations, positive reinforcement for prosocial behavior, and the use of clear, consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior. The second tier targets at-risk students and those who require additional and personalized supports beyond those provided at tier one. Finally, the third tier targets students who demonstrate a clear pattern of problem behavior and have not responded favorably to first- or second-tier supports. SWPBIS programs have been linked to reduced student conduct problems (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009) including decreased bullying and victimization (Ross & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012).

Per Olweus and Limber (2010), the OBPP includes programming at four levels (individuals, classrooms, school, and the community). At the individual level, students are monitored and supervised during the school day, staff members intervene when bullying is observed, parent meetings are scheduled for students involved in bullying, and targeted interventions are developed for individual students. At the class level, rules against bullying are posted, discussed, and enforced; additionally, weekly class meetings are held to discuss bullying and related issues; classroom meetings with parents may also occur. At the school level, this program establishes a bullying prevention coordinating committee, provides trainings for the committee and all staff, holds group meetings for staff, introduces schoolwide antibullying rules, strengthens the school's supervisory system, launches the program with an event, and involves parents in schoolwide programming. At the community level, schools are encouraged to ask community members to sit on the coordinating committee, develop school–community partnerships, and disseminate their work on bullying prevention throughout the community. As documented earlier, the OBPP has garnered substantial support for its effectiveness in schools throughout the world (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009).

Method

This project received an exemption from our institution's IRB in that it is considered "evaluation" rather than "research." It is important to note that research and evaluation often overlap. For instance, evaluations share numerous methodologies with research and can be quite rigorous in their designs. However, research is typically aimed to produce generalizable knowledge (e.g., to

advance theory, explain mechanisms, or make broad claims about program efficacy; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). In contrast, evaluation is generally intended to further develop and improve specific programs (Mathison, 2008).

In the fall of the 2012–13 school year, we gave a brief presentation during a staff meeting at the elementary school, in which we described our goals and invited all staff to collaborate with us. We also repeatedly stated that our objective was to evaluate the school's antibullying programs and not individual staff members. Consultation data were collected in the spring of the 2012–13 school year through semi-standardized individual interviews, classroom and schoolwide observations, and an analysis of existing program data. Our collaboration took place three years after the school's introduction of SWPBIS and two years after its adoption of the OBPP.

School Characteristics

We use pseudonyms to protect the identities of individuals, the school, and the school district. Williamstown is one of seven elementary schools in the Covington School District, a large suburban public school district nestled in the northwest corner of a metropolitan area in the northeastern U.S. The school's enrollment is 628 students (53% male) in Grades K–6. Williamstown is not a Title I school; 14% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch, 2% are English language learners, and 10% have special needs. Additionally, 8% of students are classified as gifted. There is a relatively low level of ethnic diversity in the student body in that 79% are White (non-Hispanic), 10% are Black or African-American, 6% are Asian, 4% are Multiracial (not Hispanic), and less than 1% are American Indian/Alaskan.

Williamstown has four sections of Grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 and five sections of Grades K, 3, and 6. There are three autism support classrooms; the students in these classes join regular education classes for much of the school day and are followed by autistic support teachers and paraprofessionals who work with them individually or in small groups. The average class size is 22 (student–teacher ratio = 22:1). While there are no full-time instructional aides, up to 30 support staff members and volunteers provide assistance each school day. Williamstown also has a school psychologist, school nurse, and reading specialist.

As noted, Williamstown utilizes SWPBIS and the OBPP; they also have a peer mediation program. In addition, the school has a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) with committees to address various areas of need and plan school events and activities. The local YMCA coordinates a before and after-school program to supervise students who arrive early or leave late. Finally, Williamstown has several volunteer-based programs, such as the Parents as Tutors Program, the Homework Club, and several library programs.

Procedures, Participants, and Measures

Interviews

We conducted individual unstructured interviews with two administrators (principal and vice principal) and one teacher to gather an oral history of bullying prevention at Williamstown. We conducted additional individual semi-standardized interviews with the same individuals and four additional teachers; these interviews included five core questions (see Results). The use of semi-standardized interviews typically involves asking predetermined open-ended questions, but also allows the flexibility of asking for explanations, probing for more specific detail, and requesting personal anecdotes (Berg, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Observations

We also conducted five unstructured observations: three classroom observations and two full-day school observations of less structured times (e.g., recess, lunch time, transitions). Observation data was recorded via detailed and descriptive handwritten field notes (Berg, 2007). The classroom observations took place while teachers facilitated classwide lessons on bullying; they were intended to assess student engagement in these lessons, along with the content of the class discussion. The school observations were conducted to assess students' bullying and other disruptive behavior, along with the methods used to prevent bullying and manage these behaviors throughout the school.

Archival Records

We also reviewed existing evaluation data collected by the school. Archival records provide a rich source of information about communities and programs and may stimulate paths of inquiry for further assessment. Moreover, these records often offer information that is difficult for evaluators to observe (Patton, 2002), which is particularly important with regard to bullying in that it is a generally low frequency event (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000) and the presence of observers likely leads students to curb their bullying behavior.

We examined the school's disciplinary referral records for the previous school year and reviewed their data from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire® (OBQ; OBQ, 2007), completed anonymously by third through sixth grade students in the spring of the previous school year. The OBQ assesses multiple aspects of bullying and victimization (e.g., prevalence, forms, locations, duration, reporting, responses, feelings, attitudes) and assists in evaluating the impact of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. This instrument is used with students in third through twelfth grade in the U.S. and internationally. The subscales assessing bullying and victimization have evidenced satisfactory

internal consistency, construct validity, and concordance with peer-report measures (Olweus, 1977; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Results

Data were gathered using multiple methods across several sources. Accordingly, our data collection design was rich in terms of triangulation (Berg, 2007). Interview data were analyzed in several ways. Unstructured interview data was synthesized across interviewees to construct an oral history of bullying prevention at Williamstown. Semi-structured interview data were analyzed by identifying common themes across the field notes taken for each interviewee. All three authors analyzed data to isolate common themes and later met to resolve conflicting conclusions. Major events and themes were also derived from the observational data. A descriptive analysis of archival records was conducted. We examined all data across methods, sources, and analysts to evaluate the degree of convergence and divergence.

Interviews

Unstructured Interviews

We conducted individual, unstructured interviews with Williamstown's principal (Dr. Brown), vice principal (Mr. Vincent), and a fourth grade teacher (Mr. Bromley). Mr. Bromley was interviewed to discuss Williamstown's peer mediation program. Together, they provided an oral history of bullying prevention at the school. Below, we organize this information into specific school programs.

HEART. The HEART program is a SWPBIS system established at Williamstown in the 2009–10 school year. Prior to its implementation, student conduct problems were described as a significant concern. Williamstown is now designated by the state department of education as a school that utilizes positive behavior support with fidelity. All schools in the Covington District have a SWPBIS program developed within each school using a common set of parameters. Williamstown developed HEART via technical assistance from the state's Bureau of Special Education. HEART is also an acronym that outlines behavioral expectations for the students: honesty, excellence, awareness, respect, and tolerance. Teachers review these expectations with students through carefully designed HEART lessons, many of which are specific to behaviors in certain settings (e.g., classroom, hallway, cafeteria, bathroom, recess).

HEART includes a structured token system. Each day, students can earn tickets for "going beyond HEART's expectations," such as helping teachers, expressing kindness to peers, or showing HEART (honesty, excellence, awareness,

respect, tolerance) in some other exemplary way. At the end of the school day, students who have earned tickets exchange them for a certificate and recognition card. The cards are then randomly placed on a board resembling a crossword puzzle with multiple 10-slot lines. When a line is completely filled with students' cards, those students receive a reward (e.g., lunch with the principal).

HEART also includes a response cost system, separate from the token system. At the beginning of each year, all students are given a platinum card, on which they receive strikes for failing to meet behavioral expectations. When students earn three or more strikes in a marking period, they lose their privilege to attend the schoolwide event (e.g., schoolwide bingo) and attend a group restorative session with the school psychologist. Strikes can also result in the loss of recess or suspension. All strikes are removed at the start of each marking period. To build students' motivation, all students attend an event scheduled at the beginning of each school year.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Following the 2009–10 school year, Williamstown's administration reviewed evaluation data for the HEART program and recognized that behavioral issues had decreased, yet bullying remained prevalent among students. Dr. Brown noted that HEART did not offer "proactive strategies" to target bullying nor did it facilitate ongoing education about bullying or a community-oriented approach to preventing bullying. Around this time, the Covington district was piloting the OBPP in two elementary schools. Dr. Brown sought out the OBPP, and Williamstown adopted it in the 2010–11 school year. The school was recently designated by the Olweus organization as a Certified Olweus School; only 12 schools in the state have received this honor.

Dr. Brown introduced the OBPP to the Williamstown school community as a supplement to HEART rather than an entirely separate program. For instance, teachers facilitate weekly class meetings for the OBBP; rather than carving out separate times, these meetings were integrated into the ongoing HEART lessons. A student referral system was also established to serve both HEART and the OBPP. All significant student concerns are referred to a Core Team leader who handles academic (curriculum specialist), behavioral (vice principal), and socioemotional (school psychologist) issues. Each leader oversees the development and assessment of targeted interventions for students. Bullying is handled by the vice principal and school psychologist.

In terms of staff training, Dr. Brown identified 10 school staff members to be trained in the OBPP in order to train other staff members. He selected staff members whom he perceived as highly respected by colleagues and as holding philosophies consistent with the aims of the OBPP. These staff members completed a two-day training with an OBPP trainer who remains available to the

school for technical assistance. This team of 10 then trained school staff in the OBPP via two sessions and also provides staff with ongoing support.

Parents are also involved in the OBPP. All parents are provided with handbooks outlining the program, and they are expected to review them with their children and return a signed confirmation slip. The OBPP was also introduced at a PTO meeting prior to its implementation. A HEART–OBPP advisory committee, including school staff (administrators, teachers, support staff), parents, and volunteers, was also formed to evaluate and modify these programs.

Peer mediation. A peer mediation program was first developed at Williamstown in the mid-1990s to manage escalating conflict among a group of female students in one classroom. The program was discontinued for several years and then reestablished in 2010. One teacher, Mr. Bromley, oversees this program with support from the teacher (now retired) who originally developed the program. Mr. Bromley received training in a peer mediation program known as Conflict Busters and adapted this program for use at Williamstown. Of note, Mr. Bromley is also one of the original teachers trained in the OBPP.

Per Mr. Bromley, the peer mediation program is designed to help students learn to solve problems through effective communication (e.g., using "I" statements, rephrasing, other active listening strategies) and compromising (i.e., finding "win–win" solutions). Each year, 15 to 20 fourth grade students are trained via five 30-minute sessions to provide peer mediation during recess. Students are selected for this program based on three qualifications: strong communication skills, solid problem solving skills, and general conscientiousness.

Three students provide peer mediation during each recess period (but no other times); they wear bright yellow vests so that they can be easily identified. Students are expected to approach peer mediators if they desire their help. Recess aides will also redirect students to peer mediators when appropriate. Mediators follow a series of structured questions to help the students in conflict reach a mutually agreeable solution. They do not mediate actual cases of bullying or serious aggression. In these cases, mediators report the incidents to school staff members who then take over. Mr. Bromley reported that the peer mediators have a positive reputation throughout the school community. Notably, the current team of mediators recently gave a presentation of their work during a conference at a local university.

Other programs. Several additional noteworthy programs were mentioned during these interviews. For instance, there is a course at the library for fifth and sixth graders that teaches them how to use technology responsibly; however, there is no schoolwide student education program in cyberbullying. Because the student body is very heterogeneous, Dr. Brown has established a variety of cultural support groups for students. Social skills programs for students who

are frequent targets of bullying have also been offered in the past by a local nonprofit organization. Finally, a different nonprofit has offered districtwide parent workshops on bullying.

Semi-Standardized Interviews

Five teachers (from Grades 1, 2, 4, 5) and two administrators (Dr. Brown, Mr. Vincent) were each individually interviewed in a semi-standardized format. Below, we organize our findings across the five core questions.

1. What types of bullying do you observe in school (physical, verbal, social, cyber)? A majority of the participants communicated that bullying is relatively infrequent at Williamstown. The most common types of bullying were verbal and relational aggression (e.g., exclusion). Only one teacher mentioned witnessing physical bullying. Most instances of verbal aggression focused on differences among children (e.g., culture, language, disability, socioeconomic status). Three teachers also reported hearing students use pejorative terms about sexual orientation and race. No incidents of cyberbullying were mentioned. Concern was also noted about cliques.

Dr. Brown also voiced concerns about students transitioning from the "overly protective" Williamstown community to the less supportive and more diverse middle school environment. He reported that certain students may lack the "street smarts" to navigate the social world of middle school and stand out as easy targets for many forms of bullying by older peers.

2. What is your role in bullying prevention at school? All of the individuals interviewed reported that they have a role in bullying prevention at Williamstown; however, their precise duties varied, as did their level of involvement with the OBPP. In terms of administrators, Dr. Brown indicated that he played a major role in bringing the OBPP to Williamstown, integrating it into the existing HEART program, advertising the program among staff and parents, and empowering staff to take ownership of the program. Dr. Brown also noted that he has gradually stepped into a "consultant role" for the OBPP and many other school programs.

As a Core Team member (described earlier), Mr. Vincent reported that he plays a primary role in investigating reports of bullying and devising targeted interventions to address substantiated cases. Mr. Vincent was described by Dr. Brown as the "point person" for concerns regarding bullying and other serious behavioral issues. Several teachers reported that Mr. Vincent visited their classrooms on several occasions to address classwide bullying.

Two teachers reported that they were part of the original OBPP implementation team and provided staff training. All teachers reported that they facilitate the OBPP class meetings. While the OBPP is designed for Grades 3

through 6, a first and second grade teacher reported that they often incorporate OBPP lessons into their class meetings. In addition, one fourth grade teacher created a supplemental student workbook to accompany the Olweus meetings because he felt certain lessons required additional structure to help students grasp important ideas.

As described above, one teacher (Mr. Bromley) reported that he reestablished and oversees Williamstown's peer mediation program with support from a retired teacher. Mr. Bromley also noted that he worked to integrate messaging from the OBPP into school media (e.g., incorporating OBPP philosophies into images of the school mascot). A second grade teacher also reported that she runs social skills groups with students that include lessons on bullying.

3. What kind of training have you received in terms of bullying prevention? While all participants received training in the OBPP, there was variability in the type of training and time spent training. The three teachers who served on the initial implementation team reported completing two full days of training with a certified Olweus trainer. The implementation team then provided training to all staff during in-service meetings (one day at the end of the year prior to implementation and another at the start of the first implementation year). Mr. Bromley also attended an OBPP course via a local university and completed training in Conflict Busters, the peer mediation program adapted for Williamstown. Mr. Bromley added that he would like "to see more ongoing training for the entire staff." Dr. Brown reported completing training through the same state technical assistance program that supported Williamstown in developing their SWPBIS program. Mr. Vincent also reported attended training in restorative practices.

4. What support do you receive regarding bullying prevention? According to Mr. Vincent, funding and materials for the OBPP are provided by the Covington School District. During the second year of implementation, Williamstown's Olweus trainer provided regular consultation and continues to be available to the school for consultation as needed. Several teachers reported that members of the school's implementation team are also available to offer support. Mr. Vincent was also described as supporting teachers around specific cases of bullying that need targeted interventions. Finally, the HEART–OBPP advisory committee was noted to support teachers and classrooms by checking in periodically to gather feedback, offer suggestions, and support programmatic changes based on evaluation data.

Overall, the teachers agreed that relatively limited ongoing support is needed to implement OBPP at Williamstown. However, several participants suggested that greater collaboration is needed among teachers to facilitate the OBPP class meetings. In particular, one teacher conveyed that she is struggling with

implementing the OBPP class meetings and suggested that it would be helpful to meet with colleagues to learn how they facilitate these (e.g., what methods work/could work better?). Another teacher suggested that additional coordination is needed with support staff and volunteers and indicated it would be helpful for these individuals to participate in the weekly OBPP class meetings.

5. How effective is the combined HEART–OBPP in reducing bullying at Williamstown? Participants described the combined HEART–OBPP program as "incredibly effective," "very successful," and "extremely effective." One teacher commented that "many people have been onboard with [this program]" and noted the high level of "buy-in from the staff and images and wording all over the school [that] provide a consistent positive message." Administrators and teachers reported that the number of disciplinary referrals has fallen dramatically through implementation of HEART and the OBPP. One teacher noted that she has observed an increase in "defending behavior" (e.g., standing up for peers, supporting peers after they have been targeted, reporting incidents to staff) among students. Some concern was shared about managing students' behavior during less structured periods of the school day. One teacher also commented that staff members must work to better shift the responsibility of bullying prevention to students. After collecting open-ended feedback, we asked the participants to rate the effectiveness of the of the HEART–OBPP system (1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very). Overall, they rated the effectiveness as moderately to very effective ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .55$).

Observations

School Observations

Two full school days were spent observing unstructured periods: before and afterschool care, lunch, recess, and transitions between classes. Signs reflecting antibullying themes and behavioral expectations were clearly posted throughout the building; antibullying posters covered an entire wall of the cafeteria. During before/after care in the cafeteria, volunteers posted additional signs emphasizing values of caring, respect, honesty, and responsibility. A large student recognition board was posted outside of the administrator offices.

Overall, students were closely monitored and supervised by support staff, volunteers, and teachers during unstructured periods. Teachers and support staff were present in the hallways as students entered the building and went to their lockers; teachers stood outside of their classroom doors as students left their lockers and headed to class. Teachers and support staff were also generally well coordinated as classes transitioned between periods. For instance, several support staff members waited just outside the cafeteria to greet classes as they arrived for lunch and supervised their transition from their teachers' care.

Throughout our observations, we noticed some minor teasing and rough-and-tumble play but no serious aggression or marked disruptive behavior among students. Overall, the students observed were generally compliant with school expectations and teachers' directives. Teachers, support staff, and volunteers provided students with frequent reminders, prompting, and redirection.

Class Observations

Two observations of OBPP class meetings were conducted. One occurred in a fourth grade classroom (Mr. Bromley), and the other took place in a fifth grade classroom (Ms. Smithers). Both teachers started with a review of rules, and Ms. Smithers led her class in reciting an antibullying pledge. Both teachers reviewed the Olweus Bullying Circle (a model that depicts the different roles that students can play when they are involved in or witness bullying) and discussed each role within the circle.

Both teachers watched a video from the OBPP and then discussed the major issues presented in the films. Mr. Bromley used a worksheet that he created to help facilitate the lesson. The teachers also discussed what students should do if they are bullied or if they see someone being bullied. Ms. Smithers incorporated a role-play exercise into her lesson. Following his lesson, Mr. Bromley commented that the OBPP lessons could be "more teacher-friendly," insofar as they lack some structure and teaching materials.

Archival Records

Bullying and Victimization

We were given access to Williamstown's most recent data from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire® (OBQ, 2007). The Olweus organization will provide schools using the OBPP with a summary report of their data from the OBQ. A total of 341 students (Grades 3–6) completed this survey anonymously in the spring of the previous school year. Given the abundance of results offered in the report, we focus on the findings that could be evaluated next to national comparison data along with several other pertinent results.

In Williamstown's report, comparison data are provided for certain scales; these comparison data come from a diverse mix of U.S. schools that completed the OBQ as a baseline measure before they began implementing the OBPP. The data are weighted on several demographic variables in order to reflect the average demographics of U.S. schools. Moreover, the comparison data provided to a specific school is further weighted on key indicators for that school (e.g., the grade levels represented at that school).

Williamstown's students consistently reported lower rates of peer victimization and bullying relative to the national comparison schools. For instance,

15.5% of Williamstown students reported being bullied at least 2–3 times per month for the past couple of months versus 20.2% of students from the national comparison. In addition, 2.7% of students at Williamstown reported taking part in bullying another student(s) at least 2–3 times per month for the past couple of months versus 6% of national comparison students. Compared to the national data, Williamstown students also reported higher levels of empathy for victims of bullying, a lower likelihood of joining in bullying and passively watching it, a higher likelihood of helping victims of bullying, and slightly less fear of being bullied at school.

Of the students who reported being bullied at least 2–3 times a month for the past couple of months, verbal bullying was reported most frequently (15% of these students), followed by exclusion (11%), rumors (9%), sexual bullying (8%), physical bullying (7%), racial bullying (5%), threats (4%), property damage (2%), and cyberbullying (2%). Of note, these trends were generally consistent across boys and girls. For students who reported being bullied once or more, a majority experienced bullying on the playground (52%), followed by the cafeteria (35%), school bus (21%), and in the classroom with the teacher present (18%).

Disciplinary Referrals

We were also given permission to review a summary report of Williamstown's disciplinary offenses for the first half of the previous school year. Of note, many of these disciplinary offenses do not reflect bullying incidents; however, students' general conduct problems are positively correlated with bullying behavior (Crapanzano, Frick, Childs, & Terranova, 2011). From September to January of that year, there were a total of 90 recorded student offenses, which was down from 147 offenses during the same period of the previous school year. Aggression was the most common offense (38%), followed by minor physical contact (17%); each remaining category of offenses (e.g., disruption, defiance, profanity) constituted less than 10% of the total offenses. While aggression was the most frequent offense, the total number of aggressive offenses was down by 31% from the previous year. However, minor physical contact was up 66% (i.e., from 9 to 15). Offenses occurred most frequently in the classroom (21%), followed by the cafeteria (14%), and the school field (11%).

Discussion

We evaluated the results of our consultation in light of extant research and best practices in bullying prevention. Overall, we found a high degree of convergence in the data collected across methods (interview, observations, and

archives) and sources (administrators and teachers) in several key areas: the generally low frequency of bullying at Williamstown, the predominance of verbal and relational bullying over other forms, and the relatively high degree of perceived effectiveness of their antibullying system. We discuss the major findings of our consultation first in terms of the strengths of Williamstown's bullying prevention program; we then note the gaps detected and outline recommendations provided to the school.

Strengths of the School's Current Bullying Prevention System

Overall, Williamstown's bullying prevention program (i.e., their combined HEART–OBPP system) appears quite impactful. It is perceived by all participating teachers and administrators as moderately to very effective. Moreover, program evaluation data indicate that students perceive less bullying and victimization at Williamstown than do students at similar schools throughout the U.S. Furthermore, annual referral data suggests that disciplinary offenses at Williamstown are down from previous years, including aggression among students. Archival data also reveal that Williamstown students report higher levels of empathy for and helping behavior toward targets of bullying compared to national data. These student attitudes and behaviors toward bullying likely mediate the effects of bullying prevention programs on actual bullying behavior; they are also consistent with several features thought to characterize schools that are high in perceived community (Schaps, 2009) and that have positive climates (Emmons et al., 1996).

Williamstown's antibullying system is unique in that it includes two schoolwide programs that are both empirically supported in terms of reducing bullying and victimization (Black et al., 2010; Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Ross & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al. 2012). However, these programs are not implemented as separate systems. Rather, the OBPP was carefully integrated into the HEART program, which likely minimized many common organizational challenges associated with establishing school programs (e.g., staff resistance, scheduling complications). It should also be noted that Williamstown makes a concerted effort to evaluate the impact of the OBPP and HEART programs each year, which is notable in that program assessment is vital to the success of antibullying programs (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009).

Three specific decisions appear key to Williamstown's successful infusion of the OBPP within HEART. First, the OBPP class meetings, the essence and most time intensive aspect of the OBPP program, were integrated into HEART's ongoing character education classroom lessons, which eliminated the need for an additional meeting. Second, Williamstown integrated bullying into their student referral system; bullying concerns are reported to a Core

Team of staff members and jointly overseen by the vice principal and school psychologist. While bullying may require special attention from this team, Williamstown thoughtfully avoided the creation of a separate procedure and group for managing bullying concerns. Third, Williamstown's principal made a strong effort to help the school community take ownership of the OBPP by gradually moving out of a directive role and into a supportive one. This was largely accomplished by employing a train-the-trainer model, in which a core team of staff were instructed to train and support other school staff members in implementing the program.

Another major strength of Williamstown's program (and community in general) is its high level of parent involvement, which is generally important for student success (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; Fan & Williams, 2010) and, specifically, the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). In particular, the HEART–OBPP advisory committee (of administrators, teachers, parents, and volunteers) provides parents and other community members with a strong presence and clear voice in the Williamstown community's antibullying efforts. Overall, the school's ongoing work to foster and maintain parent engagement has likely played a critical role in the success of Williamstown's bullying prevention program over time.

Williamstown also appears successful in its messaging around bullying and, more largely, school community. The HEART (honesty, excellence, awareness, respect, tolerance) mantra is consistent with high-community schools' emphasis on prosocial behavior and civic values (Schaps, 2009). Additionally, it coincides quite well with the underlying principles of the OBPP, which emphasize the role of peer bystanders in modeling and reinforcing prosocial behavior rather than antisocial behavior such as bullying (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Based on our observations, these messages were clearly depicted on posters throughout the school building. Additional posters were hung for before and afterschool care, a less structured period in which bullying and other disruptive behavior may be more likely (Whitney & Smith, 1993). These messages were also clearly and repeatedly conveyed during the classroom meetings that we observed. Overall, the visual materials and classroom dialogue are likely to play a major role in fostering a strong sense of school community focused on the values of HEART and the OBPP.

Williamstown's peer mediation program is another noteworthy aspect of their work in bullying prevention. The use of peer mediation to address bullying has been criticized in that it places targets in possibly abusive situations by forcing them to compromise with their perpetrators. However, the peer mediators at Williamstown only handle cases of minor peer conflict and are trained to immediately report all potentially serious issues to staff. When used in this

fashion, peer mediation is likely to promote prosocial behavior and potentially prevent day-to-day conflict from escalating into patterns of bullying. Furthermore, it provides students with an active role in managing minor interpersonal conflict in their own community, which is consistent with high-community schools' emphasis on providing students with opportunities for autonomy and fostering quality social relationships (Emmons et al., 1996; Schaps, 2009).

Areas for Growth in the School's Bullying Prevention System

Through our consultation, we identified several areas for growth in Williamstown's bullying prevention efforts. Before discussing our recommendations, however, we would like to reiterate that their current system appears quite effective; thus, the suggestions that we offered represented a menu of options (see Table 1) to strengthen an already strong system.

Table 1. Recommendations to Bolster One Elementary School's Bullying Prevention Program

Area	Recommendation
Evaluation	Assess bullying and victimization in Grades K through 2 (student- and teacher-report measures)
Implementation	Increase teacher communication and collaboration regarding OBPP class meetings
	Videotape experienced teachers' OBPP meetings as a training tool
	Share additional materials (e.g., handouts or worksheets) developed for OBPP lessons
	Include school support staff and volunteers in OBPP class meetings
	Expand peer mediation program to the lunch period and the before and after school period
Programs	Provide schoolwide education on cyberbullying
	Offer students education in multicultural awareness and social justice
	Offer assertiveness training workshops to students at risk for peer victimization in middle school

Note. OBPP is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

Evaluation

Per Farrington and Ttofi (2009), ongoing assessment is a key component of effective antibullying programs. As reviewed above, Williamstown collects annual data (from students and teachers) to assess bullying, victimization, and related issues. However, their measure of bullying and victimization (OBQ,

2007) is only collected from the third through sixth grade students, and no bullying data are collected for kindergarten to second grade.

We suggested that Williamstown assess bullying and victimization in these earlier grades for several reasons. First, bullying and victimization occur among students as young as preschoolers (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Monks et al., 2003). Second, even though the OBPP is not designed for these grades, several of Willimastown's K–2 teachers have adapted OBPP lessons and use them in their classrooms. Third, we believe that collecting data from and on these younger students' bullying experiences is critical to giving them a stronger voice in their school community's bullying prevention efforts. While measures of bullying and victimization for young children are relatively scarce, we recommended using the peer victimization subscale of the Perceptions of Peer Social Support Scale (PPSSS; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).

The PPSSS is administered via individual student interviews and includes a four-item peer victimization subscale (being picked on, getting hit, and having mean things said to you/about you to peers). Children rate the extent to which they have experienced each type of victimization on a three-point scale. Total victimization scores are calculated by averaging the ratings for the four items. This measure has been administered to students in kindergarten to fourth grade; the peer victimization subscale has demonstrated adequate internal consistency, evidence of concurrent and predictive validity, and concordance with observational ratings (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996; Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002).

To our knowledge, the PPSSS does not include a bullying behavior subscale; thus, we suggested assessing bullying by adapting the four victimization items to reflect bullying (i.e., picking on others, hitting peers, and saying mean things to or about classmates) and for report by teachers. Notably, teacher-report measures are typically used to measure aggression at school, rather than self-report tools, especially in young children. Although the proposed scale has not been validated, we believe that it may be well suited for use by teachers for several reasons. First, it is extremely brief, which is important in that teachers would complete the scale for every student in their classrooms. Second, it captures a range of common experiences that teachers are likely to observe, and these items would parallel those on the child-report scale which would make it feasible to compare the student- and teacher-report data.

Implementation

We also offered Williamstown several suggestions to strengthen their OBPP class meetings. Multiple teachers reported the need for greater collaboration regarding these class meetings, which could be accomplished through regularly scheduled meetings or even consultation (as needed) with teachers more

seasoned in the OBPP. Additionally, certain teachers could videotape their meetings as reference tools for others; notably, such videos have been used in other schools implementing the OBPP (Black et al., 2010). We also recommended creating a shared electronic drive to store these videos and any supplemental materials developed by teachers (e.g., handouts or worksheets for the OBPP class meetings).

Additionally, we suggested that support staff and volunteers attend the OBPP class meetings as frequently as possible. Support staff play a vital role in monitoring and addressing student behavior in the school community, typically in locations where bullying is highly likely to occur (e.g., recess, hallways, the lunch room; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Thus, we advised Williamstown to encourage support staff and volunteers to attend the OBPP meetings for the specific classrooms they most often support. We also believe that support staff and volunteers could eventually take an active role in co-facilitating these meetings with teachers.

Furthermore, we suggested the possibility of expanding peer mediation to lunch time and the before and after school periods. Given the frequency of problematic peer interactions during unstructured times (Whitney & Smith, 1993), peer mediation could be extremely valuable during these periods of the school day. To accomplish this, we suggested that the faculty advisers of the peer mediation program train support staff to supervise the mediators during these times.

Programs

Although cyberbullying was not reported as a major concern, data from the OBQ suggests that incidents have occurred. Accordingly, we advocated taking a proactive stance to prevent the possible escalation of cyberbullying. We recommended schoolwide education on cyberbullying for all students and staff and referred Williamstown to the local district attorney's office with trainers willing to provide this service to schools. We also suggested that teachers work to better incorporate cyberbullying into their OBPP class meetings.

Concerns were also reported regarding many students' transition from the protective and largely homogenous Williamstown school community to the less supportive and more diverse middle school environment. After sixth grade, all Williamstown students enter the same middle school that draws from all seven elementary schools in the district. The middle school's student body is substantially larger (1,800 students with 160 faculty members) and more diverse than Williamstown's in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, and special needs. The middle school also uses the OBPP program through eighth grade and implements positive

behavior support principles; thus, Williamstown students will experience some continuity in school programming in their transition to middle school.

Nonetheless, it could be quite challenging for some students to adjust to a less supportive and cohesive middle school community. Therefore, we encouraged Williamstown to consider providing assertiveness training classes for students perceived to be at heightened risk for peer victimization in middle school. These trainings could help students develop skills needed to ease their departure from the secure base at Williamstown. We referred the school to a local nonprofit organization that provides these types of services and has previously worked with Williamstown. Moreover, we recommended that the school host workshops aimed to promote multicultural awareness, especially for the fifth and sixth grade students and teachers. We identified several community agencies that could design and deliver these workshops for Williamstown.

Limitations of Consultation Findings and Model

It is important to emphasize that Williamstown serves a largely economically advantaged and homogenously Caucasian student body. In the U.S., student poverty and classroom racial/ethnic diversity have been linked to increased rates of bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Thus, Williamstown lacks certain risk factors faced by many schools, especially impoverished urban schools with more diverse student bodies. As such, the success of Williamstown's antibullying programs and the recommendations offered via our consultation may not generalize to all school communities. However, we would like to reiterate that the purpose of this consultation was to assist Williamstown in strengthening its bullying program for its unique school community, rather than generating a universal list of recommendations for all school programs.

Nonetheless, one key observation that may benefit many schools is Williamstown's decision to roll their bullying prevention program into an existing behavior management system. As noted earlier, Black and colleagues (2010) evaluated the OBPP in an urban U.S. school district that faced multiple challenges during its adoption. Although it is not clear whether this district utilized a schoolwide behavior management system, we speculate that having such a system in place (e.g., SWPBIS) could increase the likelihood of success for bullying prevention programs such as the OBPP. SWPBIS programs could accomplish this by not only reducing general student conduct problems as well as bullying and victimization (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Horner et al., 2009; Ross & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012), but also by providing schools with an underlying foundation (e.g., existing rules, policies, procedures) to support targeted bullying programs. While additional research is needed to explore whether schoolwide behavior systems increase the effectiveness of bullying

prevention programs, schools should consider whether community-wide behavior systems are needed before adopting antibullying programs.

Several weaknesses of our consultation model should also be taken into account. Overall, data were collected from a relatively small proportion of the school community; thus, it is questionable whether the findings truly represent the beliefs of the broader community. While we made an effort to engage staff, many declined to take part. It is possible that staff felt as though they would be personally evaluated by participating, despite our efforts to allay these concerns during a staff meeting. They may have also questioned the usefulness of the consultation in that Williamstown was already addressing bullying quite well. Perhaps more staff would elect to participate in schools with greater need for bullying support. Additionally, it will be critical to give parents and students the opportunity to make their voices heard in these consultations.

For future consultations, we plan to follow a framework that better engages the entire school community and offers greater opportunity for community members to be involved in the consultation process. To accomplish this, we intend to follow a model known as participatory action research (PAR). PAR is aimed to respectfully empower communities in developing and evaluating programs for their own members (Hughes, 2003). Following the PAR model, consultants work with schools to collaboratively design, assess, and adapt programs rather than recommending programs or modifications without input from community members. In line with PAR, we also plan to better enact the process of mutual adaptation, that is, the ongoing reciprocal exchange between external consultants and community members to develop and adapt programs for the unique community context and vice versa (McLaughlin, 1990). According to McLaughlin (1990), consultants are most effective when they make a concerted and repeated effort to enable community members through each step of the consultation process.

While several theorists have advocated the need to adapt bullying prevention programs to fit different school communities (Black et al., 2010; Cross & Barnes, 2014), to our knowledge, they seem to neglect the need to involve the community at every major step. For instance, in our own work, we interpreted the consultation data in our research lab and then presented our findings to the school. To be more consistent with both PAR and mutual adaptation, we could have interpreted the data alongside key school members, giving them the opportunity to draw their own conclusions and also fostering a mutual exchange of ideas between both parties, which would likely lead to interpretations and solutions that are more contextualized to the unique school community. Also, by including school members in this process, they would likely be more willing and motivated to adopt and sustain the solutions discussed. With that

said, we strongly encourage other professionals who consult with schools on bullying prevention to integrate PAR and mutual adaptation as much as possible in their own work.

Conclusion

In sum, this manuscript offers a snapshot of a unique and effective bullying prevention program in one U.S. public elementary school. Although the school's antibullying programs may not generalize to all schools, its integrative framework is compelling and should be considered by schools. This manuscript also highlights the role that professional consultants can play in collaborating with school communities on bullying prevention.

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