

An Investigation of Middle School Teachers' Perceptions on Bullying

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Abstract

The researchers in this study investigated rural middle school teachers' perspectives regarding bullying. The researchers gathered information about the teachers' definitions of bullying, where bullying occurs in their school, and how to prevent bullying. Peer-reviewed literature associated with this topic was studied in order to achieve a broader understanding of bullying and to develop a self-administered survey addressing these issues. A total of 21 teachers participated in the survey and the results of this study convey the need to recognize bullying in many forms, appropriately address bullying when it occurs, and incorporate preventive actions that will discourage bullying and encourage acceptance.

Keywords: Bullying; Middle School; Teacher Preparation.

Introduction

Middle school can be a transformative and exciting time for students. However, during these important developmental years, bullying continues to be a persistent and serious issue. In more recent years, national and international concerns relating to the harmful effects of bullying have increased significantly (Thompson & Cohen, 2005). According to Frey and Fisher (2008), bullying has become a part of life for countless students, and can take on many forms within contemporary schools. As a result, bullying has placed a considerable amount of pressure on administrators and teachers to effectively respond to bullying (Bush, 2011). Often, teachers and administrators can be unaware of bullying, making it difficult to develop appropriate policies that are proactive instead of reactive.

In 2003, Seals and Young stated that bullying is a persistent and insidious problem that affects roughly one-fourth of the students in the United States. However, in 2011, eight years later, the National Education Association (NEA), Nishioka et al., and the United States Department of Education (USDE), stated that bullying affects one-third of students in schools in the United States.

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With the number of students affected by bullying growing each year, middle school teachers are often bombarded with the realization that the development of cognitive skills is not the only foundation for truly effective learning. Cognitive processes are also justly linked to students' emotional, psychological, and physical health (Siris & Osterman, 2004). Davis and Nixon (2011, p. 18) state, when "teachers, counselors, and administrators strive to create emotionally safe and respectful school environments, they are often confronted with conflicting ideas about what to do."

Teachers' often have differing views about how to respond to bullying behavior and what exactly constitutes bullying, as there can be differences based on the regularity and gravity of a bullying situation (Rigby, 2002). Nansel et al. (2001, p. 294) state that "given the concurrent behavioral and emotional difficulties associated with bullying, as well as potential long-term negative outcomes for [students], the issue of bullying merits serious attention." The researchers in this study seek to provide insights from current middle school teachers regarding bullying and what can possibly be done to help prevent and reduce bullying in schools today.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions towards bullying and the ramifications of different types of bullying within the school environment. This study was thoughtfully designed after a thorough examination of relevant research literature, which was then used to inform the construction of our research study and analysis of data collected from a self-administered online survey instrument. We chose specifically to study the perceptions of classroom teachers because they are often the most likely school employees to witness bullying of and between students, thus, if and how they choose to respond to these incidents has a direct correlation to the overall effectiveness of bullying prevention programs and the promotion of a positive school climate. The researchers in this study collected data that focused on teachers' perceptions of how the issue of bullying is currently addressed in a middle school setting, as well as recommending future actions for bullying prevention in secondary schools.

Review of the Literature

Bullying is nothing new in society; the exploitation of the weak by the strong is a recurring theme throughout recorded history (Rigby 2002). Many literary works depict children being frequently and systematically bullied, and a copious amount of adults have childhood encounters that haunt their memories. Even with the common-place familiarity of bullying in society, it was never truly studied with any significance until the late 20th century, when Professor Dan Olweus

studied, defined, classified, and estimated frequency of bullying behavior (Rigby, 2002). Consequently, the subsequent review of literature was established to present information pertaining to a definition of bullying to be used throughout the course of this study, different types of bullying, who bullying affects within educational environments, and different approaches to preventing and reducing bullying, specifically in the middle grades.

What is Bullying?

Olweus (1993), a pioneer in bullying research, defines bullying as an imbalance of strength, which must be a repeated action and occur regularly over time. There is a major emphasis on the phrase, “imbalance of strength,” which simply means, the word bullying cannot be used when two or more students of nearly the same size, physically or psychologically, are fighting or arguing (Olweus, 1993). Distinguishing between direct-physical, direct-verbal, indirect, overt, and relational forms of aggression can be difficult because bullying can take on multiple forms at one time (Nishioka, Coe, Burke, Hanita, & Sprague, 2011; Psunder, 2010). Direct-verbal aggression can be seen as “hurtful teasing, name calling and assigning unkind nicknames,” and is one of the more common forms of aggression among young people (Psunder, 2010, p. 218). Verbally- and physically-aggressive behaviors are two characteristics of overt aggression that are generally intended to threaten or harm another student; whereas, harming a student’s relationship with others is a form of relational aggression (Nishioka et al., 2011). In addition to the verbal and physical forms of bullying, aggressive behavior can be demonstrated through electronic text, known as cyberbullying (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008). Cyberbullying most frequently occurs through social media sites and allows bullying behaviors to continue beyond the traditional school day and into the homes of students. The continual presence of cyberbullying in children’s lives can have a devastating impact and should be taken seriously by students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

With multiple genres of bullying comes a multitude of reasons behind bullying. Students have reported that they were bullied due to “how they acted, what they said, who their friends were, and their size” (Thornberg, 2010, p. 312). According to Thornberg (2010), teacher favoritism along with academic and social success and shortcomings play a significant role in the totality of bullying. The idea that bullies often act out due to an aggressive and impulsive nature, a strong need to maintain power over others, and a family life full of aggression and/or neglectful parenting

are some other central issues in the reasoning for bullying tendencies (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005; Olweus, 1993; Thornberg, 2010).

In recent years, many studies have been organized around bullying, and data have been accumulated to show a representative depiction of the affect of bullying in schools (Frey & Fisher, 2008; NEA, 2011; Nishioka et al., 2011; Novick & Isaacs, 2010; Petrosino, Guckenburger, DeVoe, & Hanson, 2010; Psunder, 2010; USDE, 2011; Veenstra, Lindenberg, Munniksma, & Dijkstra, 2010). Bullying has developed into a routine, every-day occurrence in classrooms all across the globe (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). It can take on many forms and may be hard to recognize at times. Humiliation, teasing, and physical aggression are just a few of the many ways students are bullied in school (Psunder, 2010). According to Watson et al. (2010, p. 62), bullying is no longer seen as a “traditional dyadic bully-victim relationship,” researchers now have to acknowledge the “social arena in which bullying occurs.”

Who is affected by Bullying?

According to Frey and Fisher (2008), bullying has become a persistent part of school life for countless students and can be very difficult to avoid. Several research projects have reported that bullying hits a pinnacle in middle school (Hargrove, 2010, p. 40). According to an early survey presented by the World Health Organization (WHO), 30% of a student sample of sixth through tenth graders had been involved in bullying (as cited in Rimm, 2010, para. 2). The National Education Association (NEA) reported that “bullying and violence cause 160,000 fearful children to miss one or more school days each month” (as cited in Mental Health American [MHA], 2011, para. 3). Specifically, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the NEA (as cited in Frey & Fisher, 2008, p. 132) stated that “7% of eighth graders stay home from school at least once a month to avoid a bullying situation.” Frey and Fisher (2008) also state that many middle school students have reported altering their routes between classes to avoid meeting a bully in the hallway.

A number of studies (as cited in Watson et al., 2010, p. 62) have confirmed six chief roles within the realm of bullying: the bully, the victim, the bully-aide, the bully-supporter, the protector, and the spectator/bystander. The pure bully and pure victim are both the original characters in the bully-victim scenario. The protector simply defends the victim in the bullying situation. The spectator/bystander takes on the role of audience member. This character does nothing except watch the bullying play out. Lastly, the bully-aide and bully-supporters are more specifically defined within the context of the actual role played. As defined by Watson et al. (2010, p. 62), the

bully-aide is someone “who joins in with bullying, but does not initiate it.” Similarly, the bully-supporter is someone “who provides positive feedback to the bully, but does not actively take part” (Watson et al., 2010, p. 62). There are other roles that researchers have considered significant as well, bully-victims. Based on a study by Wolke, Woods, Stanford, and Schulz (2001), a bully/victim was also identified as a key role in the arena of bullying behavior. Within this character, the main idea is that the player is both a victim of bullying and a perpetrator of bullying. Because bullying has so many components it is often difficult to distinguish between victim and bully.

Victims of bullying are affected in many ways by the oppressive actions of bullying perpetrators. This can have a negative impact on academic success and the social/emotional development of middle school students (Frey & Fisher, 2008; Nishioka et al., 2011). Additionally, student bystanders and perpetrators of bullying can also experience social and emotional anxiety (Nishioka et al., 2011). According to Veenstra et al. (2010, p. 481), bullying perpetrators, like most students, “want to realize status and affection.” Bullying can have many affects on all the different parties involved. Every day there are many students who are discouraged and disparaged from social interactions due to bullying. Bullying also leads to absences, as kids wish to stay home and avoid bullies at school, which can also contribute to poor academic performance.

Preventing Bullying in Schools

“Although it has always been around, bullying should never be accepted as normal behavior” (MHA, 2011, para. 1). In more recent years it seems that bullying has increased dramatically; however, there is no definitive evidence that this is true. According to education.com (2011), there are several reasons bullying seems to be on the rise:

- “There is greater awareness of the seriousness of bullying, which could be due to higher reporting rates by students.
- The addition of cyberbullying as a new, easy, and round-the-clock place to bully.
- There are a number of early childhood risk factors that have increased that might also increase a child’s vulnerability to bully or be bullied, such as an insecure attachment to a primary care giver or lack of parental supervision.” (2011, para. 3).

Diamanduros et al. (2008) argue that bullying has greatly impacted the contemporary headlines due to the recent eruption of school shootings and other forms of school-based violence. With this escalation comes a challenge for students as well as teachers. According to Rimm (2008),

administrators, teachers, parents and students need to become more proactive in the prevention of bullying in schools. Bullying has many different forms, and often times will take on multiple forms at once. This can cause teachers and administrators to be oblivious to bullying, which in turn makes it hard for any proactive steps to be taken (Psunder, 2010; Veenstra et al., 2010). Research suggests bullying episodes are rarely reported to school officials, which can become an impediment to the “ability to define the scope and frequency of bullying behavior” in educational environments (Petrosino et al., 2010). Many school systems have developed an anonymous hotline reporting system that hopefully has removed students’ fear of retaliation and in turn, encouraged them to report any and all bullying situations (Petrosino et al., 2010).

Rather than involving adults, most middle school students tend to select other forms of dealing with bullying situations (Novick & Isaacs, 2010). However, when students are left to their own devices, they tend to choose approaches that are either highly unproductive or are likely to cultivate further harassment. It has been said that students have a tendency to choose more effective ways of coping with bullying as they get older; therefore, a promising avenue for bullying prevention programs would be to prepare students with effective responses to bullying at an early age (Watson et al., 2010). The ultimate goal is to reduce victimization through preparing students, of all ages, to use an inner-dialogue approach in collaboration with any existing intervention and/or prevention plans (Watson et al., 2010).

There are many steps that can be taken in order to help prevent bullying; for example, the Olweus Bully Prevention Program, which incorporates four rules to be implemented school-wide (Olweus, 1993). These rules consist of not bullying others, including those who are being excluded, helping those being bullied, and telling an adult at school and home if there has been a bullying incident (Olweus, 1993). Respect and regard for others should be taught from an early age and continued throughout the schooling process (MHA, 2011). The students are not the only ones in need of bullying education. Sherer and Nickerson (2010) reference several sources that say teachers and administrators need to be trained and provided continuous support in order to enhance their abilities to manage bullying dilemmas. In order to help prevent bullying in schools, administrators and teachers need to help students learn to improve their behavior management skills and foster social and emotional growth (Romain, 1997). Students should feel capable and willing to help other students being bullied, and teachers need to help facilitate an understanding of bullying so that all students can play a role in decreasing the frequency and intensity of all

bullying situations (Olweus, 1993). The research literature clearly demonstrates the importance of teachers in helping students effectively deal with bullying and the vital role teachers' play in implementing anti-bullying policies. Essentially, anti-bullying policies cannot be effective if teachers do not know how to identify different types of bullying behaviors and how to respond to these situations when they occur. Thus, the present research study was designed to examine the perceptions of teachers at a middle school with a designated anti-bullying program to provide insights into how classroom teachers actually handle various aspects of bullying.

Method

This study took place in a middle school, grades six through eight, in the Southeastern United States. The population of the school was approximately 605 students and 49 faculty, staff and support services. The percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch was 43%. The primary unit of analysis for this study was teachers, both in regular classrooms and related arts classrooms (i.e. band, art, library, physical education, etc.). The emphasis for the study was placed on teachers who interact with the students on a daily basis. This element helped to eliminate 13 members from the faculty, staff and support services, specifically, administrators, guidance counselor, and all other support staff. There were 36 classroom teachers available to participate in this study, and 21 of the teachers fully participated in completing the online survey. This made for a response rate of 58%, which is higher than average for typical survey research.

The participants were first invited to take part in the survey by means of a formal letter requesting the teachers' participation in this voluntary study. This letter was placed in the teachers' mailboxes the day before the survey was administered. The letter also notified participants that their identity would remain confidential and that a report would be issued once the study was complete. A second invitation, along with a link to the survey, was given via email to complete the survey during the teachers' own time, using an online program (www.surveymonkey.com). The participants then responded to each question independently. Two days before the survey was expected to be complete, the participants were sent an email reminder requesting their participation to complete the survey on or before the due date.

The self-administered survey was used for several reasons. Due to the survey being self-administered through an online program the researchers had easy access to the participants' responses. Also, the self-administered surveys permitted the participants to complete the questions at their own leisure. The latter of the two reasons was a major factor in deciding on self-

administered surveys. Teachers do not have a lot of leisure time due to the everyday time constraints of grading, lesson planning, parent conferences, etc. Therefore, a short, self-administered online survey was chosen as the data collection instrument. This was necessary in order to gather the valuable insights of middle school teachers about bullying in their school, while also being cognizant of their extremely busy schedules.

Instrument

The survey (see Appendix A) used for this study was based on a survey used in a similar study on the concept of teachers' bullying perceptions. Michael Bush created a comprehensive survey that was "designed to examine the influence of individual and organizational level factors towards teachers' responses to bullying" (Bush, 2011, p. 41). The survey was based on Olweus' (1993) definition of bullying, which was provided on the survey for the participants in order to maintain consistency in data analysis. Bush (2011) took into account concerns for reliability, which is associated with credibility of research findings or interpretations of findings, and validity, which refers to the accuracy of measurement. Bush's study tested the reliability and validity of each item within the survey instrument and all items had a Cronbach's alpha of .75 or higher, which has been deemed an acceptable level of reliability among researchers (Dillman, 2007).

The survey was left in the original order of questioning; however, the actual presentation of the survey was altered slightly. For ease of convenience, the survey was transferred to an online service (www.surveymonkey.com). The questions were presented in the precise manner that Bush (2011) fashioned in the original survey as to preserve the survey's integrity. Also, there was no reason to alter or make amendments to the questions being asked because they were composed in this exact rhythm for flow and consistency. The researchers designed this study to build on the work of Bush (2011) by adding to the literature on teachers perceptions of bullying, while also offering a unique perspective by collecting data specifically from a group of teachers at a middle school with a designated anti-bullying program.

Limitations

Before any generalizations can be made about this study, further research must be completed due to the overwhelming development of bullying reports in educational settings today. A major limitation stems from the population surveyed, as the participants were all from one specific school. This convenience sample was chosen because the researchers had support from the school administration, but also because the student population of this school closely aligned

with the overall demographic of most middle schools within the state. As a consequence of these limitations, the results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population. Reproduction of this study among a larger variety of schools within the U.S. and abroad would certainly generate useful data to the field of education. Another limitation of this study was the lack of diversity among participating teachers. Due to this lack of diversity, the researchers were unable to examine the differences in how teachers respond to bullying based on race/ethnicity, grade level taught, and gender.

Results

Teacher Concerns

Teachers were asked to rank order the following five items: classroom resources/materials, student assessment, bullying, curriculum/lesson plans, and teacher observations/evaluations. Teachers were asked to use a scale of 1–5, where 1 indicated their highest concern and 5 indicated their lowest concern. Table 1, displays the ranking of each item with the percentage of respondents. Based on the Table 1, nine teachers (43%) ranked student assessment as the highest concern. This was closely followed by curriculum/lesson plans, which was selected as the second largest concern by 42% of participants. These two findings accurately reflect the current climate of education in many areas of the U.S., where high stakes testing has a major impact on teachers' job security and pay increases. Interestingly, bullying was rated as the lowest two concerns by a majority of participants, with 62% of teachers identifying it as a 4 or 5 on the rating scale. In the end, these findings provide insights into the largest areas of concern for middle school teachers. Clearly, participants in this study were mostly concerned about their professional responsibilities in relation to classroom instruction and assessment. In addition, it appears that most teachers deem bullying to be less of a concern compared to other professional responsibilities.

Table 1

Teacher Concerns Ranking

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Average
Classroom resources/materials	14%	10%	28%	24%	24%	3.33
Student Assessment	43%	19%	14%	14%	10%	2.29
Bullying	19%	10%	10%	34%	28%	3.43

Curriculum/Lesson Plans	10%	42%	24%	14%	10%	2.71
Teacher observations/evaluations	14%	19%	24%	14%	28%	3.24

Observation and Consideration of Behavior

The next section of the survey included information about different forms of bullying behavior (physical, verbal, and relational) and whether or not teachers observed this type of behavior within the last year. The teachers were also asked whether or not they considered the aforementioned types of behavior as bullying. There were six descriptive statements, two for each type of behavior, used to ask the participants about the different types of bullying (see Table 2). The respondents were first given a statement, and then asked, “Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year (2015-2016)?” Additionally, teachers were asked if they considered each of the behaviors to be bullying and rate the severity of the bullying action on a scale of 1-10 (1 being least serious, 10 being very serious). Finally, teachers were asked to rate the likelihood of them responding to bullying behaviors in question on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not respond in any way, and 10 being definitely respond. The majority of the teachers participating in this study witnessed each type of behavior during the last academic year and overall considered each type of bullying to be very serious.

Based on the responses, teachers in this study witnessed a great deal of bullying over the last year, as four of the six behaviors were reported by 85% of the teachers in this study. Verbal bullying was the most common, with both descriptive statements (see Table 2) being observed by 85% and 86% of the teachers in this study. Teachers in this study rated the severity of each bullying incident fairly high and the scores were quite consistent among participants, as all of the average ratings were 8.5 or higher. Interestingly enough, there were two bullying statements, one verbal and one relational, that teachers in this study indicated that they were not very likely to respond to if witnessed. Both of these statements dealt with the common middle school situations of “teasing” and “gossiping,” indicating that perhaps teachers in this study do not believe these behaviors to be all that serious or harmful.

Table 2

Teachers observing bullying behavior

Type of Bullying	Bullying Statement	Percentage of teachers observing behavior	Percentage of teachers considering behavior as bullying	Severity of Action average rating (1-10)	Likelihood to Respond average rating (1-10)
Physical Bullying	A student hits, kicks, pushes or shoves another student.	86%	76%	8.5	9.5
Physical Bullying	A student threatens another student with physical harm.	62%	76%	10.0	10.0
Verbal Bullying	A student is being teased by another student.	86%	71%	9.0	5.0
Verbal Bullying	A student is being called hurtful names.	85%	80%	9.5	10.0
Relational Bullying	A student is deliberately being left out of a group of other students.	79%	68%	8.5	9.0
Relational Bullying	A student is having rumors or gossip spread about him or her.	84%	84%	9.5	6.0

Bullying Response Training

Next on the survey was a section that asked about teacher training in response to bullying. The teachers were asked if they had received any training for responding to bullying since being hired at their school. Out of the sample, 79% indicated they had received training from the school in question; however, 21% indicated they had not received any training pertaining to responding to bullying. Secondly, the teachers who had received training were asked how many hours were received during the 2015-2016 academic year. There was a range of responses from 0 – 4 hours. The third and final question in this section asked, “Using the scale below, respond to the statement, ‘I would like more training for responding to bullying.’” The respondents then recorded their score on an interval scale ranging from 0% - 100%, where 0% was related to the *Strongly Disagree*, 50%

was related to *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, and 100% was related to *Strongly Agree*. The average response for all teachers was 66%, meaning. The average teacher in this study agreed with the idea that more training is needed in their school.

Anti-Bullying Policy

With respect to policy, the teachers were asked if their school has a formal anti-bullying policy. Within the sample, 95% indicated their school did have an anti-bullying policy in place. The teachers that responded “yes” were then asked to answer several questions regarding familiarity, satisfaction, effectiveness, consistency, and involvement in the development of the anti-bullying policy for their school. The respondents then recorded their score on an interval scale ranging from 0-10, where 0 was related to the *Not at all*, 5 was related to *Moderately*, and 10 was related to *Very Familiar*. Table 3, shown below, displays the average rating for each policy question.

Table 3

Anti-Bullying Policy

Anti-Bullying Policy Question	Average Rating
How familiar are you with the school's anti-bullying policy?	7.0
How satisfied are you with your school's anti-bullying policy?	7.0
How effective is your school's anti-bullying policy?	6.0
How consistent are you in enforcing your school's anti-bullying policy?	8.5
How involved were you in developing your school's anti-bullying policy?	2.5

Discussion

Bush (2011) discusses several studies about bullying that use physical aggression as the main focus; however, this study includes physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Also, much of the previous research on bullying focuses on the students’ perspectives. This study was solely focused on teachers and their perspectives of bullying frequency and intensity. These are some of the key factors that have helped to develop a clearer understanding of what teachers need and want

in order to minimize and eliminate bullying behavior. This study, while small in sample size, does offer valuable insights into how middle school teachers identify bullying behavior and how seriously they consider these behaviors to be in the school setting. Based on the results of this study, there is clearly a great deal of bullying taking place in middle schools and teachers and administrators should strongly consider how these behaviors can impact the social, emotional, and intellectual development of middle school students.

Teacher Concerns

Teachers' professional responsibilities run a wide gamut of activities, from instructor to role model to cheerleader to drill sergeant. Due to this wide array of challenges, certain items were included within the survey to provide an essential skeleton in which to base the larger results. These specific items measured teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities, observation of behavior, whether they actually consider the behaviors to be classified as bullying, and lastly, these items also provided some non-specific information about response training and anti-bullying programs within the teachers' school. Teachers in the U.S. are professionally responsible for students' achievements on standardized tests and this accountability directly impacts the teachers' job security and pay (Bush, 2011). With new evaluation systems in place and teachers being intensely critiqued based on their students' test scores, teachers are more and more concerned with what occurs academically in their classrooms. With this in mind, it is no surprise that one of the top ranked concerns for this specific sample of teachers was student assessment and curriculum/lesson plans. However, bullying was also a legitimate concern, as several respondents added additional comments in the survey highlighting how distinguishing between childish behaviors and bullying is an essential part of working with middle school kids. This goes to show that bullying, while certainly a concern, continues to be difficult for teachers to routinely address on top of all their professional responsibilities as classroom teachers.

Observation and Consideration of Behavior

There is still a substantial portion of undiscovered bullying in schools, making it hard to gauge teachers' perceptions about the amount of bullying behaviors in their school (Olweus, 1993). In order to overcome this barrier, the teachers were asked if they had observed any aggressive behavior within this academic year (2015-2016). As displayed in table 2, the majority of teachers in this sample observed all of the descriptive behaviors used within the survey. Verbal bullying was the most observed among the respondents; however, this is ironic because relational and verbal

aggressions are usually less visible than physical aggression (Liepe-Levinson, 2005). Generally speaking, it is easier to catch sight of a student hitting, kicking, pushing, or shoving another student, rather than a student spreading rumors or gossip about another student. Trevor Romain (1997) discusses the idea that most bullies seem to operate undercover, which simply means that bullies tend to only use aggressive behavior in small groups and usually not in the presence of an adult or authority figure. This makes it difficult for teachers to be able to prevent or even intervene in a bullying situation.

Another important aspect to consider is teachers' consideration of bullying behavior. Several respondents added comments at the end of the survey that provided a more detailed description of their perceptions of bullying behavior within their school. One teacher stated, "Close attention must be paid to whether a situation is recurring and also how both sets of students perceive the behaviors." Multiple other teachers commented with similar sentiments stating that it is essential for teachers to distinguish between childish behavior and bullying. According to Bush (2011, p. 118), "the challenge in distinguishing bullying behavior from non-bullying behavior adds to its elusive nature." This is not only a challenge for the teachers, but the students as well. One respondent commented, "Often, I am having to teach students that repeatedly teasing, calling someone names, or touching others can be considered an act of bullying." Many times, students may not be aware of their bullying tendencies, which one teacher noted in the comments section. The respondent said, "Many times bullying students graduate and move on with their lives without ever realizing they had bullying tendencies in school." In many cases, adolescents use rough play, or horseplay, and teasing as a function to determine friendships and even flirtatious relationships (Bush, 2011).

The definition of bullying used for this study emphasizes the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. Due to the different types of bullying, this can be difficult to recognize. With physical bullying the power refers to the bodily shape and size of the bully. In verbal and relational bullying, power refers to emotional and mental fortitude. The key issue to remember is there must be an imbalance of power, whatever kind of power that may be in each bullying situation.

Bullying Response Training

As indicated by Rigby (2002), teachers feel a responsibility to prevent bullying within educational environments, but on the other hand, they do not feel well equipped in appropriate and

effective ways to respond to bullying. Teachers also, for the most part, felt as though situations not being handled appropriately would further exacerbate the conditions. A few teachers stated they had not received any training at their school for responding to bullying within the last academic year (2015-2016). However, there were several teachers who responded that they had received at least one hour of training within this academic year (2015-2016). When asked if they would like to receive more training in responding to bullying, the majority of teachers agreed.

Several teachers commented on inconsistency within bullying responses among teachers; however, one similarity in response technique was to defer the situation to the guidance counselor. Within the comments section, there were multiple answers, with no real consistency, which was shown through the different response techniques chosen for each descriptive behavioral statement. More often than not, the teachers would inform the school guidance counselor; some chose to do this right away, and others would talk to the students first and then inform the guidance counselor.

Anti-Bullying Policy

According to Rigby (2002), teachers and other school personnel commonly believe that an anti-bullying policy can help reduce any level of bullying. Majority of the teachers responded “yes” when asked, “Does your school have an anti-bullying policy?” The significantly low number of respondents who said “no” shows some inconsistencies within the school anti-bullying strategy. The teachers that responded “no” may have been absent for the training, or there may not have been any training at all. However, all teachers within a school need to be aware of and knowledgeable in the school’s anti-bullying guidelines. This will not only help with structure for responding to bullying, but will provide continuity pertaining to liability concerns as well.

Conclusion

Bullying is undoubtedly a highly difficult concept to evaluate; however, within this study it was determined that anti-bullying programs are beneficial and would be helpful in reducing and potentially, preventing bullying incidences. Bullying prevention programs are widely used in middle schools throughout the United States and these programs can add consistency to a school climate when responding to bullying. According to the National Middle School Association/Association for Middle Level Educators (NMSA/AMLE, 2010, para. 17), a top priority for all schools is to provide an environment that is “inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all.” By implementing a bullying-specific policy, students, teachers, administrators, and even parents can become involved in helping to intervene and prevent bullying within educational

environments. Furthermore, NMSA/AMLE (2010, para. 7) states, “Effective middle grades educators make a conscious choice to work with young adolescents and advocate for them. They understand the developmental uniqueness of this age group, the appropriate curriculum, effective learning and assessment strategies, and their importance as models.” Due to middle grades educators unique qualifications, it is imperative that the teachers and administrators work together in creating an anti-bullying program to ensure the proper guidelines are implemented and everyone is comfortable and familiar with the guidelines. Unfortunately, as the findings in this study indicate, many teachers are not involved in the planning of anti-bullying programs, which could contribute to a lack of understanding regarding expectations, responses, and importance of the initiatives.

Teachers usually have little control over school discipline policies, but they do have a significant amount of autonomy within their own classroom. In order to create a cohesive and consistent anti-bullying program, teachers and administrators need to work together for the betterment of their students and school. The NMSA/AMLE (2010) includes empowering students as one of the essential attributes of an education for young adolescents. The NMSA/AMLE goes on to state that “providing all students with the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives, to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge” are also important factors of empowering young adolescents. In order to help students conquer bullying situations, no matter what part they play (bully, victim, bystander, etc.), teachers, administrators, parents and students need to ban together and create a network of support and encouragement. No child should ever have a fear of going to school due to constant harassment and bullying. While some teachers and adults may write off some of these situations as simply “part of growing up,” the severity, frequency, and consistency of bullying behavior, both in person and online, can have a devastating impact on the lives of middle school children. Educators and researchers should seriously consider the impact that bullying has on students lives, both in the classroom and beyond, and systematically make a conscious effort to address the problem proactively instead of reactively.

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APPENDIX A

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will undoubtedly provide useful information about issues that teachers face in schools. The survey is divided up into six parts. Please read the directions for each part carefully. The survey will take approximately 15 – 20 minutes to complete.

PART I: Teachers have multiple concerns related to their work. Listed below are some of these concerns. Rank the following items from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates your highest concern and 5 indicates your lowest concern.

Classroom resources/materials	_____
Student assessment	_____
Bullying	_____
Curriculum/lesson plans	_____
Teacher observations/evaluations	_____

PART II: There are varying perspectives about student conflict situations and how to respond to them. Please read the definitional phrases provided below and answer the questions that follow each of the phrases. To answer the questions, either place an “X” in the space to the left of your answer choice or circle the percentage underneath the line provided.

1. A student hits, kicks, pushes, or shoves another student.

A. Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year? _____ Yes _____
No

B. Using the scale below, how seriously do you rate this behavior?

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Serious					Serious

C. Using the scale below, how likely are you to respond to this type of behavior?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Somewhat					Very
at all					Likely					Likely

D. Based on your experience, how would you typically respond to this type of behavior?

Please choose only one answer.

- do not respond to this type of behavior
- discuss behavior with the student who hit, kicked, pushed, or shoved
- have students who are involved in the situation talk to one another
- discuss the situation with the entire class
- call the parents of the student who hit, kicked, pushed, or shoved the other student
- send the student who hit, kicked, pushed, or shoved to detention
- send the student who hit, kicked, pushed, or shoved to the office
- other (please specify):

E. Do you consider this type of behavior bullying? Yes No

2. *A student threatens another student with physical harm.*

A. Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year? _____ Yes _____
No

B. Using the scale below, how seriously do you rate this behavior?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Serious					Serious

C. Using the scale below, how likely are you to respond to this type of behavior?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Somewhat					Very
at all					Likely					Likely

D. Based on your experience, how would you typically respond to this type of behavior?

Please choose only one answer.

_____ do not respond to this type of behavior

_____ discuss behavior with the student who threatened another student

_____ have students who are involved in the situation talk to one another

_____ discuss the situation with the entire class

_____ call the parents of the student who threatened another student

_____ send the student who threatened another student to detention

_____ send the student who threatened another student to the office

_____ other (please specify):

E. Do you consider this type of behavior bullying? _____ Yes _____ No

3. A student is being teased by another student.

A. Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year? _____ Yes _____ No

B. Using the scale below, how seriously do you rate this behavior?

<hr/>										
0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Serious					Serious

C. Using the scale below, how likely are you to respond to this type of behavior?

<hr/>										
0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Somewhat					Very
at all					Likely					Likely

D. Based on your experience, how would you typically respond to this type of behavior?

Please choose only one answer.

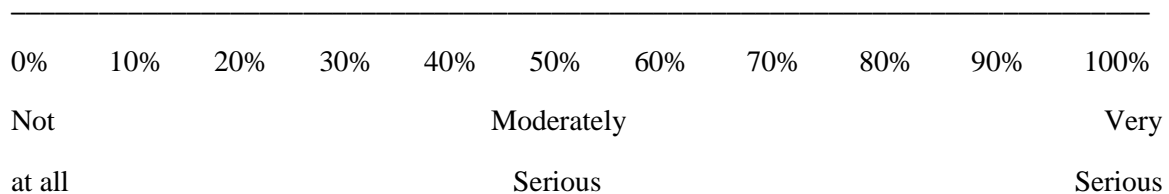
- do not respond to this type of behavior
- discuss behavior with the student who teased another student
- have students who are involved in the situation talk to one another
- discuss the situation with the entire class
- call the parents of the student who teased another student
- send the student who teased another student to detention
- send the student who teased another student to the office
- other (please specify):

E. Do you consider this type of behavior bullying? Yes No

4. A student is being called hurtful names.

A. Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year? Yes No

B. Using the scale below, how seriously do you rate this behavior?



C. Using the scale below, how likely are you to respond to this type of behavior?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Somewhat					Very
at all					Likely					Likely

D. Based on your experience, how would you typically respond to this type of behavior?

Please choose only one answer.

- do not respond to this type of behavior
- discuss behavior with the student who was name calling
- have students who are involved in the situation talk to one another
- discuss the situation with the entire class
- call the parents of the student who was name-calling
- send the student who was name-calling to detention
- send the student who was name-calling to the office
- other (please specify): _____

E. Do you consider this type of behavior bullying? Yes No

5. A student is deliberately being left out of a group of other students.

A. Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year? Yes No

B. Using the scale below, how seriously do you rate this behavior?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Serious					Serious

C. Using the scale below, how likely are you to respond to this type of behavior?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Somewhat					Very
at all					Likely					Likely

D. Based on your experience, how would you typically respond to this type of behavior?

Please choose only one answer.

- do not respond to this type of behavior
- discuss behavior with the students who were leaving others out
- have students who are involved in the situation talk to one another
- discuss the situation with the entire class
- call the parents of the students who were leaving others out
- send the students who were leaving others out to detention
- send the students who were leaving others out to the office

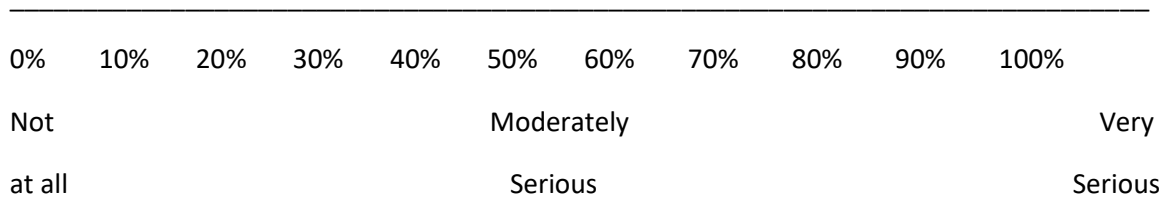
_____ other (please specify):

E. Do you consider this type of behavior bullying? _____ Yes _____ No

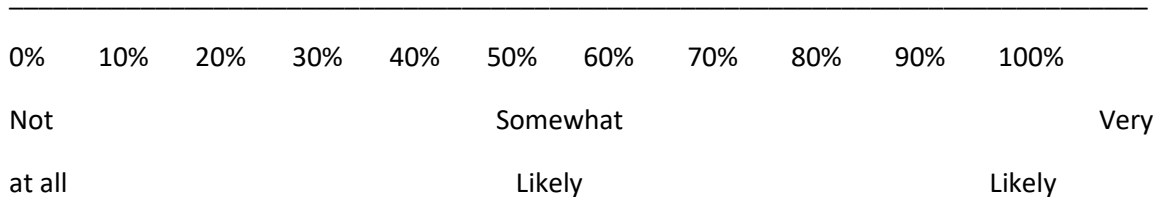
6. A student is having rumors or gossip spread about him or her.

A. Have you seen this type of behavior occur this academic year? _____ Yes _____
No

B. Using the scale below, how seriously do you rate this behavior?



C. Using the scale below, how likely are you to respond to this type of behavior?



D. Based on your experience, how would you typically respond to this type of behavior?
Please choose only one answer.

- _____ do not respond to this type of behavior
- _____ discuss behavior with the students who were spreading rumors or gossip
- _____ have students who are involved in the situation talk to one another
- _____ discuss the situation with the entire class
- _____ call the parents of the students who were spreading rumors or gossip
- _____ send the students who were spreading rumors or gossip out to detention
- _____ send the students who were spreading rumors or gossip to the office
- _____ other (please specify):

E. Do you consider this type of behavior bullying? _____ Yes _____ No

For parts III, IV, and V, please read the following definition for bullying and answer the questions in each section according to the definition provided.

-A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed **repeatedly** **and over time**, to **negative actions** on the part of one or more other students.

-Negative actions are defined as when someone **intentionally** inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another.

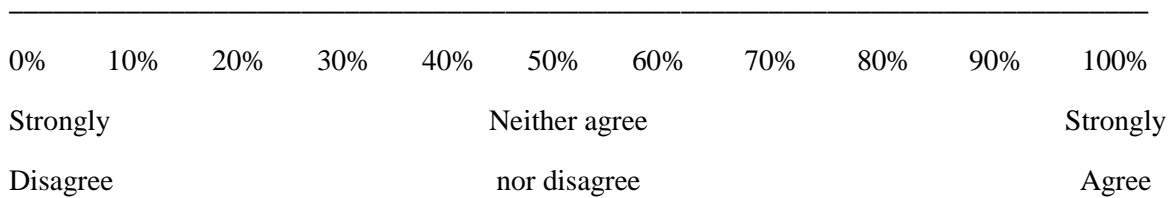
PART III: Please answer the questions below by either placing an “X” in one of the blanks provided, writing your answer in the blank provided, or by circling the number that corresponds to how strongly you agree or disagree with the given statement.

1. Have you received any training for responding to bullying since being hired at your school?
_____ Yes _____ No

If you answered Yes to the question above, then please answer question 1A. below. If you answered No, then please move ahead to Question 2 and continue the survey.

- A. In the last academic year, how many hours have you spent being trained at your school for responding to bullying? _____ hours

2. Using the scale below, respond to the following statement, “I would like more training for responding to bullying.”



PART IV: Please answer the questions below by either placing an “X” in one of the blanks provided or by circling the number that corresponds to how strongly you agree or disagree with the given statement.

1. Does your school have a formal anti-bullying policy? _____ Yes _____ No

If you answered Yes to the question above, then please answer the questions below. If you answered No, then please move ahead to Part V and continue the survey.

A. Using the scale below, how familiar are you with the school's anti-bullying policy?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Familiar					Familiar

B. Using the scale below, how satisfied are you with your school's anti-bullying policy?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Satisfied					Satisfied

C. Using the scale below, how effective is your school's anti-bullying policy?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Effective					Effective

D. Using the scale below, how consistent are you in enforcing your school's anti-bullying policy?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Consistent					Consistent

E. Using the scale below, how involved were you in developing your school's anti-bullying policy?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Not					Moderately					Very
at all					Involved					Involved

PART V: Please answer the questions below by circling the number that corresponds to how strongly you agree or disagree with the given statement.

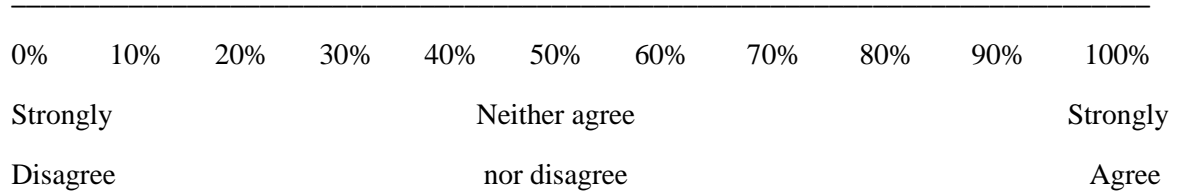
1. When responding to bullying, other teachers support my response.

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Strongly					Neither agree					Strongly
Disagree					nor disagree					Agree

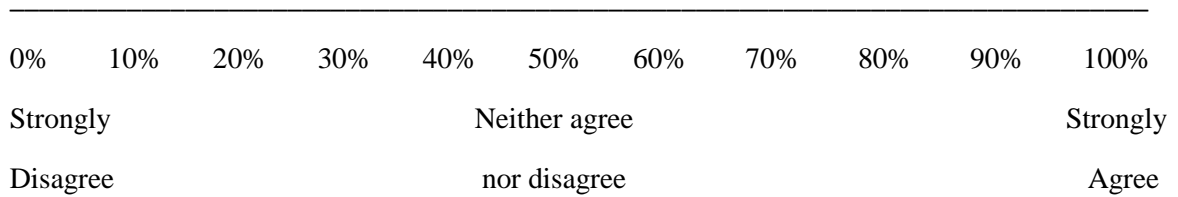
2. When responding to bullying, the principal/vice-principal supports my response.

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Strongly					Neither agree					Strongly
Disagree					nor disagree					Agree

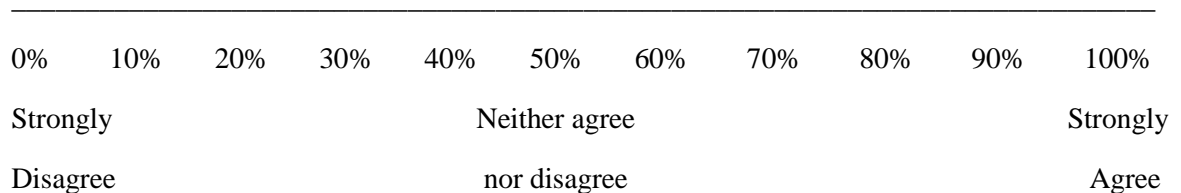
3. When responding to bullying, the school board/school district supports my response.



4. When responding to bullying, students support my response.



5. When responding to bullying, parents support my response.



PART VI: Personal and Professional Characteristics

Please answer the following questions about your personal and professional characteristics either by writing your response on the line provided or by placing an “X” on the appropriate line provided.

1. What is your current age? _____ years old

2. What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female

3. What race/ethnicity do you most identify with?

_____ Asian/Pacific Islander

_____ African American

_____ Hispanic/Latino

_____ Native American

_____ Caucasian (White)

_____ Other (please specify)

4. What subject do you teach?

_____ Language Arts

_____ Mathematics

_____ Reading

_____ Related Arts

_____ Science

_____ Social Studies

5. What grade(s) do you *currently* teach? _____ grade (s)

6. How many *consecutive* years have you been teaching? _____ years

THANK YOU for taking the time to complete this survey. Your assistance in providing this information is very much appreciated. If there is anything else you would like to say about this survey or bullying, please do so in the space provided below.