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APA 2003 Poster Session Proposal

Preventing Bullying in Schools:

A Community Action Research Approach

In recent years, schools throughout the United States have experienced some form of school violence. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control (1992) reported that 50% of the boys and 25% of the girls were physically attacked by someone at school. Unfortunately, other findings (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000; US Department of Education, 2000) are similar in revealing the forms of school violence. Many researchers (Aurora, 1987; Olweus, 1993; Perry, 1998; Whitney, 1993) have addressed and implemented measures to deter school violence. In deterring school violence, the U.S. Department of Education (1998) has suggested that observing early warning signs in students can prevent school violence. One early warning sign is bullying behavior among students. In fact, they state that “some mildly aggressive behaviors such as constant hitting and bullying of others that occur early in children’s lives, if left unattended, might later escalate into more serious behaviors” (p.15).

In addressing school violence, most research methods have been quantitative. Recently, several researchers (Aleta & Meyer, 1998; DeBlieu, 2002; Hunter, Elias, & Norris, 2001; McIntyre, 2000) have recommended the implementation of action research in addressing school violence. According to these researchers, action research emphasizes the collective investigation of all participants to address school violence.

This poster aims to discuss an action research approach to deter bullying in a New Jersey Public School District. The first section of this poster session outlines the action research framework used in this study. Next, the paper discusses the significance of this action research study. Finally, the paper presents the action research process in a chronological order which includes (a) participants functions (b) assessments and (c) interventions.

Action research contrasts from other research methodologies by addressing the problem contextually and subjectively rather than objectively generalizing the findings (e.g., if zero-tolerance policies can be generalized to other schools). Action research builds on collaborative input from individuals who are involved in addressing the problem (Stringer, 1998). In other words, and in this study, experts are not the only participants but students, teachers, and the community interact collaboratively in creating the assessment and intervention of school bullying strategies. The significance of this action research study is to assess the needs of students and staff in alleviating bullying. Consequently, the assessment will provide the basis to devise a school bullying intervention strategy. Overall, the framework for this action research study will allow stakeholders (participants) to identify, define, address, and create interventions collaboratively for school bullying behaviors (Olweus, 1999).

The study began when the superintendent invited Professor Ray Lorion to lecture on school bullying for the faculty and staff of the school district, elementary, and secondary schools. During the lecture, the professor defined and described bullying, identified victims and perpetrators of bullying, and discussed possible causes of bullying. Dr. Lorion also asked teachers to complete a Teacher Experience Survey (Lorion, **what is the date and reference you are using?**) that would invite teacher and staff definitions on bullying behavior. In addition, the survey collected responses of the teachers' observations of bullying behaviors for each grade level and age of students. The results led to a number of future planned initiatives for the following school year.

For the three elementary schools, the New Jersey Child Assault Program (NJCAP) was reviewed and chosen as the bullying deterrence program. As part of the assessment phase, parents, teachers, and students will be asked to complete surveys addressing bullying behaviors.

The results of these assessments will assist in determining a bullying deterring intervention for 3rd and 4th graders. The results will also be crucial in devising bullying workshops for teachers and parents.

While the assessments and interventions are more straightforward at the elementary school level, the middle school intervention used the participants creatively to address bullying, prejudice, and discrimination. The committee (8 students, 2 guidance counselors, the administration, and Dr. Lorion) decided to create an intervention using the movie *Remember the Titans* with about 1100 students from the fifth to eighth grades. The committee outlined themes and topics in the movie such as bullying, prejudice, discrimination, leadership, and loyalty/commitment. The movie was divided into five segments with a corresponding set of discussion questions that related to the themes. As students and teachers viewed the movie, teachers would be given the set of questions to discuss with students. Three months after the students viewed the movie, students were asked to complete the Student Experience Survey (**Lorion????, ***????**). The survey measures students' experiences and observations of bullying and other issues (**what are these issues?**) in the middle school.

At the high school level, the focus of the assessments and interventions were conducted differently than the elementary and middle schools. One difference was that the assessments were devised from several discussions with different participants. The participants included the Student Assistance Counselor (SAC), teachers and representatives of the administration. They discussed school violence issues including bullying and diversity with high school students at Town Meetings. Following the Town Meetings, the administration formed a School Intervention Team (SIT) composed of five guidance counselors, teachers, school nurse, SAC, and administration representing the high school. The SIT served as a decision making group for high

school initiatives. In Spring 2002, the SIT decided to have high school students complete a Student Experience Survey. In evaluating the teachers' observations on bullying behaviors, high school students from an AP Psychology course revised the Teacher Experience Survey (a measure on bullying behaviors) and developed the Student Experience Survey. Dr. Lorion and his graduate assistants supported the AP high school psychology students on constructing and statistically measuring bullying behavior. Not only did Dr. Lorion and his graduate assistants help the AP students, but the Young Women Leaders, a group of high school girls that mentor middle school girls, worked on the revision of the survey. After the survey was revised, the high school psychology students from three classes completed the survey. Their experiences of completing the surveys lead to a final revision. The final revision will be administered to all the middle and high school students in November 2002. The results of the survey will be compiled and analyzed by the AP psychology students under the supervision of Dr. Lorion. Later, results of the data and analysis will be presented to the Board of Education, staff, and administration. Also, students will have input on presenting the results of the survey to other students.

In conclusion, this action research study highlighted the collaborative process involved by defining, identifying, assessing, and creating interventions in addressing bullying in a South New Jersey School District. Using action research to address school bullying helped to developing proactive interventions, addressed the root causes (Aronson, 2000), and above all, reached the school district's goal (which is kind of add to place here because we never mention in it in the entire paper**). In particular, this led to specific tailor made assessments and interventions with varying levels of participation among the possible stakeholders. As a result, this action research methodology demonstrated how bullying can be addressed by collaboratively involving stakeholders.

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