

Effects of Bullying Prevention Curriculum on Reading Levels

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Purpose and Justification

Reading intervention strategies and anti-bullying intervention strategies have both been shown to positively affect students' academic experience. However, these have been previously treated as two separate issues, reading and bullying. If there is a correlation between the two, teachers can use the anti-bullying curriculum to support reading instruction, while simultaneously fostering student emotional well-being by decreasing bullying behaviors.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether anti-bullying curriculum will enhance students' reading level as indicated by the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR) when compared to no anti-bullying interventions.

Hypothesis

Students falling in the second quartile on the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR) will perform higher on the STAR upon completion of an anti-bullying program.

Key Terms

The term reading level is indicated by students' student achievement on the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR).

Bullying can be defined as the use of one's strength or status to intimidate, injure, or humiliate another person of lesser strength or status. Bullying can be categorized as physical, verbal, or social. *Physical* bullying involves physical injury or threat of injury to someone, while *verbal* bullying refers to teasing or insulting someone. *Social* bullying refers to the use of peer rejection or exclusion to humiliate or isolate a victim. Bullying must be distinguished from other forms of peer aggression or conflict; bullying always involves a power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993). Examples of bullying behaviors include: name calling, physical violence, intimidation, ostracism, manipulation and badgering of other students.

Literature Review

Recent research and media attention has been focused on the prevention of bullying, especially with the high profile case of Phoebe Prince, a Massachusetts teenager who committed suicide as a result of school bullying. This bullying included defamation of personal belongings, threatening text messages and phone calls, and physical violence (NY Daily News, 2010). Research indicates that approximately 30% of school age children report being victimized by bullies at some point in the school careers (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003; Shore, 2009). This behavior is often undetected by adults (Brewster & Railsback, 2001). If a relationship exists between reading level and bullying behaviors, early intervention may be possible to reduce said behaviors. Research indicates that the most effective way to deal with bullying is to prevent it from happening in the first place (Shore, 2009). Current research practices focus on bullying prevention through behavior modification, such as team building activities, role playing, tolerance building, and anti-bullying lessons.

Research indicates that a pattern of school failure starts early and persists throughout a child's school career. Longitudinal studies show that there is an almost 90% chance that if a child who is a poor reader at the end of grade 1 will be a poor reader at grade 4 (Strickland, 2002). According to research early prevention is preferable to extended intervention, with particular emphasis paid during the primary years (Strickland, 2002).

Teachers recognize the responsibility to provide students with programs and curriculum that provide scaffolded support for reading and socio-emotional development. By implementing interventions preemptively, educators can decrease the amount of bullying behaviors exhibited in their classrooms while simultaneously facilitating higher reading achievement.

Research Design

The research will be experimental using a Randomized Pretest – Posttest Control Group Design.

Variables

The independent variable for this study is the anti-bullying instruction. The dependent variable is the students' reading ability.

Sample

The sample population for this study includes 140 second graders from Vineyards Elementary School in Collier County Florida. The population will be divided by simple random sampling into two seventy student groups, one being the control group and the other the experimental group.

Ethical Considerations

As a Category II proposal, currently awaiting IRB approval, this study presents no more than minimal risk to the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). All participants in this study must provide written parental permission (Appendix A). While the possibility of harm is minor, it is foreseen that the students not receiving the intervention will experience no socio-emotional benefit from the anti-bullying curriculum. Control group participants may also experience emotional trauma from feeling "left out." To prevent this possibility, the control group will receive the same anti-bullying curriculum at the conclusion of the experiment.

No confidentiality problems are expected during this study. However, some deception is necessary to maintain the internal validity of the research. The concern is that if parents and teachers know the purpose of the study, extra reading support may be provided at home or in the classroom, thus affecting the outcome of the research. This is also true for the teacher administering the anti-

bullying intervention. Therefore, parents and teachers will be instructed that the purpose of the experiment is to study the effectiveness of anti-bullying curriculum.

Instruments

All of the 140 students will be tested via the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR). The experimental group will receive six weeks of anti-bullying instruction as provided by the Leaps curriculum during their regularly scheduled Physical Education time (twice a week). The control group will receive regularly scheduled physical education instruction.

Validity and Reliability

The reliability of the STAR reading test has been assessed by the split-half method and the test-retest method. Results indicated that the reliability of the scores was approximately 0.95. Coefficients ranged from a low of 0.89 to a high of 0.93. These estimates are consistent across grade levels. The standard error of measurement for the STAR test is 51 scaled score units, and ranged from a low of 36 to a high of 83.

The validity of the STAR reading test has been determined using the construct validity method, by a study linking the STAR reading test to the Degrees of Reading Power comprehension assessment. A raw correlation of 0.89 was observed between the two tests, indicating that reading comprehension measured by the two tests are nearly indistinguishable (Renaissance Learning, 2009).

Procedural Details

Participants will be tested on the STAR reading assessment at the onset of the study. After being sorted into the control group and the experimental group, by simple random sampling, the experimental group will begin receiving anti-bullying instruction. This instruction will be implemented using the LEAPS (Life Excelerator/Assessment of Personal Skills) curriculum. LEAPS is an instructor led

curriculum for behavior modification and social skills training (goleaps.com). The program will consist of predetermined lessons with each week focusing on one aspect of social development, including building self-esteem, peer awareness, self-discipline, and appropriate physical communication. The intervention will continue for six weeks, with students receiving the instruction twice a week during PE time. At the conclusion of the six week program, students will be tested again using the STAR reading test. The data of the two tests will be analyzed for results.

Internal Validity

Because subjects will be chosen using stratified random sampling, student characteristics should be controlled. Subject mortality should be minimal and should be limited to student relocation. Any event will be documented in the study. The location of both the anti-bullying intervention and the STAR assessment will be in a controlled, classroom environment. All students will be STAR tested in the morning in the technology lab with a researcher present to monitor testing. All intervention instructors will receive training in LEAPS curriculum prior to beginning the study. Data collector bias is not expected to affect internal validity because data is collected electronically by the STAR reading test, eliminating possibility of manipulation of data.

Data Analysis

Data from the STAR test will be collected and a T-test for correlated means will be performed and compared across the experimental and control groups. Scores are expected to improve for both experimental and control groups due normal reading growth over a six week period. However, researchers will analyze data to determine if the experimental group showed marked gains when compared to the control group. Results will be published in a bar graph format for visualization and distribution purposes.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

A researcher is conducting a study on the effectiveness of anti-bullying curriculum in elementary schools. Major findings of the study will provide information that can be used to improve instructional programs and to provide information for future research studies. Participating students will be attending an anti-bullying class for six weeks. The sessions will be held during participants' regularly scheduled PE classes, held twice a week. This has been scheduled in cooperation with the classroom and related arts teachers to ensure a minimum of interference with academic programming.

Upon completion of the project, copies of the major findings of the study will be available upon request to all participants, including the principals of participating schools. However, no individual student profiles and/or assessment results will be provided.

A copy of this consent form is provided to each participant and parent/guardian. Additional information concerning the procedures of this research project can be obtained by contacting the following person(s):

Saleeta Cook
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Naples, FL 34116
239-377-8783

Kelly Garrick
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239-377-8784

I have read the description of the above research study and give permission for my child to participate according to the procedures outlined above. I understand that this evaluation will not effect my child's academic grades at his or her current school. I understand that participation is on a voluntary basis and I may withdraw from the project at any time. I also understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form and may request a copy of the major findings of the study at the conclusion of the project.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Name of student participant: _____