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Assessing Bullying Behaviors and the Efficacy of Bullying Prevention in Fourth Grade Classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying has recently gained notoriety as a serious concern across all countries. Bullying is generally acknowledged to be a repeated pattern of abuse communicated to a victim by physical, verbal, or written means which results in bodily harm or emotional injury. Victims of bullying have been shown to be at increased risk for suicide, depression, anxiety, headaches, or difficulty sleeping.

Puppets in Education (PiE) is a non-profit organization that uses interactive puppet shows and workshops to educate more than 8,000 children per year about disabilities, cultural diversity, and a wide variety of other issues. By performing its shows in classrooms throughout the state, PiE works to model realistic, challenging situations for children and to provide simple and practical strategies for dealing with them. Focusing our attention on the effects of bullying behaviors in schools, our team worked with PiE and several local fourth grade classes to determine the amount of information children retain from the organization’s bullying prevention program, the effectiveness of the program in addressing and preventing bullying behaviors, and the students’ overall perception of the program.

METHODS

• Three fourth grade classrooms at a Burlington, VT elementary school were selected for study (n = 55).
• Students and families were given the option to opt out of the bullying prevention program.
• Two focus group interviews were conducted after the puppet presentation.
• Four written surveys were administered by school teachers.
• Surveys and focus groups were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.
• Responses were analyzed based on how many times an answer was mentioned.
• Surveys and focus groups were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

A. Survey: Assessing Knowledge

Figure 1: I have been bullied before

Figure 2: Summarized Evidence of Learned Concepts

Figure 3: A bully...

Figure 4: Sometimes I...

Figure 5: What can you do if you are bullied?

Figure 6: What can you do if you see someone being bullied?

Figure 7: I won’t help someone being bullied because...

Figure 8: Are you comfortable at school?

B. Focus Groups: Exploring Behavior and Attitudes

Figure 9: When asked what actions would be taken when confronted with bullying behaviors, children most frequently indicated that the bully should be talked to. Students most frequently cited “Telling an Adult” and “Walking Away” as strategies they would use when faced with a bully, a finding consistent with recent literature in which 9-13 year olds suggested that telling a parent or adult was the most effective way to stop bullying.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the post-test demonstrated that an increased percentage of students expressed the desired or correct answer about bullying behaviors, indicating that the presentation was received.

Elements that would make them less likely to intervene were fear of becoming the victim or a fear of physical violence. The data from the pre and post surveys suggest that a large majority of students do feel that there are safe ways they can help when bullying behaviors occur.

Students were able to recall all of the strategies introduced during the puppet presentation during both focus groups. Also of significance, a large majority of students reported that they felt more comfortable dealing with bullying after the presentation.

“Now I know, if I ever get bullied or my friends are being bullied, I know what to do.”

“Anyone can be a bully, and anyone can be bullied.”