Reducing Bullying Through Leadership Skills Development

Lynette Black
Oregon State University Extension
Wasco County
The Dalles, OR
lynette.black@oregonstate.edu

Reducing Bullying Through
Leadership Skills Development

Lynette Black
Oregon State University Extension

Abstract: The heart wrenching and disturbing statistics regarding bullying in the schools is a reason for concern. Looking at a popular definition of bullying: aggressive intentional behavior involving an imbalance of power or strength (Stop Bullying.gov), one can see a lack of caring and compassion for others. The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (Lerner, et al., 2008) indicates the 4-H Youth Development Program is successfully guiding youth onto the best trajectory for positive youth development. As a result of the Lerner PYD study, one rural school in Oregon invited an Extension 4-H Educator to teach leadership skills to children in grades 4-8. The goal of the training was to increase caring and compassion through interactive, teambuilding activities thereby reducing bullying. Evaluation results indicated a significant impact by the program on youth defining their ability to positively work with others.

Introduction

Bullying in the schools is a significant problem for youth. The statistics are disturbing and heart wrenching. The National Youth Safety Center (NSSC) called bullying the most enduring and underrated problem in American Schools (Beale, 2001). The 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey completed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service found 1 in 5 teens had been bullied at school in the last year. Research indicates students who are chronically bullied are more likely to report physical and mental health problems, are at risk for behavioral and academic problems, and are more likely to contemplate suicide (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Rigby, 2001).

Among the most important changes in the field over the past 25 years are shifts in emphasis toward prevention as well as remediation of problem behaviors (Horner, et al., 2004). Lerner's study of positive youth development (2008) acknowledges the accomplishments of the 4-H Youth Development Program in its ability to help youth obtain the best development trajectory for becoming compassionate adults. The Positive Youth Development approach builds upon what have become known as the Five Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character and

Caring. Positive youth development programming strives to incorporate opportunities for youth to further develop these qualities. Studies on the topic of leadership education reflect an increase in learning how to care about others. A multi-site study in Oregon (Arnold, 2003) shows an increase in the mean scores of youth measures following educational retreats that focused on leadership development. Another study states: "The personal characteristic of kindness and helpfulness was desired most by both lower and higher socioeconomic status groups" (Apps, 1968). Leadership education sessions, with character-building education, may contribute to a decrease in bullying behavior.

Program Purpose

Studies indicate the importance of providing students with the tools to reduce bullying behaviors by blending positive support with explicit instruction (Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2008). Increased bullying behavior in schools has many state legislators considering laws that will directly influence the development of school-based violence prevention policies and require these policies to be inclusive of bullying behavior. (Limber & Small, 2003).

Researchers agree that school-wide primary prevention programs are the best defense against school bullying (Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004). According to Meyer and Nastasi (1999) primary prevention strategies are those that are given to an entire population and are designed to prevent a problem from occurring before signs appear. Primary prevention of bullying in schools needs to involve all students, not just those actively affected by bullying behavior.

Program Design

Based on concerns as addressed in the prior section, a School Leadership Training was designed as a Bully Prevention Program conducted at a small rural school in Oregon. Bullying behavior in the school resulted in School Administrators partnering with the local Extension 4-H Youth Educators to provide the prevention program for youth in grades 4-8. The program included a series of ten leadership education sessions, each 55 minute in length, and presented to individual classrooms of 4th-8th grade students. All students in these grades received the training.

The lessons and interactive activities used in the trainings were chosen to focus on understanding and appreciation of others and working together as a team. The program consisted of sessions each day for one week followed by once a month class sessions.

Daily Themes Included:
- Embrace Our Uniqueness
- Teamwork and Cooperation
- Respect
- Trust
- Emotional Safety

Group activities, de-inhibitors, role play and individual/group reflection time were included within each 55 minute session. Refer to the Appendix for a class lesson sample.

Evaluation

The program evaluation consisted of a pre-post, post survey containing fourteen questions designed to measure the student's attitude change toward their classmates. Twenty three 6th graders, twenty-four 5th graders and thirteen 7th grade students responded to the evaluation. Of the 60 participants 35 were male and 25 were female. The evaluation tool was given to the students on the last day of the training series. T-test comparisons of the scores were statistically significant to .01 on all questions.

Table 1
Pre-post Post Surveys: Ranking in score improvement on topics taught during Leadership Skills training

	N	Pre-Test	Post-Test[a]	Improvement in Scores	
Topics Used to Evaluate Leadership Trainings	**Matched Pairs**	**Mean Scores**	**Mean Scores**	**Difference between pre and post**	**Ranking**
I can work on a project with anyone in my class.	54	3.28	4.30	1.02	1
I understand how my words can affect others.	56	3.75	4.70	.95	2
I care about how my decisions affect other people.	55	3.84	4.67	.83	3
I listen to opinions of my classmates.	57	3.75	4.53	.78	4
I understand how my attitude can affect my life.	57	4.14	4.88	.74	5
I consider myself a leader.	55	3.89	4.60	.71	6
I appreciate each of my classmates (even if I don't consider them a friend).	57	3.74	4.44	.70	7
It is easy for me to consider the feeling of others.	56	3.80	4.46	.66	8
Other people's feelings matter to me.	57	3.98	4.60	.62	9
I am open to suggestions from any of my classmates.	57	3.86	4.46	.60	10
I understand the value of teamwork.	56	4.28	4.84	.56	11
I can be counted on to help if someone needs me.	56	4.16	4.70	.54	12
I try to do the right thing, even when I know that no one will know if I do or not.	58	4.19	4.66	.47	13
It is important that others can count on me.	54	4.15	4.59	.44	14

Rating code: 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree
[a]Differences between pre-test and post-test scores is statistically significant at p<.001.

The results of the survey indicate students developed an overall awareness of how their words and actions affect others and indicate a move toward being more accepting, appreciative and caring of all classmates. The move toward caring about others and how their words and actions affect their peers theoretically should reduce intentional, aggressive, bullying behavior.

Follow up informal questioning between the educator and this school's teachers and administrators point toward a decrease in the more minor aggressive behavior displayed between students. The student's instructors noticed a marked decrease in the "picking on each other" that was frequent behavior between students. They have contributed this change to the

leadership trainings. The school administrators also indicated they have noticed a drop in intentional aggressive behavior between students.

Implications

The positive impact the 4-H School Leadership Training has had on the participating students is encouraging; however more can and should be done to reduce bullying behavior in schools. The educator has been invited back for a third year of leadership training. This time, the training will be offered to students in grades 2 and 3 as well. Discussions with the teachers have shown a need to start the focus on appreciation of other earlier in a student's life.

References

2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States. (2009). Surveillance Summaries, June 4, 2010, Vol. 59, No. SS-5. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/HeatlhyYouth/yrbs/index.htm.

Apps, J. (1968). Youth Leadership Preferences. Journal of Cooperative Extension, Winter 1968.

Arnold, M. (2003). Using Multi-Site Methodology to Evaluate 4-H Youth Leadership Retreats. Journal of Extension. (2003), 41, 6.

Beale, A.B. (2001). Bullybusters: Using drama to empower students to take a stand against bullying behavior. Professional School Counseling, 4, 300-306.

Elinoff, M.J., Chafouleas, S.M., & Sassu, K.A. (2004). Bullying: Considerations for Defining and Intervening in School Settings. Psychology in the Schools, 41(8), 887-897.

Espelage, D.L. & Swearer, S. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? School Psychology Review, 23, 365-383.

Horner, R., Todd, A., Lewis-Palmer, T., Irvin, L., Sugai, G. et al. (2004). The School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET) A research Instrument for Assessing School-Side Positive Behavior Support. Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, January 2004, 6(1), 3-12.

Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, et al. (2008). 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development available at: http://tufts.edu/iaryd/documents/4HStudyAnnualReport2008.pdf.

Limber, S.P., & Small, M.A. (2003). State Laws and Policies to Address Bullying in Schools. School Psychology Review, Vol. 32.

Meyers, J., & Nastasi, B.K. (1999). Primary prevention in school settings. In C.R. Reynolds & T.B. Gutkins (Eds.). The handbook of school psychology (3rd ed., p. 764-799). New York: Wiley.

Rigby, K. (2001). Health consequences of bullying and its prevention in schools. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.). Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized (pp. 310-331). New York: The Guildford Press.

Ross,S.W., Horner,R.W., & Stiller, B. (2008). Bully prevention in positive behavior support. [Curriculum manual developed for intervention implementation.] Eugene: Educational and Community Supports, University of Oregon.

Stop Bullying.gov. Available at http://www.stopbullying.gov/topics/what_is_bullying/index.html

Appendix

Leadership Skill Building/Anti-Bullying Program

Lesson 1: Getting to know you – Celebrating your uniqueness

Introduction   **2 min.**
We will be learning and playing together every day this week. In order for us to have the best time possible while we are together, we need a couple of ground rules:

1. We will follow all the school's normal guidelines such as when the instructor is talking you are listening, be respectful at all times and always do your best.
2. If you are uncomfortable doing any of the activities, don't do them. Quietly step off to the side.
3. Keep your actions, words and thoughts positive.

Deinhibitor: Screaming Toes   **3 min.**
Circle up (have students stand in a large circle)
Tell everyone to look down at someone else's shoes. When you say "look up" they should look that person in the eyes.
If that person is looking at someone else, nothing happens. If that person is looking directly back-making eye contact-then both parties act surprised by letting out a little scream or yell. Those who make eye contact then meet in the middle for a high-five and switch places.

Reflection:
How did you like screaming in this activity?
Did you try to avoid eye contact or to get eye contact? Why?
What made this game fun/not fun for you?
Why did I start our time together with this activity? (Since this is leadership focused training, developing the skills needed to be a leader is a focus. This is a chance to explain why we start group team building programs with "ice breakers or de-inhibitors".

Name Game   **3 min.**
Introduce self with a descriptive work that begins with the same letter or sound as your name.
For instance, I am Loony Lynette (or I could be likeable, loveable, lovely, laughing, lonely, etc.)

Activity: Ants on a Log   **5 min.**
Participants line up on the webbing according to hair length (all facing the same direction).
This is a get-to-know-you-better game. When I make a statement that applies to you, step over the line made by the webbing. Look around to see who else has stepped across the line and who hasn't. After we're done with the statement, you can step back across the line before I make another one.

- You are wearing red
- You ate breakfast this morning
- You are in 4-H
- You have blue eyes
- You have brown eyes
- You've been to 4-H Summer Camp Morrow
- You like pepperoni on your pizza

- You only like cheese on your pizza
- You have a brother
- You have a sister
- You've lived in this town all your life
- You play a sport
- You are the oldest child in your family
- You are the youngest child in your family
- You are so done with this activity

Reflection:
Did anyone learn anything about a classmate that you didn't know before?
What did you like or not like about this activity?

Activity: Choose a side   **10 min.**
Let's continue on the path of learning more about each other and ourselves. I will ask a question, and then ask you to go to one side of the room or the other depending on your answer. Again, pay attention to who share the side of the room with you.
Favorite Season: Winter or Summer
Consider yourself a doer or a cheerleader?
Dog person or cat person
Left handed or right handed
Cross arms – arm on top is right or left
Interlock your fingers - thumb on top right or left
Just for fun try to reverse what came naturally

Reflection:
Did anyone stay on the same side of the room the entire time?
Did you notice if someone always had the same answers as you?

How did it feel to reverse directions when interlocking your fingers and crossing your arms?
Sometimes change feels funny and adjustment to the change can be difficult.
How do you feel about change? If you like the challenge of change and jump right into it - run to the center of the room. If you like to sit back, observe and then accept it – form a circle around the group in the middle.

Activity: People to People   **10 min.**
Circle up then pair off.
Explain: I will call out body parts and your mission is to touch those body parts together with your partner. When I call out people to people you are to find a new partner. Are there any questions? Is everyone ready?
- Hand to hand
- Elbow to elbow
- People to people!
- Knee to knee
- Toe to toe
- People to people!
- Elbow to knee

- Pinky finger to palm of hand
- Wrist to forehead
- People to people!
- Palm of hand to upper back
- Hip to hip
- People to people!
- Sole of foot to sole of foot
- Etc. etc.

Reflection:
Did who you were partnered with make a difference in your involvement in the activity? How did it make a difference?
Do you feel like you could work/play with anyone else in the class – that you would welcome them and they would welcome you? Why or why not?
What would it take for you to feel comfortable working/playing with anyone?

Activity: Growth Circles   **15 min.**
Outline growth circles on the floor and discuss the meaning of growth circles. (outside circle – not at all comfortable, middle circle – not comfortable, inside circle – bring it on)
Ask questions like the following and have participants put themselves into the circles they feel are most appropriate. How do you feel about…
- Spiders
- Snakes
- Singing in a choir
- Singing a solo in front of a large group
- Speaking in front of a large group
- Taking the lead in a major school project
- Running for a student body office
- Taking a math test
- Telling family member that you love him or her
- Introducing yourself to someone new
- Being the new person in a different group of people
- Confronting a friend about something they did or said

Allow time for movement after each statement. After the students get use to the activity (after the first few statements), give the students a chance to comment on why they put themselves in their particular spots. Ask them leading questions (why did singing a solo in front of a large group cause you to move to an outer circle?) Give them time to share a story.

Reflection:
As we worked though this activity what did you notice about yourself? About your classmates? Did most of you find it easy being the new person in a different group of people? How can we help the new person feel more comfortable? Did you find it easy to confront a friend about something they did or said? How do we react when we feel we have been "wronged" by a friend? What are some ways we could handle the situation in a more positive way?

Summary: **2 min**.

Each and every one of you are special. You are unique in the way you think and act and in your strengths. Do you have things in common with your classmates? Yes, for sure. And each of you bring unique ideas, strengths and personalities to the classroom. Tomorrow we will take our unique capabilities and use them as we work together as a team. Team work and cooperation is the name of the game of success.

Props:
Webbing/rope