Bullying is a widespread problem that permeates our society. It occurs not only on school playgrounds, but also throughout society—at the workplace, in the media, and on the Internet. Cohn and Canter (2003, 1) reported, “Bullying is the most common form of violence in our society; between 15 percent and 30 percent of students are bullies or victims.” In schools, bullying negatively impacts school climate as well as the ability of students to learn in a safe and nonthreatening environment. Moreover, bullying is associated with criminal behavior, school dropout, poor psychosocial adjustment, and other problems with long-term negative effects on society (Cohn and Canter 2003). Victims experience feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

Creating a positive and orderly environment can go a long way toward freeing the classroom of bullying.

Results from a recent study by the author suggest strategies that may greatly reduce or prevent bullying. The research indicates a strong link between proficiency in classroom management and the absence of bullying. Thus, by implementing effective classroom management practices and creating positive learning environments, teachers can make great strides toward the prevention of bullying. When they recognize and address the problem in a proactive manner, many incidents of bullying can be avoided.

Defining Bullying
Dillon and Lash (2005, 34) defined bullying as “repeated acts of aggression by individuals who have more power than their victims.” Typically, the perpetrator enjoys dominating the victim and the victim feels oppressed (Rigby 2001). Common characteristics of bullies include antisocial behavior, strong self-esteem, an inability to feel empathy, and a need to feel power and control (Banks 1997).
According to Banks (1997), bullying may be classified as direct or indirect. Direct bullying includes teasing, threatening, hitting, stealing, or using a weapon, whereas indirect bullying is achieved less overtly through acts such as intentional social exclusion or spreading rumors. In general, boys inflict various forms of direct bullying, while girls engage in the more subtle forms of indirect bullying (Harris and Petrie 2002). Whether direct or indirect, physical or psychological, bullying constitutes an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse. It is a destructive, antisocial behavior that is learned through environmental influences, such as peer groups, home, and the media (Cohn and Canter 2003).

The Study
To gather data on incidents of bullying in local schools, a survey was administered to 105 preservice teachers who had observed in kindergarten through 12th grade, public and private school classrooms, for three or more weeks in 2006. At the end of their laboratory experiences in schools, all undergraduate and graduate preservice teachers enrolled in a teacher education program at a small college were asked to complete a written survey. The survey was administered to preservice teachers during their college classes.

Though participation in the survey was voluntary, no preservice teacher declined to participate. The mean age of the participants was 21.3 with a standard deviation of 3.57. Eighty-four percent (n=88) were females while the remaining 16 percent were males (n=17). All attended a small liberal arts college where the majority of students are from middle class to upper middle class backgrounds.

The survey included items asking respondents to provide information on incidents of bullying they observed during their laboratory experiences in schools. To direct the preservice teachers’ attention to the issue, the following definition of bullying was included in the survey: “Bullies are individuals who instill fear in others, who intend to hurt, and who enjoy it. They may use verbal or physical bullying, or they may ignore or exclude their targets with relational bullying” (Charles and Senter 2005, 131).

Survey items asked for information such as gender of the bully, and frequency, location, and time of day of bullying incidents observed. Preservice teachers also indicated the dates of observations and the type of school in which they observed, private or public. Other survey items asked respondents to indicate how the teacher addressed acts of bullying and to rate the teacher’s overall effectiveness in classroom management.

Survey data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents reported observing one or more incidents of bullying every day, and about one-third of the incidents took place within classrooms. Furthermore, the incidents of bullying were observed in about equal numbers by type of school—public or private—with more than one-fourth of incidents committed by girls.

Perhaps more significant is that the research findings suggested a strong connection between bullying and classroom management. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents who observed no bullying rated the teachers’ classroom discipline as above-average to excellent (defined as very orderly with almost no misbehavior). Conversely, the majority of those who reported observing the greatest frequency of bullying rated the teachers’ classroom discipline as below average to poor (defined as very disordered with frequent misbehavior). Fourteen percent of survey participants indicated that the teacher responded to bullying by ignoring it.

“Consistent enforcement of rules and procedures is critical to the prevention of antisocial behavior that can lead to bullying.”

Practical Suggestions for Teachers
The findings of this study provide support for the recommendations that follow.

• Recognize the problem. Teachers cannot assume that bullying occurs only in certain types of schools. They must recognize that bullying takes place in all types of schools, public and private. Educators also should acknowledge that bullying is not a problem exclusively with boys. Anti-bullying interventions are needed by students from all backgrounds and both genders. Though some forms of bullying by girls may be less overt, the acts are no less insidious and harmful.

• Reflect on classroom management practices. The author’s study indicates a connection between classroom management and bullying. Consistent enforcement of rules and procedures is critical to the prevention of antisocial behavior that can lead to bullying. When classrooms are well-managed and teachers engage students in interesting and meaningful learning activities, students have fewer opportunities to bully their classmates.

An orderly, positive school environment that includes a strong stance against bullying provides students the safety and security they need for optimal learning. Outstanding teachers strive continuously to
develop and improve their skills as classroom managers so that bullying is less likely to take place. They reflect on ways to improve methods for monitoring interaction among students and ways to provide brief and orderly transitions between learning activities.

• **Don’t ignore the problem.** Teachers must acknowledge that many incidents of bullying take place within classrooms. Bullying doesn’t occur on playgrounds only. Rather, incidents of violence, physical and psychological, take place throughout the school campus, and teachers must not ignore them. When acts of bullying are ignored, bullies feel empowered while victims lose confidence and trust in their teachers to keep them safe.

• **Promote nonviolence, respect, and service to others.** Students should be taught strategies that promote nonviolent means of settling disputes. Older students, trained to serve as mediators, can provide students a way of working out their own peaceful solutions to problems. Additionally, students may be given opportunities to express in class something special they admire about a classmate.

Acts of kindness and service may be encouraged in the classroom by displaying “Helping Hands,” paper cut-out hands on which students write how they have assisted others. Examples of these kinds of activities are the student who carries the lunch tray for a classmate whose arm is in a cast and the student who assists the new kid in the class become acclimated to a new school setting. By teaching tolerance and respect for individuals, in spite of differences, teachers foster a climate of nonviolence.

• **Be proactive.** Effective classroom management is only part of the answer to the prevention of bullying. Successful teachers are proactive, and they implement anti-bullying programs that are proven successful. It is not enough for teachers to establish a setting for mutual respect in the classroom. They also should teach students techniques that prevent bullying—techniques that enable students to resolve conflicts peacefully, and that empower witnesses and victims to take charge during incidents of bullying simply by telling the bully to stop. Role-playing is useful for acting out bullying scenarios in which students practice conflict resolution. Following up with class discussions gives students opportunities to elaborate on what has been learned.

• **Teach responsibility and teamwork.** Students experience social and moral growth when they are given opportunities to practice responsibility and teamwork. To accomplish this, many teachers assign students class jobs, such as “buddies” or “helpers” in which students demonstrate responsibility for classmates in some way. Annual themes, such as “Learning and Growing Together,” also promote unity and an attitude of “we’re all in this together.”

By planning assignments for cooperative learning groups, teachers provide students additional opportunities to practice responsibility and demonstrate teamwork. Each member of the group is given the responsibility for a specific aspect of the group’s success. To reinforce appropriate behavior, teachers use praise and other forms of recognition when students act responsibly toward group members.

• **Use literature.** Presenting literature that promotes pro-social behavior can be useful for building positive character traits. Libraries are filled with books that foster traits such as friendship, tolerance, and service to others. Examples of children’s books that teach acceptance and respect are *The Brand New Kid* (Couric 2000) and *Hooray for Wodney Wat* (Lester 1999). The main characters of these and other stories are ones to which students easily relate, thus providing models of appropriate behavior.

• **Collaborate.** Teachers should collaborate with other educators. Administrators, counselors, and fellow teachers are willing to share their expertise by suggesting strategies for stopping the bully. They may recommend teachers’ manuals and kits on anti-bullying that are available in the school’s curriculum resource center. Many of these materials are excellent tools for promoting the strong moral and social development in students that lead to positive learning environments.

**Closing Thoughts**

Bullying is a serious problem that exists in all types of schools and among all types of students. It should not be tolerated, because the negative effects are destructive and far-reaching. This study suggests the need for teacher preparation programs, new teacher induction, and professional development initiatives to place greater emphasis on acquiring and practicing effective classroom management strategies. Becoming more proficient in classroom management will help teachers create positive and productive learning environments in which students feel safe and flourish both academically and socially.

**References**


