CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem

In the last few years, incidents of violent retribution by victims of bullying have led to an increased awareness of the problem of bullying. While school officials often overlook bullying, a large number of students report having been bullied during the school day. A very serious problem in itself, bullying may have detrimental psychological effects on children such as low self-esteem, depression, and suicide.

In a school-wide effort to send the message that bullying will not be tolerated in the school setting, bullying prevention programs have been created. These well-designed and implemented programs can create an improved climate by educating staff and students how to recognize and respond to instances of bullying.

To understand completely the ramifications of being bullied, one must be able to recognize the definition of bullying. According to Olweus, a student is considered the object of bullying or victimization when he is exposed repeatedly over time to intentional injury or discomfort inflicted by one or more other students. These behaviors may include physical contact, verbal assault, obscene gestures or facial expressions, or intentional exclusion. Bullying implies an imbalance in power or strength, which disrupts the playing field necessary to educate properly all students (Olweus, 1993). When bullying occurs in the school setting, the victims are denied a complete educational opportunity and the school environment is affected in a negative way.

Although many educators are oblivious to bullying, it does occur. In the United States approximately 20% of students report that they have been bullied by another student (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Most incidents occur in places with little adult supervision, such as on

playgrounds and in hallways. Typically larger in stature than their victims, bullies have more positive attitudes toward the use of violence than do other students. Their victims tend to be less popular, often with very few or no real friends in class. The victims of bullies are characteristically more anxious and insecure than other students and commonly react to uncomfortable situations by crying, withdraw ling, and avoiding the bully when attacked. Unfortunately, such reactions may only reinforce the bullies' sense of power over the victims (Olweus, 1993). To protect the potential victims of bullying, teachers must be attentive not only to aggressive signs in their classrooms but also throughout the school grounds.

Bullying has serious consequences not only for victims and perpetrators but also for the entire school. Victims have reported feelings of vengefulness, anger, and self-pity after a bullying incident (Borg, 1998). Left untreated, such reactions can evolve into depression, physical illness, and even suicide. In addition, students who engage in aggressive and bullying behaviors during their school years may be more prone to take part in criminal and aggressive behavior after adolescence. In classrooms exhibiting high numbers of bullying problems, students tend to feel less safe and are less satisfied with school life in general (Olweus & Limber, 1999). Therefore, educators must provide a safe environment for all students.

Bullying is often tolerated and ignored. Even though teachers rarely detect bullying, they only intervene in 4% of all incidents they do see (Craig & Peppered, 1999). While a large number of parents believe teachers have a firm control over the bullying in their classrooms, this assumption is false. In addition, students maintain their own attitudes about bullying. For instance, they believe that bullied individuals are at least partly to blame for their victimization. They also contend that bullying makes the victims tougher. Possibly unaware of the

consequences of bullying, the students think that the teasing is simply done "in fun." Sadly, students who report being bullied believe little or nothing will be done to address the problem.

Effective prevention programs rely on a number of components to reduce and prevent bullying problems. The utilization of improved supervision, classroom rules against bullying, positive and negative consequences for following and violating rules, and serious talks with bullies and victims contributes to a school environment characterized by warmth and positive adult involvement. Strategies to prevent bullying include a school conference day to discuss bullying, subsequent meetings with parents of bullies and their victims, and weekly homeroom classroom meetings. At the elementary level, worksheets, role-plays, and relevant literature may be incorporated into existing classroom curricula "to defuse" bullying. Such measures send the message that bullying is unacceptable in our school and will not be tolerated by the faculty or staff.

Purpose of the Study

A local private school in Wilmington, North Carolina has experienced a related problem in regards to bullying. In the spring of 2005, the school went through the vigorous process of being certified by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). While seeking the prestigious certification, the SACS committee found evidences of bullying in the school. As a result, the SACS team acknowledged the school had a bullying issue and needed an intervention process incorporated in the School Improvement Plan. Therefore, the school advisory council, composed of school faculty members, addressed this problem in the 2004-2009 School Improvement Plan. One objective in the School Improvement Plan was to provide a safe, disciplined, and orderly environment. To accomplish this objective, an intervention to address the bullying problem at this individual school had to be established. The problem existing in the

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local private school resulted in the following research to identify an intervention and way to implement it to ensure a safe and disciplined school environment.

Description of Study

The purpose of this study was to implement a researched based bullying prevention program at an identified school with bullying occurrences.   Questions that guided the research of this project were the following: (1) What bullying prevention programs currently exist for this school to implement? (2) What type of bullying behaviors is present in this school? (3) Are particular grade levels subjected to greater bullying than others? (4) What specific interventions can be done to diminish bullying in this particular school?

The organizational framework of this paper has been designed in this format. Chapter 1 shows the problem and purpose of why a bullying prevention program is needed at this particular school. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relating to the term "bullying." Included in Chapter 2 is a widely accepted definition of the term bullying. In addition, this chapter also discusses how prevalent the problem of bullying has become, the characteristics of bullies and their victims, the short and long -term effects of victimization, the common myths about bullying, and the descriptions of several proven anti-bullying programs for schools to implement. Chapter 3 outlines the components of a proven bullying prevention program piloted in this particular school setting.   Chapter 4 discusses the findings from three different instruments used. They were the administration of a bully/victim questionnaire, the use of staff surveys and discussion interviews of teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward bullying, and the analysis of discipline referrals related to the bullying behaviors of the students in the building. Lastly, Chapter 5 shows the importance of having teachers trained with quality professional development to eliminate the bullying in the educational arena.