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Coaching Teachers in Detection and Intervention Related to Bullying
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Final Summary Overview
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Final Summary Overview

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop, through an iterative process, the Bullying Classroom Check-Up (BCCU) integrated coaching and guided practice strategy to aid teachers in detecting and effectively intervening with bullying behaviors (Aim 1; completed spring 2016); determine the feasibility and acceptability of the BCCU (Aim 2; completed spring 2016); and pilot test the BCCU using a small-scale randomized controlled trial (RCT) to determine its promise as an evidence-based strategy for reducing bullying and increasing safety in the classroom (Aim 3; 2016-17 and 2017-18 school year)

Participants

The development process included focus groups with total of 17 student participants (6 boys, 11 girls; 4 focus groups) and total of 16 teacher participants (1 man, 15 women; 3 focus groups). We then pilot tested the intervention with six teachers in one school. The randomized testing of this intervention included 80 teachers recruited from five middle schools during the 2016-17 school year. In the second (2017-18) study year, there were 67 remaining consented teachers; all changes were due to school moves/position changes. We also completed end-of-study focus groups with 17 participating intervention teachers (12 female and 5 male) for feedback on their experiences with the coaching. Thirteen students (9 female and 4 male) in these same three schools also provided feedback on bullying and teacher responding.

Project Design and Method

Project Design

To develop the intervention, we used a qualitative approach. Specifically, we reviewed the literature and conducted and synthesized focus groups. For the piloting of the intervention,

we used a mixed-methods approach. We employed the ADDIE model of systematic instructional design (Dick & Carey, 1996) to iteratively analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate the BCCU strategy during the pilot stage. Qualitative feedback from this process allowed for further refinement. At the end of the piloting, we collected quantitative data from teachers regarding their experience with the coaching. The efficacy testing of the intervention was conducted using a randomized controlled trial, where teachers were randomized within schools. Specifically, a within-school randomized trial design including 80 middle school teachers recruited from 5 middle schools (grades 6-8) serving urban and urban fringe communities in mid-Atlantic state. Two teachers declined to participate following recruitment, leaving a final sample of 78 teachers randomized to participate in the intervention (N = 39) or control schools (i.e., business as usual; N = 39).

Intervention

The Bullying Classroom Check-Up or BCCU is an individualized teacher coaching intervention, which is blended with guided practice in a mixed-reality simulator. The theoretical basis of the BCCU is that a positive classroom climate, positive behavior supports, and strong teacher-student relationships are foundational and necessary, but not sufficient, elements to successfully address bullying in the classroom and thus are part of the preventive focus of the intervention. In addition, providing the skills to detect bullying and respond effectively in real time is also an emphasis. The coaching is an adaptation of the Classroom Check-Up (Reinke, Herman, & Sprick, 2011) which is a staged problem-solving process, whereby a teacher can select a goal for improvement in their classroom and to design and implement a plan. The original coaching process was adapted to focus on bullying throughout all steps of the coaching, but was also augmented with guided practice provided in the mixed-reality simulator

TeachLivE[®]. Finally, coaches distributed psychoeducational materials (i.e., two-sided tip sheets referred to as “Bullying Bulletins”; see below for list), which were discussed by the coach and teacher to ensure that teacher knowledge of the topic was addressed.

Consistent with best practice in bullying prevention (e.g., Bradshaw, 2013, 2017), there was an emphasis on promoting teacher demonstration of perspective taking to their students, by first labeling the bullying behavior, and expressing (and modeling) empathy and apologizing to victims of bullying in the classroom (i.e., in instances where the victim was easily identified) as a time-efficient but sincere responding strategy.

The BCCU intervention included the following five steps: 1) an assessment of the classroom through the CCU motivational interview, teacher completion of a checklist, and coach-conducted classroom observations of teacher and student behaviors; 2) an integrated feedback session drawing from all data sources; 3) goal setting and the development of an action plan addressing the two teacher-selected goals (all adapted from the original CCU); 4) ongoing support via guided practice and performance feedback (Mesa, Lewis-Palmer, & Reinke, 2005) within the TeachLivE[®] mixed-reality simulator on three occasions (i.e., to address specific goals set and ensure practice on each of the detection, responding, and prevention foci of the intervention); and 5) faded coach support. It is important to note that the initial feedback session was based on findings from the objective data collection from step 1, and the coach used motivational interviewing to provide feedback in a non-judgmental and empowering manner. Within the simulator, the coach collected new objective data and immediately provided teachers with feedback. In the second year, it included 1) a brief interview and follow-up data collection regarding the prior year’s goals, 2) an abridged feedback and re-visitation to the action plan (e.g., to update/refine), 3) additional guided practice in one simulator session; and 4) faded support.

The intervention materials set includes:

- An adapted interview asking about student peer relations; teacher prevention and intervention with negative student interactions; and school bullying policies;
- An expanded coach observation form including tallies of social behavior expectations and survey-like items regarding the forms of bullying and aggression displayed by students and the responses by teachers;
- A new feedback form including general behavioral and bullying-specific strategies;
- A set of follow-up materials (i.e., interview, feedback, and goal setting);
- A set of six “Bullying Bulletins” focused on an overview about bullying, detection of bullying, responding to bullying (2 bulletins), prevention of bullying, and starting the year off right (given to teachers in the 2nd year after already receiving the intervention);
- A set of the TeachLivE scenarios which include the specific student behaviors and the desired and non-desired teacher responses for practice TeachLivE sessions with teachers;
- A book chapter that summarizes the BCCU (e.g., intervention manual; see Bradshaw, Waasdrorp, Pas, Larson, & Johnson, 2018).

Coaches provided a total of 432 individual contacts with teachers, totaling 351.20 hours or about 9.5 hours, on average, per teacher in the first year. Teachers engaged, on average, face-to-face with the coach for 6.45 hours (i.e., the remaining time was coach dedicated time to data collection and preparation for coaching, and did not require active teacher time). During the second year of the study, coaches made 191 individual contacts with teachers and spent a total of 102.60 hours on coaching, or 3.21 hours per teacher. Of this total time, teacher active time was 1.65 hours.

Data Collection

Data were collected at baseline (fall of 2016), at the end of the first year of intervention (spring 2017) and one year later following continued coaching to intervention teachers (spring 2018). The two data sources for the outcome analyses were a teacher survey and a classroom observational measure. A shortened version of the Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools (MDS3) Climate Survey (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Lindstrom Johnson, 2014) was used in this study, with a focus on the items regarding demographic data, bullying, safety more broadly, and programming. In particular, teachers were asked about their *perceptions of bullying prevention efforts and prevalence* (i.e., if “Bullying is a problem at this school” and “Adults at this school are doing enough to try to stop/prevent bullying” on a 4-point Likert agreement scale; where teachers have seen students bullied within the past 30 days; and which of 11 forms of bullying they observed in the past 30 days); their *responses to witnessing* (i.e., asked “When you have seen bullying in the past 30 days, how did you respond?” and were asked to check all that applied among 9 behavioral responses); and their *demographics* (e.g., grade taught, years in role, gender, and race/ethnicity). This teacher-report measure has been used extensively in several prior studies of bullying (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O’Brennan, 2007; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O’Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013; Waasdorp, Pas, O’ Brennan, & Bradshaw, 2011; Waasdorp, Pas, Zablotzky, & Bradshaw, 2017). The observational measure is called the *Assessing School Settings: Interactions of Students and Teachers* (ASSIST; Rusby, Taylor, & Milchak, 2001) as a means for measuring teacher responding and prevention. This measure includes event-based tallies (e.g., *proactive behavioral management* [verbal and physical demonstrations of behavioral expectations], *approval* [recognition of students’ performance], proportion of time that the teacher did not respond to aggression, and student aggression [coded both through a *physical aggression* code, which was any aversive physical contact, and a *verbal and relational aggression* code, which was

verbal disapproval or critical judgment by any student or any action that could harm a peer's relationship or social standing]. The original ASSIST also included global rating scales, which we expanded to assess *positive behavior supports* (comprised of items typically assessed by implementation measures of a positive behavioral approach including *3-5 positively stated expectations posted in the classroom; a classroom-specific behavioral matrix; teacher reference to the expectation; evidence of the presence of a reinforcement system to reward positive behaviors; use of the reinforcement system*) as well as an one item, "*when aggression occurred, teacher acknowledged student's feelings (e.g., stating that the behavior is hurtful or offensive)*". Each item had a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *never* (scored 0) to *almost continuously/often occurred* (scored 4).

Additional *coaching process and acceptability* data were collected including *coach contact logs* (after each meeting with a teacher, a coach entered the activities conducted and the amount of time spent; these data were used to report the amount of time coaches spent with teachers in the intervention section above), *coaching fidelity* (after the interview, feedback, goal setting, and simulator sessions, coaches responded to a series of items about whether they fully, partially, or did not implement each element of that session), and *teacher-coach alliance forms* (i.e., series of items embedded in the teacher survey in the two spring data collections asking teachers about the working relationship, benefits, and competence of the implementation).

Data Completion by Participants

Baseline assessments and observations were conducted in all 80 classrooms and 78 teachers had completed baseline surveys. Post-test survey data and observations in teachers' classrooms were completed in April through June 2017; surveys were completed by 75 teachers; observations were conducted in all 78 teachers' classrooms. Of the remaining 67 teachers in the

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2017-18 year, 60 completed teacher surveys in the spring 2018 and observations were completed in 64 classrooms.

Data Analysis

Focus Group Data: Data were examined by research teams and synthesized for themes.

First-Year Outcomes: Univariate general liner models (GLM) were conducted examine continuous variables (i.e., teacher perceptions of bullying, ASSIST tallies of proactive behavior management and approval and global ratings). Logistic regressions were conducted for all binary teacher survey outcomes (i.e., prevalence, forms witnessed, and responses) and the dichotomized observational aggression tallies. The reported teacher demographics were controlled for in all models.

Second-Year Outcomes: Because the second year included three time points, repeated measures hierarchical linear models were conducted (i.e., level 1 = repeated measures and level 2 = time). The Bernoulli distribution was utilized for dichotomized variables and the Poisson distribution for count variables. Time was coded as 0 (baseline), 1 (post), and 2 (one year follow up).

Findings

Initial Focus Groups: Teacher expressed themes around the barriers to addressing bullying in the classroom as being: (1) the many other tasks they are expected to be engaged in, particularly due to the complex nature of bullying within student relationships, and thus the limited time they have to address these situations; (2) lacking efficacy to respond that relate both to difficulty in detection and lacking expertise in intervention strategies; (3) poor classroom management leads to escalated behavior and allows for greater occurrence of aggression or bullying; (4) systemic issues surrounding the reporting of bullying (e.g., the manner in which bullying, compared to other student behaviors) and the involvement of administrators in bullying referrals. The student focus

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groups revealed some overlapping themes as well as new areas, including: (1) teachers do not effectively help stop bullying and recognized that there were time constraints for teachers to do so; (2) a clear sentiment that teachers did not “*seem to care or understand*” what they were going through; (3) adults making an emotional connection with them made a difference when they tried to address bullying or aggression; and (4) school policies are either inconsistently implemented, ineffective, or perceived to make things worse.

Efficacy Year One Outcomes: Logistic regression models indicated that intervention teachers had marginally significantly higher odds of reporting (a) teasing, picking on, making fun; (b) hitting, slapping, or kicking; and (c) witnessing ignoring/leaving out and a marginally significant increase in reporting of witnessing bullying in the classroom. General linear models revealed that coached teachers reported more disagreement that adults at the school are doing enough to stop/prevent bullying $F = 8.83, p = .004$ ($M_{control} = 2.83$ [$SE = .095$] $M_{intervention} = 2.50$ [$SE = .096$]). There was also a trend for perceptions that bullying is a problem at the school. With regard to responding, intervention teachers had statistically significantly higher odds of talking with other staff (OR = 3.96, $p < .05$), referring to a guidance counselor (OR = 5.87, $p < .05$), intervene with the bully (OR = 4.83, $p < .05$) and with the victim (OR = 3.51, $p = .05$). No significant effects were seen on teacher prevention of bullying and student aggression.

Efficacy Year Two Outcomes: Results suggested that although there was impact in the first year (pre fall –post spring), there was a narrowing of the findings in the follow-up (spring) that suggest that the intervention effects relative to the control were not sustained, and the levels of implementation were not sustained. This has resulted in the development of additional staff professional development programming related to the BCCU; we are currently considering

additional ways to augment impacts through planned activities (e.g., booster sessions), which could be incorporated into a larger-scale efficacy trial of the BCCU.

Coaching Fidelity: Fidelity to the coaching model (i.e., engaging in every step of the interview, feedback session, goal setting and action planning process) was upheld for 95 to 100% of teachers, as reported by coaches. The greatest variability in fidelity related to planning for and engaging with the simulator. Coaches reported that 78% of teachers engaged in the preventive strategy practice typically allocated for the third session, whereas 92-97% of teachers practiced all other targeted skills, including detection, responding, and strategies specifically selected for the teachers' action plan.

Teacher Feedback Regarding the Intervention: Teachers provided positive feedback about the process, the coach, and the utility of the coaching in improving their knowledge. For example, nearly all teachers reported feeling that the coach delivered their support, recommendations, and technical assistance clearly and concisely and that the coaching helped to build their capacity to implement evidence-based programming.

Final Focus Group Findings: The student focus group data, collected from 13 students, mirrored the prior data garnered in the initial focus groups; all themes remained the same as the themes as the initial focus groups mentioned above. With regard to the coaching specifically, teachers discussed the deeper understanding or set of skills they gained from the coaching (theme 1) as well as multiple components of the coaching that were deemed as helpful (theme 2). The coaching was specifically found to be helpful in providing teachers with a better understanding of how to detect bullying and respond to bullying and their students' behavior generally as well as how it related to their own (teacher) behavior. With regard to the utility of the coaching, teachers were positive about how the coaching structure allowed them to move from conversations filled

with complaints and problems to productive change; felt that the classroom observations/visits were specifically a powerful part of the process; and said that the power of the coaching lies in the fact that it is not judgmental and is non-evaluative. They shared that time barriers were (and can be) overcome by the value in the content focused on through coaching, the coach respecting the teacher's time, and the coach's recognition that teachers did not have a lot of time to focus on social-emotional concerns in the classroom. With regard to noted barriers, the teachers talked about a lack of student understanding and knowledge as well as other systemic and ecological issues (e.g., community and family).

Implications for Criminal Justice Policy and Practice in the US

Given teachers spend the largest proportion of time with students, they are on the front lines of prevention and intervention with student bullying. Currently, however, the field lacks experimental knowledge and readily available information for how teachers can best identify and respond to bullying within the classroom. This project has clear implications for reducing bullying in the classroom, as the BCCU helps shift teachers merely responding to bullying as behavioral infractions to teachers responding with empathy, concern and guidance; the types of behaviors and responses that are expected of students. The results of this study showed that this shift is necessary and desired from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. Further, the results of the trial suggest that the BCCU improves teacher responding and potentially detection. For example, teachers who received the BCCU increased their responding to bullying through seeking help from professional staff (e.g., school counselors) to address bullying and providing support specifically to the victims. Given the harmful, disruptive, and potentially dangerous nature of bullying, these behaviors often result in consequences for students that disrupt learning and overall emotional health, not just for perpetrators and victims, but for those who merely

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witness it. Further, for youth who are perpetrators of bullying, schools often respond through suspensions and expulsions, both of which have detrimental impacts on positive youth development. Over time, improving how teachers address bullying and aggression could decrease exclusionary discipline responses and ultimately improve concerns with the school-to-prison pipeline. This work is also aligned with and informs efforts to provide supportive school discipline through the partnership between Departments of Justice and Education.

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