

Multicultural Education Program Evaluation:

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Megan Mallon

EDCI 755 Multicultural Issues in Teaching

Dr. Be Stoney

Kansas State University

December 2011

Introduction

The term *bullying* has been in the news an increasing amount in recent history. Bullying is typically defined to include repeated acts of aggression over time, and will include an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Olweus & Limber, 2007). Bullying can affect all students, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or social class, and students of minorities are sometimes more likely to be targeted as a victim for being different (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010). For this reason, many school districts are adopting a bully prevention program as a way to circumvent this issue.

In 2007, the USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden school district officially adopted the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (hereafter referred to as OBPP). This program, developed by Dr. Dan Olweus of Norway, has been implemented in schools all over North America and Europe (Olweus & Limber, 2007). The program uses components such as class meetings, bully and victim interventions, school-wide policies against bullying, and climate surveys to create a culture of respect, safety, and understanding in schools. This evaluation will discuss four guidelines of Banks' (1994) Multicultural Education Program Evaluation Checklist to show that the OBPP assists in creating a positive multicultural environment in schools.

School Policies

Guideline 2.1 of the Multicultural Education Program Evaluation Checklist evaluates whether “school policies accommodate the behavioral patterns, learning styles, and orientations of those ethnic and cultural group members actually in the school” (Banks, 1994). Through use of student interventions and all-encompassing rules, the OBPP provides policies that are acceptable for all students.

The OBPP advises giving immediate and appropriate consequences through an individual intervention of any student that is bullied (Olweus & Limber, 2007). The guideline in discussion asks whether consequences and approaches are appropriate for all cultural group members, and this point is addressed in the *OBPP Teacher Guide*, when Olweus (2007) instructs the educator to “Look the students in the eyes. Tell them to look you in the eyes, if this is culturally appropriate” (p. 90). While adults in the school will need to be educated on what is culturally appropriate, the OBPP does in fact address this as something to watch out for.

A foundational part of the OBPP is the school rules against bullying, which Olweus (2007) lists as:

1. We will not bully others.
2. We will try to help the students who are bullied.
3. We will try not to include students who are left out.
4. If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

As Banks (2010) explains, “Student learning can be positively influenced by changes in school policies and practices that affirm students’ identities and that are part of systemic school reform measures” (p. 395). When a school follows policies and rules, such as the ones outlined by the OBPP, they are more likely to treat everyone fairly. Including rules as specific as these as part of the school policy minimizes the opportunity for bias in conclusions about student behavior (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009). Additionally, the OBPP recommends that each classroom teacher and students cooperatively create rules for their room. This allows each student to feel ownership of their classroom climate, no matter what their cultural or racial identity. Banks (2010) describes

one of the challenges facing schools as incorporating multiple perspectives, and emphasizes the importance of allowing students to become an integral part of the learning.

Positive Classroom Atmosphere

Guideline 9.1 of the Multicultural Education Program Evaluation Checklist evaluates whether “the teacher creates a classroom atmosphere reflecting an acceptance of and respect for ethnic and cultural differences” (Banks, 1994). Improving classroom climate is a goal of the OBPP, and the classroom teacher can go far in helping foster positive social relationships between students of all racial and ethnic identities.

One of the main purposes of the OBPP is to “create a safe and caring classroom environment that’s free of bullying” (Olweus & Limber, 2007, p. 51). As mentioned in the guidelines, it is the classroom teacher who is responsible for this. A few ways a teacher can increase positive classroom management is by having positive expectations for students, fostering a climate of cooperation, assisting students in creating a positive group identity, and by teaching in a variety of different styles (Olweus & Limber, 2007). Not only are these useful suggestions in creating a classroom atmosphere that is free of bullying, they are also suggestions that are beneficial to a classroom atmosphere that is culturally diverse and accepting. A teacher can play a big difference in the life of a student who is in a minority role in a school. In her book *Through Ebony Eyes* (2004), Thompson explains

Any decent teacher can become successful with well-behaved and high-achieving students. Only the phenomenal teachers who possess [a certain] mind-set can success with underachievers, students from challenging backgrounds, and those who are perceived as discipline problems. Becoming a phenomenal teacher is not easy, but it is an option that is available to all teachers” (p. 131).

Student Understanding of Diverse Perspectives

Guideline 17.0 of the Multicultural Education Program Evaluation Checklist evaluates whether “the curriculum help students view and interpret events, situations, and conflict from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives and points of view” (Banks, 1994). While the OBPP does not, as previously mentioned, focus specifically on ethnic and cultural differences, it does encourage students to accept any differences in others. A central part of the OBPP are weekly class meetings, and these can prove successful in providing a chance for students to share their feelings or opinions on a topic, or help their peers come up with solutions for a problem (Olweus & Limber, 2007). Learning about the history of cultural diversity and using a variety of literature are both ways a classroom meeting can help students understand perspectives different than their own.

These classroom meetings give teachers a chance to encourage students to celebrate dissimilarities in each other and interact as a community. They also give teachers the opportunity to focus on the history of racial or ethnic discrimination that may be at the root of a bullying behavior. In his book *Schools Where Everyone Belongs* (2005), Stan Davis remarks “It is difficult to change the assumptions about bullying that pervade our culture and impede our progress in bullying prevention” (p. 24). Often, students come to school with assumptions or misinformation that teachers must spend time counteracting (Tatum, 1997).

Within the arena of classroom meetings, teachers can begin discussing these issues with students, both from a multicultural perspective and a bullying prevention perspective. In the *Companion Bibliography for Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, Mullin (2007) suggests choosing literature that avoids stereotypes and biases, and also is of interest to English Language Learner (ELL) students. As Mullin (2007) remarks, “The term bullying has different meanings

in different cultures and not all languages have an equivalent translation that conveys the scope of both direct and indirect types of bullying” (p. 4).

Evaluation of Policies and School Climate

Guidelines 23.2 and 23.3 of the Multicultural Education Program Evaluation Checklist evaluate whether “the evaluation program examine school policies, procedures, and everyday climate” (Banks, 1994). The OBPP provides several forms of evaluation, including staff discussion groups, reviewing and refining the school supervisory system, and the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (Olweus & Limber, 2007). The Questionnaire is given to students by their classroom teacher at the beginning of the program implementation, and then yearly after that. The Questionnaire serves three important purposes (Olweus & Limber, 2007):

1. It creates awareness and involvement on the part of adults by providing detailed information about bullying and the social relationship among students.
2. It helps the school tailor its bullying prevention efforts to the needs of the particular school community.
3. It measures changes in bullying behavior over time and provides information on program progress and any bullying problems that need additional efforts (p. 39).

While no specific mention is made of the Questionnaire in a multicultural capacity, all three purposes listed above could very easily be used to examine the diverse climate of the school.

Conclusion

While the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is not specifically meant to be culturally diverse, it is designed in a way that makes it successful in creating a school environment that is welcoming to members of all cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. This program is by no means enough to carry a multicultural curriculum on its own, but through its use of components such as

interventions, class meetings, and climate surveys, the OBPP is an effective way to ensure a safe and caring school climate that allows, in part, for cultural and ethnic diversity.

References

- Banks, J.A. (1994). *An introduction to multicultural education* (Appendix C). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Retrieved from <http://www.iun.edu/~nwacadem/utep/docs/multiculturalchecklist.pdf>
- Banks, J. A., & McGee Banks, C. A. (2010). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. (7th ed.). Hoboken, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Davis, S. (2005). *Schools where everyone belongs*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Mullin, N.L. (2007). *Olweus bullying prevention program: Companion bibliography*. Bullying Prevention Institute. Retrieved from <http://bullyingpreventioninstitute.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=VWXJwRQjWUE%3d&tabid=72>
- Olweus, D., & Limber S. P. (2007). *Olweus bullying prevention program teacher guide*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. (2009). What works in preventing bullying: Effective elements of anti-bullying programs. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict, and Peace Research*, 13(24). Retrieved from <http://bullyingpreventioninstitute.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Ufod4vzsiXs=>