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The Bullying Literature Project:
An Evaluation of a Class-Wide Bullying Intervention Program

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education

by

Lauren Kelley Couch

June 2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Bullying Literature Project: An Evaluation of a Class-Wide Bullying Intervention Program

by

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Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Education
University of California, Riverside, June 2015
Dr. Cixin Wang, Chairperson

As the problem of bullying on school campuses gains more attention among educators nationwide, the need for effective bullying prevention programs increases. Existing bullying interventions have either had mixed results in terms of effectiveness or have been highly resource intensive and challenging to implement. This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of The Bullying Literature Project (BLP), a brief class-wide bullying intervention designed to integrate into the existing curriculum and provide educators a cost-effective way to target bullying on campus. The BLP was implemented for five weeks in four elementary school classrooms; two fourth grade classrooms served as a waitlist control. Students completed a pre-test and post-test examining bullying behavior, victimization, bystander defending behavior, victim coping behavior, and attitudes related to bullying. Teachers completed a pre-test and post-test in which they reported on the bullying behavior, victimization, and pro-social behavior of their students. After controlling for gender and grade level, the results of a repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant treatment effects for teacher report of students' pro-social behavior. A significant treatment effect was also found for student self-reported pro-

bullying attitudes. Students in the control classrooms reported an increase in pro-bullying attitudes, while students in the treatment classroom did not show a change. However, no differences were seen between the treatment and control classrooms for student- or teacher- reported bullying or victimization. Additionally, no treatment effects were seen for bystander defending or victim coping behavior. Implications for practice for school psychologists and directions for future research are discussed.

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The Bullying Literature Project: An Evaluation of a Class-Wide Bullying Intervention Program

Bullying is a pervasive problem affecting schools throughout the United States that is gaining more attention as the long lasting effects of involvement in bullying are studied. Research shows that children involved in bullying, as bystanders, victims, bullies, or bully-victims, experience more internalizing and externalizing problems than their uninvolved peers (Espelage & Swearer, 2010). Students involved in bullying are more likely to be involved in other violent acts and criminal activities (Farrington & Ttofi, 2011). Students who were bullied at the age of 8 or 12 were more likely to have psychiatric symptoms at 15 and to be involved in deviant behaviors (Kumpulainen & Räsänen, 2000). The impact of bullying reaches beyond mental health and delinquent behaviors; academic achievement can be adversely affected by bullying involvement as well. Compared to their uninvolved peers, elementary school students who are victimized by their peers are at an increased likelihood to have low achievement scores (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005). With prevalence rates for bullying victimization nearing 30% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), educators are in need of effective early interventions to help prevent the numerous negative outcomes associated with bullying involvement. While research on bullying involvement has become more prolific in recent years, researchers are still searching for effective prevention and intervention programs for bullying.

Current Research on Bullying Intervention Programs

Due to the negative long term effects of bullying involvement, educators are in need of cost-effective and efficacious early bullying prevention and intervention programs. However, present research on the effectiveness of bullying intervention programs has been mixed. One meta-analysis of bullying interventions revealed that available bullying interventions decrease bullying and victimization on average 20-23% and 17-20% respectively (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). The bullying intervention programs examined in this meta-analysis targeted bullying in a variety of ways, including increased “playground supervision”, parent training and information sessions, “teacher training”, school-wide policy change regarding bullying, classroom behavioral expectations and management procedures, and “disciplinary methods” (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011; p. 41). Another meta-analysis revealed that presently available bullying intervention programs were effective at changing attitudes and beliefs pertaining to bullying but had little effect on bullying behavior (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). Additionally, the bullying interventions with the highest effect sizes were those that were implemented school-wide (Merrell et al., 2008), which can be both time and resource intensive.

Theories supporting school/classroom-based interventions. While bullying intervention literature is growing and many new intervention programs are being developed, additional research is needed to identify those that are highly effective and cost efficient. Classroom-wide curricula provide an appealing method for targeting bullying because they can be relatively easy to implement and use limited resources

(Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Classroom-based and school-based bullying interventions provide an opportunity to target bullying in the key environmental context of the school and adjust immediate environmental factors that may be contributing to bullying involvement. Previous research indicates that students feel that teachers do not intervene in bullying incidents frequently enough (Holt, Keyes, & Koenig, 2011). This may be due to a lack of recognition of bullying incidents and the stereotypes teachers hold about the types of students that are victimized, such as students who are victimized must be weak or unpopular (Doll, Song, Champion, & Jones, 2011; Holt et al., 2011). By providing intervention within the classroom or to the school as a whole, teachers are made more aware of the overt and covert specifics of bullying behavior and may be better able to recognize and intervene during bullying situations. Additionally, certain classroom ecologies may support bullying behavior, and those can be addressed through a classroom-based intervention (Doll et al., 2011). For instance, pro-bullying attitudes and aggression among students in the classroom can have a large impact on the rate of bullying behaviors (Doll et al., 2011). Classrooms where students report being willing to defend a peer who was being victimized have significantly lower rates of victimization compared to classrooms where students inadvertently reinforce the bullying behavior by laughing or watching during bullying incidents (Doll et al., 2011). Improving the classroom or school climate by addressing bystander behavior could have a significant impact on the level of bullying within a classroom. Classroom-based bullying interventions that seek to improve classroom climate, change bystander behavior, and enhance teachers' awareness of bullying situations on campus may be able to change the

major environmental factors contributing to bullying and reduce the level of bullying and victimization within a classroom.

The available classroom-based bullying interventions for elementary school students have had mixed results. One four-week bullying intervention had teachers incorporate eight instructional activities into their curriculum to teach students about bullying and the impact of bystander behavior on bullying incidents (Elenia Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2007). The program was designed to increase awareness of bullying and peer victimization, encourage students to reflect about their role in bullying that occurs on campus, and alter the way peer conflicts are solved through commitment to behavior change (Elenia Andreou et al., 2007; Eleni Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2008). The program was found to have a significant effect on attitudes pertaining to bullying, self-efficacy beliefs, and behavior change in the short term. In addition, an increase in defending behavior by bystanders was seen in treatment but not control schools. However, these changes were not maintained at the six month follow-up, suggesting that this intervention did not lead to long-term changes in behavior or attitudes (Elenia Andreou et al., 2007). Another bullying intervention program, Project Ploughshares Puppets for Peace (4 P's), utilizes a 30 minute puppet show to teach students conflict resolution skills and increase knowledge about bullying (Beran & Shapiro, 2005). The program explicitly taught four skills for students to use during bullying situations: "ignoring, saying stop, walking away, and getting help" (Beran & Shapiro, 2005; p. 703). However, this program did not increase students' knowledge about bullying or improve their skills for handling bullying situations. One major

limitation of this intervention is its brief duration (Beran & Shapiro, 2005). Longer interventions that provide students more opportunities to learn the skills they need as well as opportunities to practice them may be more efficacious than brief, one-time lessons for changing behavior. In general, evidence for the effectiveness of classroom only interventions is weaker than for interventions that are school-wide (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). This may be due to the intensity level of some classroom wide interventions or the fidelity of treatment (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

School-wide bullying interventions with classroom components have had success in changing bullying behavior on school campuses. Steps to Respect (Frey et al., 2005) is an intensive intervention which includes training for staff members to help improve staff responsiveness to bullying situations, 12 to 14 weeks of classroom lessons that incorporate skills training to change victim and bystander behavior, the use of children's literature in classroom lessons to facilitate discussions, and a parent component to increase awareness among parents about bullying (Frey et al., 2005). One evaluation of the Steps to Respect program examined changes in student report of staff and student behavior in response to bullying situations. Students reported higher levels of staff involvement in bullying situations after the Steps to Respect intervention; however no change in reported level of student aggression was seen. Students also reported that bystanders intervened more regularly in bullying situations (Frey et al., 2005). Greater improvements were seen in schools where teachers promoted skill generalization (Hirschstein, Van Schoiack Edstrom, Frey, Snell, & MacKenzie, 2007). This improved treatment quality and was related to observed decreases in anti-social playground

behavior (Hirschstein et al., 2007). These findings suggest that teachers' active involvement in bullying prevention programs is likely beneficial to outcomes. Classroom-based curriculums provide an opportunity for teachers to take an active role in intervention and skill generalization.

The KiVa Antibullying Program is another option for educators looking for empirically based classroom interventions (Karna et al., 2011). The KiVa program integrates both a universal, classroom-based component and a targeted, individualized approach. The universal component involves 20 hours of classroom-based intervention administered by the classroom teacher during which students are taught strategies for pro-social bystander behavior and students learn empathy for victims. In the individualized component, the KiVa team meets with bullies and victims to discuss how to better handle the bullying situation and to ensure that bullying has stopped. Additionally, victims are paired with high status peers who are taught to help support the victim. Successful implementation of the KiVa intervention requires intensive training for teachers and staff in order to ensure that staff respond consistently to bullying incidents and the teachers are able to implement the intervention with integrity. However, this training may be too resource intensive for some schools to implement. When the intervention is implemented, it has the potential to positively impact student behavior. One investigation of the effectiveness of the KiVa program found that students from Finnish schools that implemented the intervention reported reduced levels of bullying and victimization on their campus compared to schools that did not. Additionally, bystander interventions

increased in the short term, but this change was not maintained overtime (Karna et al., 2011).

Most of the efficacious classroom based interventions are either implemented school-wide or include a universal component. Additionally, they also frequently are implemented for long periods of time. Nevertheless, due to barriers such as limited financial resources or lack of school-wide buy-in that may prevent school-wide interventions from taking root or being implemented with fidelity, briefer classroom-wide interventions offer an attractive alternative that need to be investigated further as a means to begin addressing bullying within schools. Developing effective classroom-wide intervention programs for bullying that could be integrated into larger school-wide behavioral systems should be a focus of researchers.

Bibliotherapy as a Bullying Intervention

One possible methodology for integrating academics and a bullying intervention program is through bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is a unique treatment technique where literature is used as an avenue through which to discuss dysfunctional behavior and create self-awareness for change. Bibliotherapy has been found to be an effective treatment for childhood aggression in clinical settings (Betzael & Shechtman, 2010; Shechtman, 2006; Shechtman, 1999; Tillman, 1984). However, the effectiveness of bibliotherapy has not been studied in a natural classroom setting. Multi-component bullying prevention programs have incorporated bibliotherapy and found the program as a whole to be effective at reducing bullying behaviors (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011), but it has not been examined as a stand-alone treatment.

Bibliotherapy within a school context. While bibliotherapy includes a reading component and could integrate well into a classroom, it has not been extensively used in schools to address social concerns such as bullying. Researchers have suggested that it is important to incorporate bullying prevention and intervention programs into the regular curriculums at school (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009), and using bibliotherapy with children's literature in the classroom setting will allow for easier transfer of skills while also providing a way for the intervention to integrate into the existing reading and writing curriculum. Character education programs have been using literature as an avenue to foster dialogue on moral development with success (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005), and new intervention programs for bullying (e.g. Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011; Teglassi & Rothman, 2001) are including bibliotherapy techniques to address bystander and bullying behavior. However, research examining the use of literature to improve bullying, victim, and bystander behavior within schools has been severely limited.

Previous school-based prevention programs utilizing literature or more structured bibliotherapy programs have mainly focused on middle school students (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006; Holmgren, Lamb, Miller, & Werderitch, 2011). These programs encourage the use of bullying-focused literature during academic instruction of reading and writing to help integrate the intervention into the natural environment (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). One program used literature developmentally appropriate for adolescents to help foster discussions about bullying and develop empathy for individuals involved in bullying (Holmgren et al., 2011). During the two month implementation of this intervention, students were taught the definition of bullying and how to identify it, encouraged to

empathize with the characters being victimized in the stories they read, and provided an opportunity to practice appropriate peer conflict resolution skills through skits and role plays. Overall, the intervention had mixed effects on bullying attitudes and behaviors. While the intervention was found to have positive effects on the frequency of bullying within the classroom and the students' feelings of safety while at school, bullying in other environments, such as a the gym locker room, increased, and students were less likely to intervene on behalf of peers than before the intervention (Holmgren et al., 2011). Since bullying reaches its peak during the middle school transition (Pellegrini & Long, 2002), early intervention programs targeting elementary school students may help reduce the risk during the transition by teaching students more socially appropriate ways of interacting with peers and creating a climate in which bullying is seen as an unacceptable way to gain social standing. More empirical research is needed to examine the true validity of bibliotherapy techniques with elementary school populations.

STORIES. One intervention program that utilizes bibliotherapy to target bullying within an elementary school context is the *STORIES* program. Designed to be an early intervention program for students demonstrating aggressive behaviors, *STORIES* uses children's literature to provide a safe avenue for discussion of bullying situations and an opportunity to teach empathy and conflict resolution skills to students with identified aggressive behavioral concerns (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). Due to the negative group dynamics that can occur during treatment for aggression when the majority of the participants have externalizing or aggressive behavior concerns, the *STORIES* program incorporates pro-social peers into the intervention (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). While all

students in the class do participate, the class is broken up into small groups to help facilitate discussion. These groups contain four to six children each and within those groups, one or two students have been identified by the teacher or school administrator as aggressive (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). The students identified as aggressive are not specifically targeted during the small group work; all students participate to the same degree within the groups (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). One study that examined the STORIES program found children identified as aggressive in both the treatment and control groups showed an increase in externalizing behaviors (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). However, the increase was significantly less for those involved in the intervention (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). In addition to the limited empirical support, a challenge within the STORIES program is the small group structure. This implementation strategy requires additional resources to work with smaller groups of children at a time, as opposed to targeting the entire classroom in a single session.

WITS program. Another program that incorporates the teaching of new strategies for dealing with peer conflict through dialogue around children's literature is the WITS program. The WITS program is a whole school intervention that uses children's literature as an avenue through which to discuss bullying situations and strategies for handling them (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011). The WITS program teaches four skills for handling peer conflict and bullying ("walk away," "ignore," "talk it out," and "seek help") and creates expectations surrounding how bullying situations will be handled. Parents, community leaders, and teachers are encouraged to promote the use of these strategies in a variety of settings. Community leaders, specifically police officers, are

actively involved in the implementation of WITS. During a school-wide assembly, police officers participate in the initial implementation of WITS by teaching students about the program and encouraging them to pledge to use their WITS. Parents are provided with resources and materials to help them reinforce the use of WITS strategies at home and enable them to have discussions with their children about effective peer conflict resolution strategies.

A study of the WITS primary program found more rapid declines in victimization at schools implementing WITS compared to control schools (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011). A longitudinal evaluation of WITS found significant declines in victimization over a six year period (Hoglund, Hosan, & Leadbeater, 2012). However, researchers are still unsure of which components or combination of components contribute to its effectiveness (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011). Additionally, the WITS program does not explicitly teach bystanders to seek help for others they see being victimized (Hoglund et al., 2012), and bystander behavior can moderate the risk of victimization of students who are already heightened risk due to social anxiety or peer rejection (Kärnä, Voeten, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2010). Classrooms in which bystanders defend victims have a lower the risk of victimization for at-risk students, while classrooms in which bystanders support the bully heighten the risk of victimization (Kärnä et al., 2010).

Explicit Instruction, Modeling, and Role Playing of New Skills

While bibliotherapy based programs provide a framework through which to discuss bullying and create insights into the behavior, they do not provide students with

direct instruction on how to react to bullying. Students being victimized or involved as bystanders may need to be explicitly taught new, appropriate strategies to use in the bullying situations they encounter. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory posits that individuals learn how to interact in social situations through observational learning or direct instruction. By observing how others behave and how people in their environment respond to their behavior, individuals are able to learn new behaviors and the contexts in which to use them (Bandura, 1977).

Explicit instruction and modeling of social skills has been used with success to teach children struggling with peer relationships new skills (Elliott & Gresham, 1993). However, much of the research in this area has been done with students with disabilities, and research is limited in other populations. Other programs have used Bandura's social learning theory to develop missing social skills in all students. For example, the Skillstreaming program, which integrates Bandura's social learning theory into its steps for social skills training: explicit instruction, modeling, and role playing to provide opportunities for practice (Goldstein, 2004). Explicitly teaching bystanders skills to address bullying using instruction and modeling has been found to positively affect bystander behavior (Ross & Horner, 2013). In Bully Prevention – Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS), bystanders and victims are taught to utilize hand signals and verbal prompts to signify to an aggressor to stop their behavior and are encouraged to report bullying to teachers and staff (Ross & Horner, 2009). Teachers and staff are trained to respond to bullying situations in a consistent manner and to reinforce students who effectively utilize the hand signals and verbal prompts. By changing bystander, victim,

and staff behavior, BP-PBS has been able to successfully reduce incidences of bullying behavior at elementary schools (Ross & Horner, 2009). While this research shows promise for the effectiveness of explicit behavioral instruction, BP-PBS intervention requires buy-in from all staff to ensure that the behaviors taught are reinforced consistently and an existing PBS framework within the school to be successful.

The Bullying Literature Project

Both explicit skills instruction and bibliotherapy appear to be beneficial additions to a bullying intervention; however, there are limitations to using both in isolation. While the BP-PBS provides support for the use of behavior instruction when targeting bullying, it is a school-wide intervention that requires buy-in from all staff to be successful (Ross & Horner, 2009). In an existing PBS framework, the BP-PBS may work well, but it may not be feasible for many schools. Additionally, while the WITS (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011) and the STORIES (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001) programs provide some evidence for the efficacy of bibliotherapy within a school, both have limitations. The STORIES program has limited empirical evidence; only one study is currently available on the intervention (Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). While WITS is an effective school-wide intervention for bullying (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011), it is multi-component and the effectiveness of each component has not been examined. Additionally, the WITS program does not emphasize modeling of the new skills, teach bystanders how to respond appropriately to bullying, or provide opportunities for the students to practice the skills in a safe environment. It remains unclear which components of the program are necessary for behavior change and have the most influence on its

effectiveness. In order to address the limitations of previous bullying intervention programs, the Bullying Literature Project (BLP) integrates explicit instruction and modeling of behavioral strategies with bibliotherapy to help foster dialogue regarding bullying. It is designed to create insights regarding the negative impact of bullying behavior and teach skills for handling bullying situations. The BLP teaches students on how to use each of the four key WITS strategies (walk away, ignore, talk it out, and seek help) as well as additional techniques to help students handle bullying. These include using humor to deflect hurtful comments, strategies for coping with anger, and ways for bystanders to intervene when they witness bullying. Additionally, the BLP provides an opportunity for students to practice the new skills during role playing activities. Finally, the BLP is designed to integrate easily into a classroom setting while using research-based methods for teaching effective behavior for how to handle bullying situations on campus.

Current Study

In response to the need for low cost, effective bullying intervention programs, the BLP was developed to provide teachers and school psychologists with a realistic and cost-effective intervention designed to target harmful bystander and victim behavior while providing all students skills to handle peer conflicts. This study will seek to examine the efficacy of the BLP as a tool to help schools reduce bullying and victimization. Specifically, this study will answer four primary research questions: (a). To what extent does the BLP increase prosocial behavior among elementary school students? (b). To what extent does the BLP change attitudes regarding bullying? (c). To what extent

does the BLP reduce bullying participation and victimization from student self-report and teacher report? (d). To what extent does the BLP change bystander and victim behavior?

Methods

Participants

Students in two third and four fourth grade classrooms from two elementary schools in one Southern California school district were recruited for participation in this study. The two third grade classrooms were recruited from school A (n=55) and the four fourth grade classrooms were recruited from school B (n=112). The demographics of both schools were similar; the majority of the students in the district are from minority groups and qualify for free or reduced lunch. The six teachers were provided with \$30 gift cards for their participation in the study; no incentives were provided to students for their participation. A total of 167 students were recruited for participation in the study. Consent forms were provided in both Spanish and English. A total of 158 students returned consent forms and participated in the study. A breakdown of the students included in the final analysis can be found in figure 1. The majority of the students were males (53.8% male; 46.2% female) and Hispanic. During the course of intervention, three students moved out of the district and others received differentiated academic instruction during the intervention period. Their data was removed prior to the analysis. Figure 1 displays the flow of participants from randomization to post-test. Of the students who participated fully, 45 were in third grade and 103 were in fourth grade. The mean age of students was 8.97 years ($SD = .70$ years). The ethnic breakdown of the participants is as

follows: 85.3% Hispanic/Latino, 4.0% African American, .7% Asian, and 9.0% Caucasian.

Interventionists

Two interventionists administered the intervention at each school. The primary investigator served as one interventionist at school A, a school psychology faculty member and licensed psychologist acted as an interventionist at school B, and a graduate student in school psychology served as the second interventionist at schools A and B. The primary investigator and the licensed psychologist developed and piloted the intervention during the 2013-14 school year. The licensed psychologist provided training to the third interventionist prior to beginning intervention. The licensed psychologist provided supervision to the two interventionists weekly throughout the intervention (at least 30 minutes per week). Treatment fidelity was examined using a researcher-developed treatment fidelity checklist. Overall treatment fidelity was 98.97%.

Procedure

The six classrooms were randomly assigned to either a waitlist control or treatment condition. Two of the four fourth grade classrooms from school B served as the waitlist control classrooms. All six classrooms participated in the pre-test and post-test surveys; however the control classrooms received standard classroom instruction during the intervention period while the treatment classroom received 5 weeks of the BLP intervention. The pre-test occurred approximately one month before the start of the intervention due to winter break, and the post-test was administered the week following the final session of intervention. The teachers of both the control and treatment

classrooms also completed pre-test and post-test surveys. The measures used on the surveys were described below.

Intervention curriculum. The BLP is a scripted intervention program that utilizes children's books to foster discussion about bullying and victimization and provides opportunities for students to develop and practice new skills to use in bullying situations. The BLP is a five session intervention designed to take place over five weeks with one session per week; each session lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. During each session, students read one book on bullying (e.g. *Bully Beans*, *Just Kidding*, *Recess Queen*, *Say Something*, and *The Juice Box Bully*) and were asked scripted discussion questions throughout the story. The discussion questions were designed to highlight key points in the story, help students identify feelings in themselves and others, promote positive bystander behavior, change negative attitudes regarding bullying, and emphasize effective ways to handle bullying and peer conflict. After the story, students participated in writing activities to reinforce the skills taught as well as role played effective solutions to handle bullying. Strategies for addressing bullying were explicitly taught to students through interventionist and peer role play, and students were provided opportunities to practice the strategies in their activities. Table 1 shows an overview of the BLP curriculum.

Measures

Student report of bullying and victimization. Student self-report of bullying and victimization was assessed using *The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale-Victimization* and *The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale-Perpetration-Student Version*

(VPBS; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008; Radliff, Wang, & Swearer, 2015). Both the bullying and the victimization subscale includes 11 questions answered on a five point likert-type scale (“1” = never; “5” = always) designed to target both physical and verbal/relational types of bullying. The victimization subscale includes questions such as “They called me names” and “They wouldn’t let me be a part of the group” to assess verbal and relational victimization, and “They pushed or shoved me” to assess physical victimization. The bullying subscale includes “I said mean things about him/her” for verbal/relational bullying, and “I broke his/her things” to measure physical bullying. The α for both of these measures were high. The victimization scale had an α of .86 at pre-test, and .85 at post-test. The α for the physical victimization subscale was .70 at pre-test and .69 at post-test. The verbal/relational victimization subscale had an α of .75 at pre-test and .77 at post-test. The bullying subscale’s α was .90 at pre-test and .85 at post-test. Both bullying subscales also had adequate reliability with an α of .67 at pre-test and .65 at post-test for the physical bullying subscale and an α of .86 at pre-test and .81 at post-test for the verbal/relational bullying subscale. The pre-test mean for the total bullying scale were found to significantly correlate with office discipline referrals ($r = .340, p < .01$), suggesting that the subscale is capturing students’ problem behaviors at school.

Teacher report of bullying and victimization. *The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale-Victimization* and *The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale-Perpetration-Teacher Version* was used to measure teacher report of student involvement in bullying as a victim or a bully (VPBS; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008; Radliff, Wang, & Swearer, 2015). Similar to the student version, both subscales included 11 items to

assess on a 5-point likert-type scale (“1” = never; “5” = always) with questions which targeted both physical and verbal/relational involvement in bullying. The internal consistency of these subscales was examined using α , and was found to be high for both ($\alpha = .95$ for both the bullying and victimization subscales at pre-test; $\alpha = .89$ for the victimization subscale at post-test; $\alpha = .93$ for the bullying subscale at post-test). The bullying subscale pre-test scores significantly correlated with office discipline referrals ($r = .623, p < .01$), providing evidence for this measure’s validity.

Bystander and victim behavior. Bystander and victim behavior were assessed using two researcher-created scales which asked about how students responded to bullying situations. The positive coping with bullying scale contains 5 items measured on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from “Never” to “Always.” The scale asked how often students exhibited certain behaviors when they faced victimization, including “walk away,” “physically fight back,” and “seek help.” The internal consistency (α) of the positive coping with bullying scale was found to be .81 at pre-test and .83 at post-test. The bystander defending behavior scale also contains 4 items measured on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from “Never” to “Always.” This measure asked how often the subject exhibits certain behaviors when they witness other students being victimized, including “tell a teacher,” and “ask the bully to stop”. For the present study, the α ranged between .78 at pre-test and .78 at post-test.

Attitudes related to bullying. A subscale from *The Bully Survey-Student Version* (BYS-S) was used to examine students’ attitudes towards bullying behaviors (Swearer & Cary, 2003). This 15 item used a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Totally False”

to “Totally True” to assess attitudes related to bullying. The pro-bullying attitudes subscale includes 9 items; sample items included “Bullying is good for wimpy kids” and “Bullies are popular.” The α of this subscale is .62 at pre-test and .52 at post-test. The anti-bullying attitudes subscale has 6 items, including “Bullying hurts kids,” and “Bullying is a problem for kids.” This subscale was found to an α of .89 at pre-test and .85 at post-test.

Pro-social behavior. Teachers were asked to report on students’ levels of pro-social behavior using the *Children’s Social Behavior Scale—Teacher Form* (CSBS-TF; Crick, 1996). This four item 5-point Likert-type scale (*never true, seldom true, sometimes true, often true, and almost always true*) includes questions such as “This child says supportive things to peers,” and “This child is kind to peers.” This previously validated measure has been found to have high reliability ($\alpha = .93$) and validity (e.g., Crick, 1996). The α of the scale for this study was .96 at pre-test and .97 at post-test.

Social validity. Students in the treatment classroom completed a social validity scale to assess the acceptability and significance of the intervention. The student social validity scale was assessed using a five item 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Sample items include “I like the way this intervention was taught,” and “I learned useful skills to improve my interaction with peers.” Teachers of the treatment classrooms also completed a nine item social validity scale measured on 6-point Likert-type scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Sample items on the teacher version include “I have noticed a change in my students’ behavior since beginning this intervention,” and “My students learned useful

skills to improve their interactions with peers.” Both social validity measures were modified based on a social validity scale created by Castro-Olivo (2014). The α was .92 for the student scale and .78 for the teacher scale.

Analysis

In order to evaluate the change in bullying and victimization over time, a repeated measures analysis of variance technique were used to compare pre-test and post-test scores on the variables of interest. After controlling for gender and grade, treatment by time interactions were examined to evaluate if the treatment had a significant impact on bullying behavior, victimization, attitudes towards bullying, or pro-social behavior over time.

Results

The descriptive statistics for the outcome variables can be found in table 2. Overall, 56.5% of students reported any victimization at pre-test and 39.5% of students reported any level of bullying behaviors at pre-test. Teachers reported that 29.8% of their students had experienced victimization and 23.2% of their students had ever bullied others at pre-test. At post-test, 63.8% of students reported being victimized at any level, and 35.6% reported any bullying behaviors. At post-test, 16.8% of students had been victimized and 22.1% of students had bullied others according to teacher report.

Changes in Pro-Social Behavior

After controlling for gender and grade, significant differences were found in teacher reports of student pro-social behavior; a treatment by time interaction revealed significant differences between treatment and control classrooms, $F(142) = 4.48, p = .04$.

Figure 2 shows this interaction effect. Teachers in the control classrooms reported that their students showed a decrease in pro-social behavior over time ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .86$ at pre-test; $M = 3.68$, $SD = .96$ at post-test), while teachers in treatment classrooms reported an increase in pro-social behavior from pre-test ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .97$) to post-test ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .97$). The treatment and control classrooms' pre-test ratings of pro-social behavior were not significantly different, $t(147) = -1.67$, $p = .10$.

Changes in Attitudes Related to Bullying

Treatment effects were found for changes in pro-bullying attitudes, $F(1, 125) = 2.01$, $p = .045$. After controlling for gender and grade, no change from pre-test to post-test was seen in the students in the treatment condition ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .58$ at pre-test; $M = 1.82$, $SD = .54$ at post-test), while an increase in pro-bullying attitudes was found for students in the control classrooms ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .62$ at pre-test; $M = 2.02$, $SD = .88$ at post-test). Figure 3 shows this interaction effect. Students in the treatment classroom did not significantly differ from students in the control classroom during the pre-test, $t(127) = .91$, $p = .27$. After controlling for gender and grade, no time by treatment interaction effect was found for anti-bullying attitudes, $F(1, 125) = .43$, $p = .51$. Students in both the treatment classrooms ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.01$ at pre-test; $M = 4.35$, $SD = .95$ at post-test) and in the control classrooms ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.17$ at pre-test; $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.04$ at post-test) reported an increase in anti-bullying attitudes.

Victimization and Bullying Behavior

Teacher report. A repeated measures analysis of variance revealed no significant differences in total bullying perpetration over time for either the treatment or the control

classrooms, $F(1, 142) = .16, p = .69$. After controlling for gender and grade, no significant time by treatment interaction was found, $F(1, 142) = .07, p = .93$. Additionally, no differences were found in levels of physical bullying, $F(1, 142) = .18, p = .67$, or levels of verbal/relational bullying between the students in the control and treatment classrooms, $F(1, 142) = .002, p = .96$.

An analysis of variance was also conducted to examine the effects of intervention on teacher reported student victimization. After controlling for gender and grade, no treatment effects were found for teacher reported total victimization, $F(1, 142) = .02, p = .90$, verbal/relational victimization, $F(1, 142) = .001, p = .974$, or physical victimization, $F(1, 142) = .79, p = .39$. The intervention did not have a significant impact on teacher reports of bullying or victimization.

Student report. After controlling for gender and grade, the results of a repeated measures ANOVA revealed no significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores of victimization for students in the treatment versus the control conditions, $F(1, 127) = .13, p = .71$. Students in the treatment classrooms did not show a significant decrease in physical, $F(1, 125) = .32, p = .57$, or verbal/relational victimization, $F(1, 127) = .17, p = .69$, compared to the students in the control classrooms. Additionally, no significant treatment effects were seen for self-report of bullying behavior as well, $F(1, 125) = .003, p = .95$. After controlling for gender and grade, no significant treatment effects were found for students' self-report of physical bullying, $F(1, 125) = .04, p = .84$, or verbal/relational bullying, $F(1, 125) = .04, p = .84$.

Changes in Victim and Bystander Behavior

An increase in the use of appropriate behavioral strategies for victimization was reported by students in both the treatment ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.08$ at pre-test; $M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.34$ at post-test) and the control classrooms ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 1.00$ at pre-test; $M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.12$ at post-test). However, after controlling for gender and grade, no significant time by treatment interaction was found for victim coping behavior, $F(1, 127) = 1.60$, $p = .21$. When victimized, students in the treatment conditions did not significantly differ in their use of effective coping strategies over time compared to students in the control condition. When examining bystander behavior, students in the treatment conditions did not significantly differ in their use of bystander defending strategies over time compared to students in the control conditions, $F(1, 127) = .15$, $p = .69$. While there was no significant treatment by time interaction after controlling for grade and gender, students in both the treatment ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.18$ at pre-test; $M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.33$ at post-test) and the control conditions ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.03$ at pre-test; $M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.30$ at post-test) did report an increase in the use of bystander defending behavior from pre-test to post-test.

Social Validity

Overall, the intervention was found to have a high social validity. For students, the mean social validity was 3.41 ($SD = .56$) on a four-point scale. Teachers' mean social validity score was 5.47 ($SD = .49$) on a six-point scale. All teachers reported being highly satisfied with the intervention, and 85.7% of students reported they were, on average, satisfied with the impact and delivery of the intervention.

Discussion

As schools continue to search for effective programs for combatting bullying, there remains a need for high quality, cost-efficient, and effective bullying intervention programs. The results of this study suggest that the BLP offers schools an inexpensive and effective way to improve pro-social behavior and prevent harmful attitude change pertaining to bullying. This study strengthens the existing evidence for the use of bibliotherapy in bullying interventions. Similar to the WITS program (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011), the BLP had a significant impact on some of the social outcomes of interest. First, students in the treatment classrooms were reported by their teachers to have significant increases in pro-social behavior compared to their peers in control classrooms. The BLP focuses on teaching students effective strategies for dealing with bullying and how to be a positive bystander and defend the victim during bullying incidents. The BLP also provides students with an opportunity to discuss how to be a good friend and how to support students who are bullied or left out of social situations. These results suggest that the discussions and skills trainings in BLP have a significant impact on students' pro-social behavior.

Additionally, after controlling for the effects of gender and grade level, students in the treatment classrooms did not report the same increase in endorsement of pro-bullying attitudes as students in control classrooms did. Previous research has found that younger students endorse fewer victim blaming attitudes than older students (Gini, Pozzoli, Borhit, & Franzoni, 2008) and that bullying behavior increases as students approach middle school in an attempt to establish social dominance (Pellegrini & Long,

2002). The increase in pro-bullying attitudes seen in the control classroom confirm this developmental trend. The consistency of bullying attitudes in the treatment classrooms suggests that the BLP had a significant impact on this outcome, especially in light of the equivalency of the treatment and control conditions at pre-test. During the course of the intervention, students have an opportunity to explore feelings related to bullying and discuss the negative ramifications of bullying perpetration. These discussions may have prevented the natural increase in harmful, pro-bullying attitudes over time (Gini et al., 2008). Previous research has found a relationship between pro-bullying attitudes and levels of bullying behavior (Doll et al., 2011). Since the theory of planned behavior finds that attitudes towards a behavior are associated with performing it (Ajzen, 1991), preventing these pro-bullying attitudes from increasing may overtime prevent bullying behaviors from increasing. Overall, the BLP was found to be effective in improving pro-social behavior among students and preventing pro-bullying attitudes from increasing.

However, the BLP, like several other previous bullying interventions (e.g. Beran & Shapiro, 2005, Elenia Andrieou et al., 2007) did not show significant impacts on bullying behaviors and victimization. No treatment effects were found for student self-report of bullying perpetration or victimization. Additionally, no significant differences were seen between the treatment condition and the control condition for teacher report of bullying perpetration and victimization. The intervention also did not have an effect on the use of effective behavioral strategies by bystanders or victims. Although both the treatment and the control classrooms reported increases in use of defending behavior for bystanders and effective coping strategies for victims when handling bullying, the

difference was not significant. One possible reason for the lack of significant behavior change is that the sample in this study had a low base rate of bullying and victimization. Only 56.5% of students reported any victimization at the pre-test and most students' reported no or rare instances of victimization. Less than 40% of students reported bullying other students at pre-test. The low frequencies of these behaviors at pre-test could have caused floor effects. Additionally, the post-test for this study occurred immediately after the intervention was completed. The full effects of the intervention, especially in terms of behavior change, may not have been realized at post-test. With the significant results found for pro-bullying attitudes, behavior differences between the treatment and control classrooms may be seen if given sufficient time. A follow-up assessment in future studies would help examine the long-term impacts of the BLP as well as possibly reveal any behavior change that may have required additional time to occur.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the use of quasi-experimental design. Rather than randomizing at the student level, classrooms were randomly assigned to the treatment or the control condition. Given that some students in the treatment and control classrooms were in the same school and same grade, discussion of the intervention may have occurred. Since students in both the control and treatment classroom showed an increase in the use of positive strategies for handling bullying, it is possible that students from the treatment classrooms were using or discussing the strategies taught with students in the control classroom.

This study also relied on student and teacher report for data. While behavioral ratings from two sources were gathered, each had its limitations. First, students may not be able to accurately reflect on their experiences to identify bullying when it occurs or be willing to report bullying other students. Additionally, teachers may not witness all bullying that occurs, especially relational bullying, and therefore be unable to accurately report bullying and victimization rates for their students. Previous research has found that teachers may be biased in their perceptions of which students are bullied (Doll et al., 2011; Holt et al., 2011), further impacting the reliability of their report. Future studies may benefit from using direct behavioral observations to examine changes in bullying behavior. Studies that have relied on behavioral observations to examine changes in bullying behavior have been successful at identifying changes in bullying behavior (i.e., Ross & Horner, 2009). The intervention was also relatively short (i.e. 5 sessions at 30 to 45 minutes each); a longer intervention and more consistent reinforcement of the behavioral strategies taught may have led to greater behavior change (e.g., Merrell et al., 2008). Future studies could consider adding additional sessions and teacher training to encourage teachers to reinforce the use of the strategies taught.

Implications for Practice

Given the long term impact of bullying on academic and behavioral outcomes for students, effective bullying prevention programs are in high demand. Overall, the BLP shows promise for improving attitudes related to bullying and increasing pro-social behavior. The BLP provides educators with a low cost and efficient way to integrate bullying prevention into the academic curriculum.

While some curriculum changes, such as increasing the number of sessions and providing reinforcement for using the strategies taught, may enhance the BLP, this study confirmed that even as a brief, classwide intervention the BLP can be effective at increasing pro-social behavior and preventing harmful, pro-bullying attitudes from developing. Because of the brief nature of the BLP and the structured, scripted curriculum, school psychologists, counselors, or teachers could act as the interventionist, depending on available resources. School psychologists whose schools have moved to a multi-tiered support system for behavioral concerns may be able to implement the BLP as a tier 1 intervention to help improve pro-social behaviors and prevent pro-bullying attitudes from increasing. Previous research suggests universal interventions are most effective at reducing bullying behaviors (Merrell et al., 2008; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007), and the BLP could be integrated into classrooms school-wide to provide a universal level of bullying prevention support. School psychologists, who may have limited time to provide mental health support, could operate as a consultant for teachers looking to implement the BLP in their classrooms. The BLP should be examined by schools looking to prevent bullying behavior from developing and could be implemented easily within the existing curriculum. The BLP provides a new, efficient intervention for educators to consider as they look to combat bullying.

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Table 1

Overview of the BLP Curriculum

| Session | Book and Author | Skills Targeted | Sample Discussion Questions | Activities |
|---------|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | <i>Bully Beans</i> by Julia Cook | Introduce WITS; different feelings; empathy for students being victimized | “How did kids feel when Bobbette was mean to them?” “Was there anything special about the beans? What did they represent?” | WITS bookmark; WITS promise; role playing to practice WITS strategies |
| 2 | <i>Just Kidding</i> by Trudy Ludwig | Use of humor when bullied; strategies to calm down; “tattling” versus seeking help | “When do you think teasing is okay and when is it not?” “When Dad was talking to D.J., he was too angry to answer. What helped him to calm down in the story? What can you do to calm down when you feel too angry to talk to an adult about teasing or bullying?” | Cartoon strip with bullying situations; role playing the cartoons to practice strategies |
| 3 | <i>Recess Queen</i> by Alexis O’neill | How to intervene as a bystander; including others | “If Mean Jean pushed or said something mean to Katie Sue when she invited her to play, what would you do?” “What can you do to help when you see a Recess Queen or Recess King at school?” | Completing stories regarding bullying situations; role playing how to respond as a victim and a bystander |
| 4 | <i>Say Something</i> by Peggy Moss | Empathy for students being victimized: how to stand up for others | “Why are they laughing? Is it okay to laugh when other students are being made fun of? How does it [laughing] make the girl feel?” | Group poster of different strategies |
| 5 | <i>The Juice Box Bully</i> by Bob Sornson and Maria Dismondy | Respecting others’ differences; appropriate bystander behavior | “Ruby said ‘when someone acts hurtfully, we all speak up.’ What can you say when you want to speak up?” | Story Booklet of all the strategies learned; role play selected scenes from booklet |

Note: The four WITS strategies and other strategies are reviewed at the beginning of sessions 2 through 5; students are provided an opportunity to share how they used their WITS or other strategies during the previous week and are praised for using strategies; all students in the class make a pledge to use their strategies at the end of every session

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Student Measures

| Measure | | Control | | Treatment | | Total | |
|--------------------------|------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| | | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> |
| Coping with Bullying | Pre | 1.65 | 1.00 | 2.01 | 1.08 | 1.89 | 1.06 |
| | Post | 1.87 | 1.12 | 2.46 | 1.34 | 2.25 | 1.29 |
| Bystander Defending | Pre | 1.88 | 1.03 | 2.22 | 1.18 | 2.10 | 1.14 |
| | Post | 2.13 | 1.30 | 2.6 | 1.33 | 2.44 | 1.33 |
| Victimization | | | | | | | |
| Verbal/Relational | Pre | 1.39 | 0.64 | 1.47 | 0.57 | 1.44 | 0.59 |
| | Post | 1.54 | 0.68 | 1.54 | 0.66 | 1.54 | 0.66 |
| Physical | Pre | 1.23 | 0.46 | 1.29 | 0.46 | 1.27 | 0.46 |
| | Post | 1.43 | 0.66 | 1.35 | 0.54 | 1.38 | 0.59 |
| Total | Pre | 1.37 | 0.61 | 1.41 | 0.47 | 1.39 | 0.52 |
| | Post | 1.5 | 0.62 | 1.47 | 0.57 | 1.48 | 0.59 |
| Bullying Behavior | | | | | | | |
| Verbal/Relational | Pre | 1.16 | 0.26 | 1.28 | 0.52 | 1.24 | 0.45 |
| | Post | 1.16 | 0.31 | 1.22 | 0.44 | 1.20 | 0.40 |
| Physical | Pre | 1.14 | 0.39 | 1.18 | 0.45 | 1.17 | 0.43 |
| | Post | 1.14 | 0.36 | 1.2 | 0.44 | 1.18 | 0.42 |
| Total | Pre | 1.16 | 0.27 | 1.25 | 0.47 | 1.21 | 0.41 |
| | Post | 1.15 | 0.29 | 1.22 | 0.42 | 1.19 | 0.38 |
| Attitudes | | | | | | | |
| Pro-Bullying | Pre | 1.72 | 0.62 | 1.82 | 0.59 | 1.78 | 0.60 |
| | Post | 2.02 | 0.88 | 1.82 | 0.54 | 1.89 | 0.68 |
| Anti-Bullying | Pre | 4.14 | 1.17 | 4.28 | 1.1 | 4.23 | 1.13 |
| | Post | 4.33 | 1.04 | 4.35 | 0.95 | 4.34 | 0.98 |

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Measures

| Measure | | Control | | Treatment | | Total | |
|----------------------|------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Pro-Social Behavior | Pre | 3.93 | 0.86 | 3.66 | 0.97 | 3.76 | 0.94 |
| | Post | 3.68 | 0.96 | 3.99 | 0.97 | 3.88 | 0.97 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | | |
| Victimization | | | | | | | |
| Verbal/Relational | Pre | 1.51 | 0.51 | 1.18 | 0.67 | 1.30 | 0.63 |
| | Post | 1.25 | 0.55 | 1.13 | 0.39 | 1.17 | 0.45 |
| Physical | Pre | 1.15 | 0.29 | 1.15 | 0.65 | 1.15 | 0.55 |
| | Post | 1.04 | 0.21 | 1.04 | 0.23 | 1.04 | 0.22 |
| Total | Pre | 1.38 | 0.40 | 1.17 | 0.65 | 1.24 | 0.58 |
| | Post | 1.17 | 0.40 | 1.10 | 0.29 | 1.12 | 0.34 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | | |
| Bullying | | | | | | | |
| Verbal/Relational | Pre | 1.43 | 0.54 | 1.12 | 0.50 | 1.23 | 0.54 |
| | Post | 1.53 | 0.80 | 1.24 | 0.64 | 1.34 | 0.72 |
| Physical | Pre | 1.12 | 0.24 | 1.09 | 0.47 | 1.10 | 0.40 |
| | Post | 1.19 | 0.47 | 1.12 | 0.47 | 1.14 | 0.47 |
| Total | Pre | 1.32 | 0.42 | 1.11 | 0.49 | 1.18 | 0.47 |
| | Post | 1.41 | 0.65 | 1.19 | 0.55 | 1.27 | 0.60 |

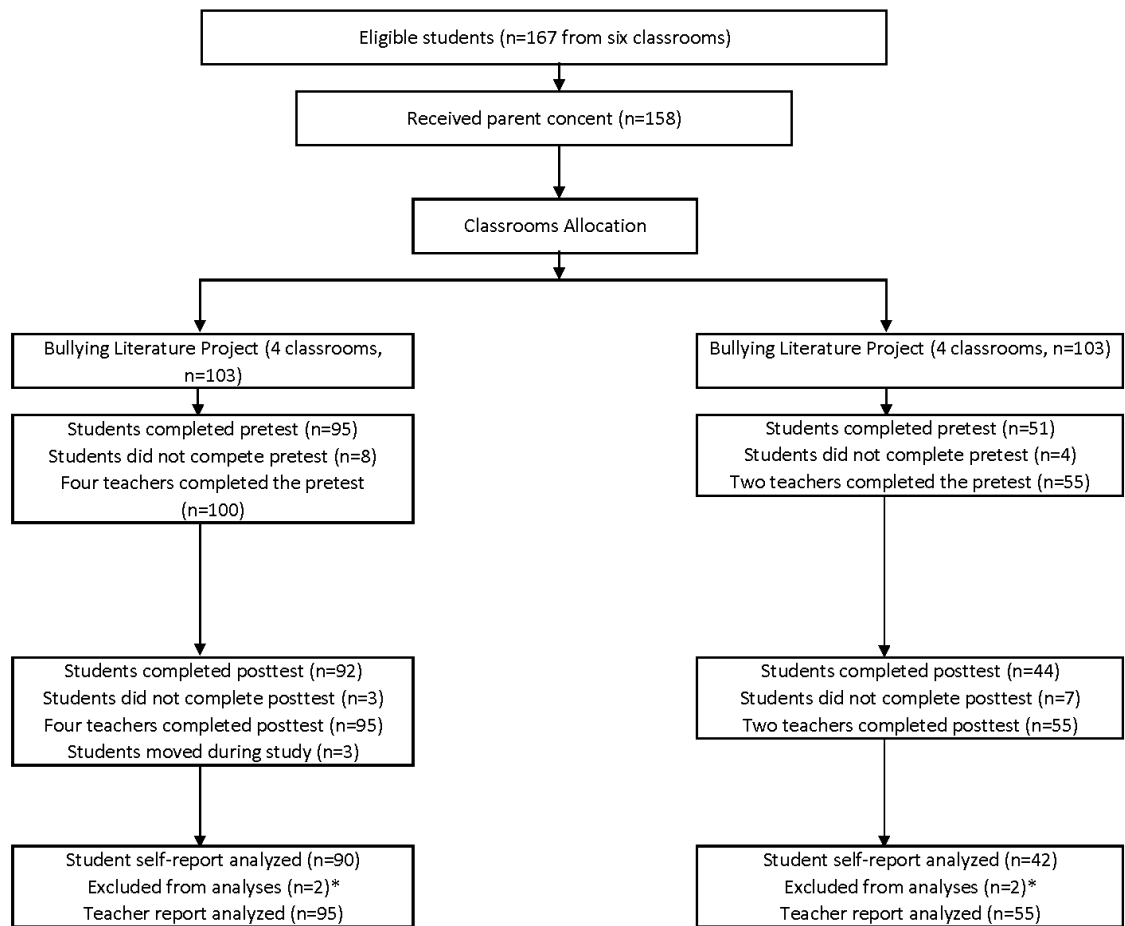


Figure 1. Participants flow from randomization through posttest assessment.

* Two students' data for both self-report and teacher-report were excluded from analysis because they did not attend the intervention consistently. Two students' self-report data were excluded from analysis because they reported that they were not "telling truth in this survey."

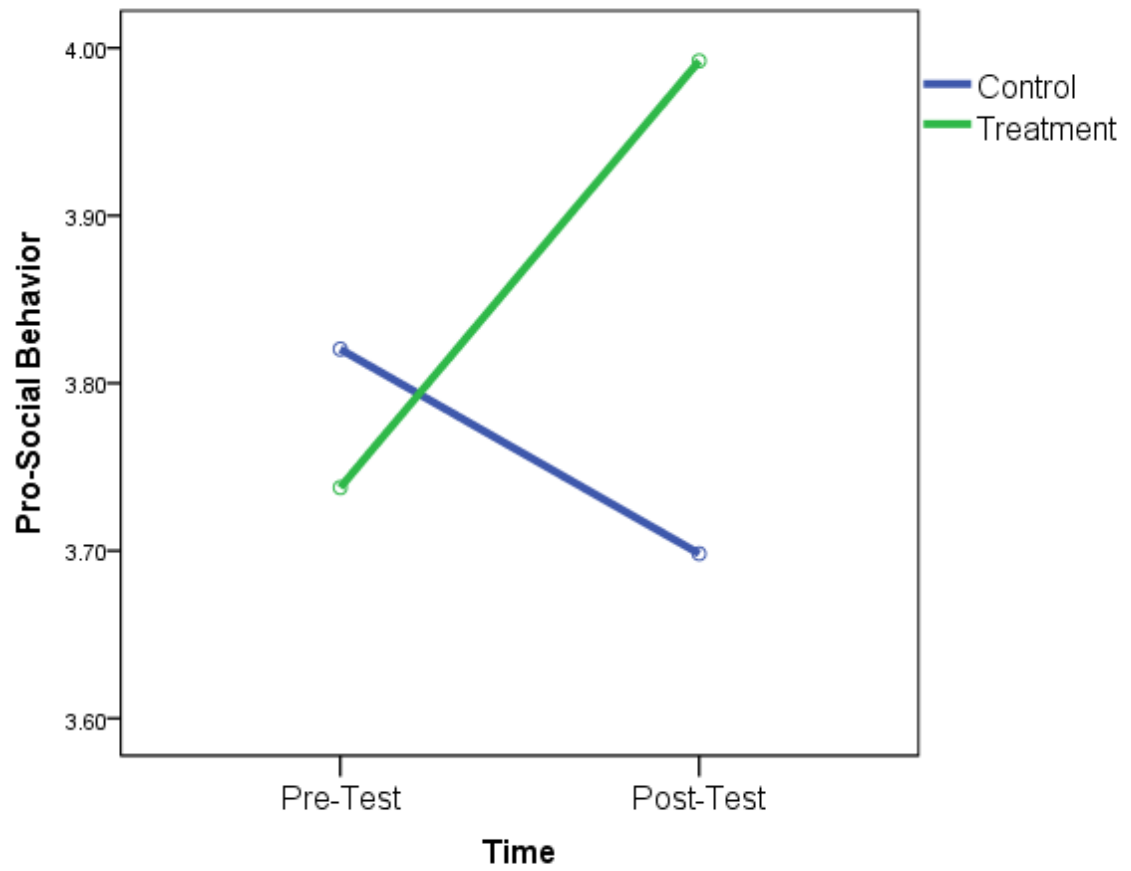


Figure 2. Interaction Effect for Pro-Social Behavior

*Note: Covariates appearing in the model were evaluated at the following values: Gender = 1.63, Grade = 3.71

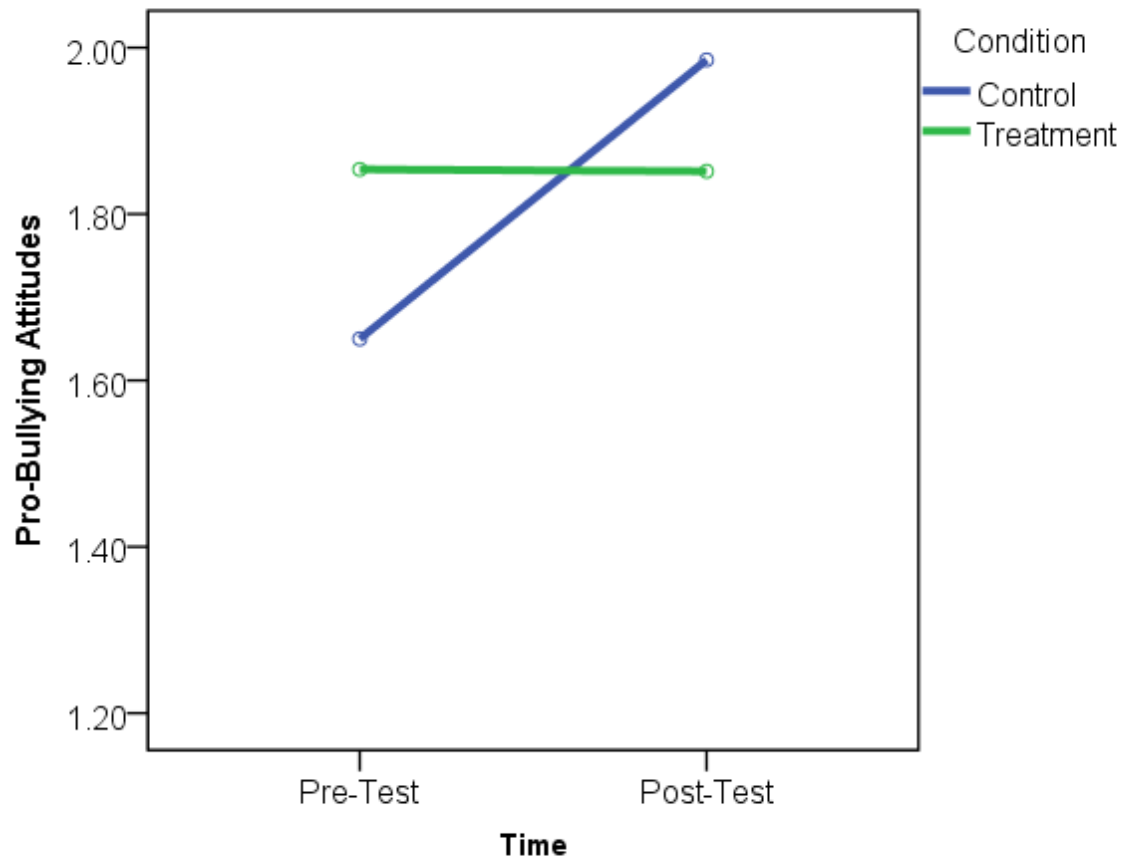


Figure 3. Interaction Effect for Pro-Bullying Attitudes

*Note: Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Grade = 3.70, Gender = 1.46