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FORGIVENESS EDUCATION AND BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION: BENEFITS FOR BULLIES, VICTIMS AND SCHOOLS

by Amy Carlon, Suzanne Freedman and Nicole Skaar

1. Introduction

Over the past 50 years, attitudes toward incidences of bullying in the schools have shifted significantly. Previously, bullying was seen as an expected and normal part of a child's development and school experience. Some even believed bullying wasn't harmful, that it assisted in character-building, and was simply "part of growing up" (Smith & Brain, 2000, p. 3). In recent decades, however, the negative effects of bullying have been more widely recognized, and there is growing acceptance that experiences of bullying often lead to negative outcomes, such as poor physical and psychological health, for those who are victimized (Due et al., 2005). Many schools are now taking a closer look at the dynamics of the school environment that contribute to bullying behavior, and are beginning to introduce anti-bullying interventions on a system level. Research has shown that bullying interventions are most successful in the school when they are implemented on an individual, class, and whole-school level (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005). Salmivalli et al. (2005) claimed that when the structure and aims of an intervention within the school are clear, teachers and administrators are able to implement it more faithfully, which results in a greater reduction of bullying activity. There is also growing interest in examining the characteristics of bullies and victims in order to identify which experiences and qualities are associated with increased bullying behavior, and furthermore, use this knowledge to create interventions that effectively reduce bullying incidents in schools. Thus, in addition to focusing on why kids bully, we also need to focus on how we can help kids who bully change their behavior.

While schools push to implement anti-bullying campaigns, the bullies themselves are often "lost in the mix." After the effort has been made to "eradicate" their behaviors, there is little or no attention paid to how the bullies can begin to reintegrate themselves into the social framework of the school. If there is no positive way for students who bully to be accepted back into the school community after changing their ways, there is little incentive for them to change these behaviors. Forgiveness provides a framework through which students who bully can reintegrate into the school community. In addition,

it allows them to take responsibility for their actions, while recognizing that the student is "bigger than the act." This mindset allows students to differentiate between bad actions and bad people, and encourages a more welcoming and understanding environment. Although some researchers (Egan & Todorov, 2009) have claimed that forgiveness interventions can only successfully help students deal with the aftermath of being bullied, it is proposed that forgiveness education and interventions can also be a viable method of reducing bullying behavior through increasing state and trait forgiveness in both the bullies and victims of bullying as well as promoting an environment of empathy, respect, and compassion within the schools. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how implementing forgiveness education and interventions in the school can not only help students that have been bullied cope with the aftermath of a transgression, but also offer students who bully a way to reintegrate into the community. Forgiveness education can offer students who bully a way to cope with past experiences of deep hurt to reduce anger, ultimately strengthening the social framework of the school and preventing further instances of bullying.

2. Bullying

Although bullying can occur at any time throughout one's life, such as in work settings or in relationships with intimate partners, family members or friends, bullying peaks during adolescence in the school setting (Book, Volk, & Hosker, 2012). Bullying is defined as a situation in which a person is "exposed repeatedly, and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1995, p. 197). Bullying is not the same as assault, and consists of repeated events over time (Aluedse, 2006; Smith & Brain, 2000). Bullying takes on many forms, and can be divided into three categories: physical bullying, verbal bullying, and relational bullying (Egan & Todorov, 2009). According to van der Valk (2013), bullying is a behavior not an identity. Physical bullying involves hitting, punching, or theft, and is more often experienced by boys. Verbal bullying involves name-calling, teasing, and threatening. Relational bullying includes social ostracism, exclusion, rumors, and rejection from peers, and is most often experienced by girls (Whitney & Smith, 1993). According to a study of sixth-10th graders in the United States by Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009), the prevalence of involvement in bullying activity – whether as the bully or victim – is 20.8% for physical bullying; 53.6% for verbal bullying; and 51.4% for relational bullying. All types of bullying can have significant negative long-term effects for the victim, and these effects have been documented in multiple research studies (Aluedse, 2006; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2010; Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2006).

In the past decade, with the growing use of technology and social media, there has been increased attention to *cyberbullying*, which can be categorized as either verbal or relational bullying, and includes a myriad of online aggressive acts, such as rumors, harassment, threats, and name-calling (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). This is especially prevalent among older youth – 13.6% of sixth-10th graders report being involved in cyberbullying, which is equally common in males and females (Swearer et

al., 2009; Wang et al., 2009). Cyberbullying, also known as digital bullying, is a more sophisticated approach than typical 'schoolyard bullying', as it allows the bully to send threatening messages through text messaging and social media websites with a significantly reduced chance of being caught (Aluedse, 2006). Cyberbullying can pose increased challenges for schools, because it provides the opportunity for anonymous bullying outside the school setting, and can occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In this situation, parent intervention and monitoring has been the most promising solution thus far (Swearer et al., 2009). However, promoting a healthier and safer school environment, as well as increasing students' empathy, compassion, and their ability to revise their thinking may also affect student attitudes and behaviors towards cyberbullying and bullying in general.

Victims

Victims of bullying suffer from numerous physical and emotional effects, such as lowered self-esteem, damaged reputation with peers, higher risk for depression and anxiety, increased risk for serious health issues, and lower academic engagement (Aluedse, 2006; Due et al., 2005; Juvonen et al., 2010; Nishina et al., 2005). Students who are bullied are also more likely to have significant academic difficulties, and have lower grades and test scores over time (Juvonen et al., 2010). Adjustment problems in students that have been victimized by peers can arise as early as kindergarten, and these students often experience loneliness in school and school avoidance, even when controlling for peer acceptance and friendships (Juvonen et al., 2010). In schools, bullying detracts from the overall school environment, and hinders the social and educational progress of the students. The stress of being bullied isn't only related to events that have already occurred, but the fear of events that could happen in the future (Aluedse, 2006). A bullying incident has an immediate negative effect on students, and detrimentally affects the school environment as a whole (Egan & Todorov, 2009).

Students who Bully

According to Olweus (1995), the typical disposition of students who bully can be described as aggressive, unempathetic, and impulsive. Multiple studies have been conducted to determine the connection between bullying behaviors and various 'Big Five' traits. Bullying has been shown to correlate with low agreeableness and low conscientiousness (Book et al., 2012). Other predictors include aggressiveness, isolation, and gender – boys are consistently found to be bullies more often than girls (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005; Book et al., 2012; Hixon, 2009; Olweus, 1995;). Bullies establish dominance over other children by inducing fear and eliciting support for doing so (Boulton, 1992). They may use physical contact, hurtful words, make faces or obscene gestures, or make an effort to exclude an individual from a social group in order to coerce victims or gain a reputation (Olweus, 1995). Despite this, there is research that suggests that students who bully may have a history of increased parent-child conflict and abuse (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013). This knowledge allows for a different perspective on students who bully and bullying, and can help victims see their offenders as individuals that have also experienced past hurts, whether from parents or

peers. Including this information in one's perception of the offender can promote a greater understanding of the offender's experiences, yet still allow recognition of the importance of reducing or eliminating bullying behaviors from the school environment.

3. Influences on Bullying Behavior

Bullying can have very negative effects for victims, the school environment, and even the offenders themselves. As stated in van der Valk (2013), youth who bully are at increased risk for depression, conduct disorders, substance abuse, and suicide. Fortunately, in the past few decades, schools have begun to recognize this and formally organize interventions that aim to decrease or eliminate bullying in the school environment (Enright, Enright, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2007). Emotional literacy programs are also on the rise. The idea is that to be successful in school and later in life, children and adolescents need to learn to recognize and manage their own emotions as well as recognize the emotions in others (Kahn, 2013). Knowing how to manage one's anger is not natural. We cannot just tell kids to forgive and expect them to know how to do so. According to the director of the Rutgers Social-Emotional Learning Lab, Maurice Elias, "emotional literacy is the missing piece in American education" (Kahn, 2013). Forgiveness education not only meets the criteria of emotional literacy programs, but may be an important piece of the puzzle for bullying prevention and intervention. Before discussing specific interventions, however, it's helpful to further understand and examine some of the internal and external factors that contribute to (and possibly even promote) bullying behavior.

4. Is Bullying Adaptive?

Recent studies have begun to explore the concept of bullying as an adaptive behavior. Bullying "promotes access to physical, social, and/or sexual resources" (Book et al., 2012, p. 218). For example, a student engaging in bullying behavior may try to ostracize a peer who is interested in dating a person that the bully would also like to date. Bullying behaviors may make the peer appear weaker and less desirable, thus decreasing their chances of dating the desired classmate. These behaviors could also increase the offender's chances of dating the classmate, because bullies often appear powerful and in control. When it comes to peer victimization, students who bully may not outwardly seem to suffer many negative consequences associated with their actions, and may sometimes even appear better off when it comes to mental health, physical health, popularity, and social skills. This is not always true. Further evidence that bullying is an adaptive behavior is the fact that youth who bully tend to use a very balanced combination of aggression and prosocial behavior in order to achieve their goals. At times, students who bully may be very prosocial and friendly to specific classmates, because of the possibility for higher social status among their peers. Students who bully often use their aggression to victimize less popular individuals in order to ally

themselves with those that could improve their social standing and increase their social alliances within the school (Book et al., 2012). Ultimately, if improved social standing is their goal, this combination of prosocial and aggressive behavior helps bullies to ally themselves with desired individuals, while intentionally excluding less popular individuals.

Despite the seemingly adaptive nature of bullying, many studies overlook the "negative" environmental factors of a bully's life, as well as the possibility that bullying behaviors may be learned. Many times, studies that seek to describe bullying focus on the inherent negative characteristics of the bully, rather than on the impact of other factors in the bully's life. Often, bullies who display aggressive behavior have seen aggressive behaviors at home (Lines, 2008). A number of bullies have experienced harsh parenting practices from one or both parents, and may have experienced abuse or neglect (Lines, 2008). Usually students who bully are looked at with only one lens, which often leads to thinking that those who bully are "monsters" or "villains". No thought is given to whether the student bullying has experienced past incidents of deep hurt and/or abuse or learned their behaviors elsewhere.

Parenting Influences

There is some argument as to whether or not parenting behaviors directly contribute to a child's bullying behaviors. Hixon (2009) purported that parenting practices are not a strong predictor for bully or victim status. Other sources, however, stated that children's bullying behaviors are strongly related to parenting styles and home environment (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). Authoritative parenting has more positive effects on children than other parenting styles and is strongly associated with lower levels of delinquency and bullying. Authoritarian and permissive parenting have more negative effects on children; authoritarian parenting reduces a child's self-control, social skills, and school achievement, while permissive parenting is associated with higher dropout rates, use of tobacco and alcohol, and increased peer victimization (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). Parent-child conflict, which may be more common in authoritarian parenting, has also been shown to be a predictor of a child's bullying behaviors (Georgiou & Stavriniades, 2013), indicating support for the idea that conflict between a child and his/her parents may contribute to increased conflict with peers at school.

Ahmed and Braithwaite (2006) demonstrated that children who bully are more likely to have parents who use punitive disciplinary practices. These punitive practices are also likely to lead to impulsive, dominating, and less empathic behavior, as well as difficulty adjusting to academic demands (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). However, it can also be the case that a child's behavior problems may, in fact, elicit negative responses from his/her parents, such as social withdrawal, punitive and overly dominant behavior, as well as denial of parental forgiveness and reconciliation (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). These responses in turn increase a child's bullying behavior. Georgiou and Stavriniades (2013) stated that increased communication and disclosure between parents and children leads to reduced risk of bullying behavior, but in many cases, the parents' use of punitive practices prevents this communication from successfully developing. Overall,

increased experiences with abuse, punitive parenting practices, and/or neglect from parents can lead to greater chances that students will engage in bullying behavior. This further supports the idea that bullies may display victimizing behaviors as a reflection of their experiences with aggression or harsh treatment at home.

Shame and Shaming

In recent years, there's been more research studying the links between shame, forgiveness, and reduced bullying behavior. Ahmed and Braithwaite (2005, 2006) discussed the process of *shaming*, which occurs when an authority figure (usually a parent or teacher) essentially brings to the child's attention that he/she has done something wrong. As there are many styles of parenting, there are also multiple methods of introducing shame after a child has committed a wrongful act. One such method is stigmatization, which Ahmed and Braithwaite (2005) classified as disrespectful, because it labels the offender as a bad person. This type of shaming contributes to a negative identity and is associated with increased amounts of self-initiated bullying behaviors in the child (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). On the other hand, when a parent uses reintegrative shaming, he/she focuses on the bad act rather than characterizing their child as a 'bad person' (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). This type of shaming helps the child process the wrongdoing constructively and move beyond the negative behavior. Shaming cannot by itself cause or prevent bullying behavior from happening in the schools, but using reintegrative shaming rather than stigmatization may help to prevent its occurrence.

Upon experiencing shame, there are two potential ways for a child to react to it: displacement and acknowledgement. Shame displacement involves externalizing the shame, and often, there is increased anger and blaming of others as a result (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). Shame acknowledgement allows a child to accept responsibility for their wrongdoing, and take steps towards making amends. Ahmed and Braithwaite (2005) suggested that the ability to effectively feel shame and remorse leads to accepting responsibility for one's actions as it discourages an individual from becoming a re-offender. The individual has considered some of the harmful consequences of his/her actions and at the same time, these actions are recognized as negative events, and thus, separate from the individual. Even though the child has done something wrong, he can still be viewed as an essentially good person, and this gives him the chance to still be accepted by his parents, peers, teachers, school administration, and him or herself. This concept, that children can engage in wrongdoing, that parents, teachers and other adults will "call them out", yet they can accept this without being permanently seen as a bad child, is described by the authors as *restorative justice* (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005).

Often, when bullying behavior is discussed, a significant amount of blame (or stigmatizing shame) is placed on the student who bullies (Lines, 2008). Several of the more popular "solutions" for bullying in schools involve a significant amount of punishment to somehow exact justice on the bully (Lines, 2008). Although there is some amount of blame the student who bullies should take on and be held accountable for,

Lines (2008) warned against taking it too far, by "demonizing" the bully, as this does very little to actually improve the school environment and prevent reoccurrences. Van der Valk (2013) discussed the negative consequences of zero tolerance policies and stated that in addition to making the school a punitive and uninviting environment, harsh punishment does nothing to address the root causes of bullying and gives students who engage in bullying behavior the impression that they are alone and must "fight for themselves". Anti-bullying programs that focus on the concept of restorative justice have led to substantial bullying reduction in schools (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). Part of the reason for their success may be because addressing an incident through a restorative justice lens allows the student who bullies to take full responsibility for his/her wrongdoing, without being ostracized or experiencing stigmatizing shame. The themes of empathy and compassion which can allow a student who bullies to take responsibility for his/her actions, yet not be permanently seen in a negative light – are present in restorative justice models, as well as forgiveness models. Forgiveness can be a tool for introducing restorative justice into schools, and increases a student's motivation to take responsibility for his/her actions by giving him/her a chance to 'make things right' and then stop engaging in bullying behavior. This allows the student to eventually be reintegrated into the school community.

5. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an "emotion-focused coping effort" (Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p. 388). In the forgiveness process, a person examines their negative feelings towards another following a transgression, and seeks to release these negative feelings, replacing them with feelings of benevolence (Denton & Martin, 1998). Forgiveness occurs in the context of deep, personal, and unfair hurt and can simply be defined as a decrease in negative feeling, thoughts, and behaviors and a gradual increase in more positive feelings, thoughts, and sometimes behaviors (Enright, 2001; Smedes, 1996). Several researchers have distinguished between decisional and emotional (sometimes called process) forgiveness (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Decisional forgiveness involves a commitment by the wronged person to let go of their anger towards an offender. Though decisional forgiveness may lessen one's negative motivations, it doesn't always involve changing negative emotions (Worthington & Scherer, 2006). Decisional forgiveness alone doesn't qualify as forgiveness, but the decision is a vital part of the forgiveness process, as it may 'trigger' emotional forgiveness (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Worthington & Scherer, 2006). Emotional forgiveness results from working through one's negative emotions related to an injustice experienced as well as reframing the offender or "seeing with new eyes" and developing empathy and compassion for the offender (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). This second type of forgiveness is more difficult to achieve, and it takes time. Knutson, Enright, and Garbers (2008) noted, however, that in the forgiveness process, time to explore one's emotions seems to be a more necessary component than the actual decision to forgive someone.

Forgiveness can be used as a mechanism to cope with an individual transgression, but when the forgiveness process is learned, it can also be incorporated into one's personality. When discussing how forgiving an individual feels towards a transgressor of a specific incident, it's beneficial to look at state forgiveness, or what degree of forgiveness the victim feels for an offender at a specific point in time. On the other hand, looking at forgiveness as it develops into a trait (i.e. being a 'forgiving person') allows us to look at an individual's propensity to forgive, both in the present and for future transgressions. Forgiveness can be a mechanism for dealing with transgressions 'right now', as in state forgiveness with a specific transgressor, or a mechanism that can help protect the individual against future experiences related to the negative effects of unforgiveness, as in trait forgiveness.

Forgiveness is often beneficial for the victim of a transgression, as it involves a conscious effort and process to embrace positive thoughts and feelings towards a transgressor (Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). The fact that the injured has a right to feel resentment after experiencing a deep hurt and that the offender does not really deserve one's positive feelings based on his or her actions needs to be recognized as well. In turn, the individual is able to reduce his or her own feelings of anger and resentment toward the offender, without condoning or excusing the behavior (Knutson et al., 2008). As Egan and Todorov (2009) noted, "forgiveness allows one to both acknowledge the full impact and wrongfulness of a transgression and overcome resultant emotional hurt" (p. 205). Ultimately, forgiveness helps a person to recognize and cope with a transgression, but reframe it in a way that allows one to release his or her anger associated with the event (Baskin & Enright, 2004). A major cause for the increase in violence we are seeing in children and adolescents today may be because no one is recognizing their anger, validating their right to be angry, and teaching them how to express it in healthy ways and then move beyond it (Kahn, 2013). Forgiveness is associated with decreased stress, and is a valuable coping mechanism that students may use to achieve emotional relief, especially if support from others is not forthcoming (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Although the majority of the research discussed above deals with the victim's use of forgiveness, students who bully can also feel the positive effects of forgiveness. As discussed above, many bullies have experiences with interpersonal hurts or harsh punitive practices at home, which may contribute to their displays of physical and/or verbal aggression at school. In other words, students who engage in bullying behavior may have individuals in their life that they could forgive, and after doing so, can feel the benefits of forgiving including letting go of anger and aggression instead of inappropriately displaying them at school.

Through the forgiveness process, the student who bullies can come to believe that others are thinking about him/her in a more compassionate, empathetic way. Similar to the way a parent may provide positive support to a child when he/she makes a mistake, forgiveness "offers a particular form of kindness to the wrongdoer" (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006, p. 351). This may give these students the opportunity to make things right and perhaps even reestablish a sense of trust and hope while still assuming

responsibility for their actions (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). The lack of long-term, ongoing resentment from peers and teachers can encourage the student who engages in bullying behavior to reintegrate themselves back into the community and exhibit an increased level of moral awareness and responsibility (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). In this approach, the offender would be encouraged to seek forgiveness from his or her target and to take responsibility for his/her actions by genuinely apologizing and changing his/her future behavior. If the school can promote the idea that students who bully can change - and fight against the strategies and systems that reinforce the belief that "a bully is a bully" and "a leopard can't change its spots", there will be more opportunity for change and rehabilitation for all students who engage in bullying behavior (Lines, 2008).

Research has shown that forgiveness may affect bullying behavior. Higher levels of trait forgiveness and a person's own forgiveness of others are associated with less incidents of bullying (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). Thus, when students have higher levels of state and trait forgiveness, they are less likely to bully their peers, which in turn has positive effects on the school as a whole.

According to Lin, Enright, and Klatt (2011), forgiveness is appropriate to introduce in schools because it contains a plethora of moral content. These authors discuss how forgiveness education helps students to respond to an experience of bullying by examining it on moral grounds. Forgiveness may also help to develop a student's sense of empathy and the ability to recognize the emotions of another. Developing empathy alongside forgiveness is important as studies have shown that students who bully often have lower levels of empathy than students who do not (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Students can use the moral connections to address their own feelings and work toward forgiving an offender who has previously hurt them or themselves for bullying (Lin et al., 2011). Increasing self-forgiveness allows students who bully to recognize their actions, but move past the guilt and unhealthy self-blame associated with their transgressions (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Teaching self-forgiveness can have positive effects on a student's view of him or herself if education on self-forgiveness encourages and focuses on empathy towards the victim as well as towards the offender. As van der Valk (2013) stated, discussing empathy and what healthy relationships look like does away with the perception that being a bully is a "fixed identity". Without the empathy factor, there is the risk of students who bully using self-forgiveness to somehow justify their actions, and remove their own feelings of guilt. Forgiveness can be a tool for strengthening perspective taking skills, and introducing forgiveness education in the school setting can give children yet another chance to develop character (Lin et al., 2011). van der Valk (2013) explained how teaching empathy also helps teachers realize that kids who bully are still young people and that the window of opportunity to work with them does not last forever. We don't want kids who bully growing up believing that the only role they can have is the role of the "bully". Kids who bully are still learning and developing, and when we support and help them we are also helping the school as a whole and the kids they may potentially bully in the future (van der Valk, 2013).

Forgiveness Interventions and Research

There have been many forgiveness education and intervention efforts, yet at this point, the majority has been directed toward adults (Baskin and Enright, 2004). However, educators and researchers have begun to design school-based forgiveness intervention programs for elementary, middle, and high school students. Specifically, research has been conducted with angry adolescents in Korea and the United States, elementary school students in Brooklyn, New York, parentally love-deprived college students, at-risk adolescents in an alternative school, junior high students hurt by parental divorce, first and third grade children in Belfast, Ireland, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and sixth grade children in China. The majority of forgiveness education and research that has been conducted with children and adolescents illustrates positive outcomes associated with forgiveness (Enright et al., 2007). Enright (2012) developed a forgiveness education curriculum specifically for students who bully, "*Reducing the Fury within Those Who Bully*", that can be used individually or with small groups of students.

Baskin and Enright (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of current forgiveness interventions, and showed that there were three common styles of forgiveness intervention: decision-based, process-based group, and process-based individual. The decision-based interventions were not as effective as the process-based interventions, suggesting that it could take more emotional exploration to successfully forgive a hurt, as opposed to simply deciding to forgive an individual as stated previously (Baskin & Enright, 2004). In addition, the researchers noted that longer forgiveness interventions were consistently more effective (Baskin & Enright, 2004). Since students spend so many years in school, it follows that an ongoing school-wide effort at forgiveness education would have increased success due to the length of the program. One of the studies examined in the meta-analysis dealt specifically with late-adolescents. Al-Mabuk, Enright, and Cardis (1995) examined both a decision-based and a process-based approach with college students, and suggested that the more complete process approach produces more positive and long-term effects than the initial decision to forgive on its own. Overall, current forgiveness education research points to the necessity of using a complete process-based approach for effective intervention with students who bully and students who have been bullied. Interventions within the school setting would likely follow this process-based approach, and would seek to present forgiveness as a process that involves a decision as well as effort and time.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation, another process that is related to but distinct from forgiveness, operates on the assumption that the offender's attitude will be changed by admitting one's offense and taking responsibility (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). It takes forgiveness a step further by giving the wrongdoer the chance to attempt to mend the relationship (assuming there was one initially), or, at the very least, presents a chance at civility (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006). Ideally, the goal of forgiveness can be reconciliation, but this may not always be an option or advisable (Knutson et al., 2008). In situations where the student who bullies does not change his/her behavior, it is not a good idea for the victim to try to reconcile with that individual (Freedman, 1998). Although it may not always be a good idea for the students to reconcile completely, forgiving the offender

may make necessary communication in the school setting less uncomfortable, and encourage students who are not reconciled to be civil when working on schoolwork.

Though reconciliation may not always happen directly between a victim and his or her offender, reconciliation is an important concept to introduce within the school. Reconciliation allows the offender to be accepted back into the community instead of being ostracized. The recognition of the student who bullies as a human being can occur as a result of a general acceptance of the offender by the community, and more specifically, forgiveness by the victim to the offender. It's important that the student who engaged in bullying behavior has a 'way back in', because if he/she believes he/she can have redemption within the school environment, the student is more likely to invest time and effort towards making things right, and may be less likely to become a repeat offender.

6. Bullying-Focused Interventions and Forgiveness Education

Although a student's home life may have a significant influence on bullying behaviors, schools and educators can also play a role in shaping and changing these behaviors (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). Previous research supports the idea that anti-bullying interventions are more successful when used through the whole school, and many current bullying interventions seek to inspire a shift in environment of the school as a whole (Egan & Todorov, 2009). According to van der Valk (2013), "The most effective bullying interventions don't focus on only one category of kids, but rather acknowledge that all students benefit when schools empower youth and teach them about healthy relationships" (p. 2). Currently, there are several interventions that seek to address the problem of bullying in schools, yet the Olweus method is one of the main bullying prevention programs that is evidence-based and frequently used (Egan & Todorov, 2009). The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has had tremendous success in Norway, with reductions in school bullying of 30-70% (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Olweus, 1997). These successes, however, have not been able to be replicated in other countries, with the United States, Germany, and Belgium seeing reductions of only 5-30%. One of the main focuses of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is peer-support systems for bullied students (Olweus, 1997). In this four-step method, students learn to report bullying, respond to it, self-manage to react appropriately and reframe the experience when bullied, and encourage empathy for one another. Egan and Todorov (2009) suggested that forgiveness could be effectively introduced in the third and fourth steps and significantly increase students' ability to frame bullying experiences in a productive manner and encourage a sense of empathy between students.

Many other intervention programs aim to increase peer support, with the hopes that this will encourage bystanders to 'step in' when they observe bullying taking place (Cowie, 2011; Polanin, Espelage & Pigott, 2012). There is also support for interventions

occurring on a whole-school level, with the goal of adjusting social norms in schools so bullying would no longer have a place in the school (Perkins et al., 2011). Forgiveness education could give students additional skills in being receptive to the needs of their peers, since it encourages an empathetic view of others. Forgiveness also includes the act of reframing or "seeing with new eyes". The idea behind reframing is for the victim to expand his/her view of the offender and why the offense occurred as well as realize that the offender is a human being and deserves respect. This can be difficult depending on the severity of the bullying. One can help the victim think about why the offender engages in the bullying behavior. For example, the victim may learn that the student doing the bullying has been abused at home. This is not done to excuse the bullying behavior or say it was okay, but to better understand how it could have occurred. It is also important for the offender who bullies to engage in reframing regarding the target of his or her bullying and his/her worth as a human being as well as the type of person the offender is and the type of person he or she wants to be. This shift in thinking about the targets of one's bullying and oneself allows students who bully to change their views of both their victims and themselves with the ultimate goal being decreased bullying behavior.

Bullying is very difficult to eliminate in schools, so most interventions achieve only limited success (Egan & Todorov, 2009). At this point, many anti-bullying initiatives in schools are more interested in reducing bullying rather than helping students cope with a bullying experience (Egan & Todorov, 2009). Empathy-focused interventions are necessary when introducing the concept of forgiveness to students who bully, because without considering the victim's perspective and feelings, the offender may continue to engage in bullying behavior (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002)., Forgiveness can be a valuable strategy to assist students who have been bullied or hurt in other ways in coping with the delayed effects of the transgressions, and can also act as a preventive factor in coping with future transgressions (Egan & Todorov, 2009). Forgiveness education can encourage attitude shifts for all students, not just the targeted students, and therefore, it can increase positive outcomes for the entire student body (Aluedse, 2006).

As discussed above, forgiveness can be applied in a 'two-pronged' approach to anti-bullying, where there is a focus on both dealing with the aftermath of bullying, as well as focusing on prevention. Current interventions that discuss forgiveness education as a way to reduce bullying in schools are primarily focused on the students learning about forgiveness, with the goal of learning to implement it in their own lives (Enright et al., 2007). Forgiveness could act as a buffer against the effects of bullying and victimization, as more forgiving individuals consistently experience superior physical and mental health, lower stress levels, and better self-reported health and life satisfaction (Egan & Todorov, 2009). Forgiveness targets and improves the very areas where bullying is most detrimental, and helps victims to overcome the negative emotions associated with bullying experiences (Egan & Todorov, 2009). As van der Valk (2013) stated, "programs designed to promote social and emotional competencies is a great way to support students who may be more at-risk to bullying" (p. 2). It's important to note that offenders, too, have often experienced hurt and transgressions in their lives, and

forgiveness offers a way for them to work through these painful experiences. Experiencing fewer negative emotions associated with their own experiences may reduce the instance of students bringing their anger and aggression to the school and taking them out on other children. Ultimately, forgiveness interventions would be beneficial for all students in a school, regardless of offender/victim status, and would increase the unity in a school as well as decrease bullying. A growing trend related to the increased attention to social emotional programs is the realization that students literally cannot learn and progress academically unless they deal with their anger and other social and emotional issues (Kahn, 2013). As illustrated in this paper, in addition to focusing on the targets of bullying, we also need to focus on the students who bully. Helping these students forgive those who hurt them as well as themselves is one way we can truly put an end to bullying behavior.

7. Conclusion

As illustrated in this paper, there is a growing field of forgiveness education research which suggests that teaching and promoting the concept of forgiveness in schools may in fact lead to reductions in school bullying. Although Egan and Todorov (2009) claimed that "it is crucial to note that a forgiveness-focused intervention would not be intended to lead to reductions in school bullying," (p. 215) and that "the proper application of forgiveness within the school setting would be to help students deal with the hurtful emotions caused by their having been bullied" (p. 215), forgiveness education can also have a positive impact on offenders' behavior by helping them to deal with the issues that may be at the root of the bullying. When students who bully are asked and are able to take responsibility for their actions, yet not be permanently ostracized from the social framework at school, they're less likely to become re-offenders. Educators can benefit by realizing the connection between social-emotional health and academic success. Students who have been bullied, rejected, abused, and are angry as a result, will have difficulty learning and will most likely act out their anger on others. Because of their many benefits for both victims and offenders, forgiveness interventions and education can be a valuable asset to schools, as they both help students cope with experiences of hurt and serve to prevent future bullying by promoting an environment of respect, tolerance, and harmony within the school.

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