

The Essence of School Bullying and the Relevance of Anti-Bullying Programs
in Curtailing Bullying in the School Setting



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Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 describes the research design—theoretical tradition of inquiry, research sample and population, method of data collection and procedures, data management procedures, method of data analysis, and issues of ethical consideration relating to this study. School bullying has caused deep-rooted problems in the society. The issues arising from bullying in school, such as homicide, suicide, and the school dropout rate has become a public policy concern, warranting in-depth assessment (Strøm, Thoresen, Wentzel-Larsen, & Dyb, 2013). This qualitative case study seeks to explore whether the existing intervention programs produce effective results. Furthermore, examining bullying from the perspective of school teachers who have observed bullying in school, will take place. This chapter explains the various methods and techniques that will be adopted for the proposed research. The chapter will present the methods that will be used in data collection and interpretation, including research design and rationale, methodology, research questions, researcher's role, study site, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and limitations. The section concludes with a summary of key points in the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The research is a qualitative exploratory case study of the contexts of school bullying, and the effectiveness of the current approaches to bullying in a Baltimore school. The exploratory methodology of inquiry will enable me to find out the nature of bullying, and if the current remedy is sufficient in curtailing school bullying. The study also seeks to determine if a well-defined intervention program should be explored, predicated on the possibility that the current program can be modified to stop bullying—to a reasonable extent, within the school's

system. The qualitative method of inquiry will be employed for the study because school bullying is an emerging phenomenon with no available theories and defined variables to explain it. Creswell (2014) described three basic approaches to research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. To answer the research questions in the most effective manner possible, it has been determined that a qualitative study will be the most effective method in obtaining the answers to the identified questions. A qualitative study is used when the data being gathered deals with descriptions, experiences, and other data that may be observed but cannot be concretely measured (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Patton 2002). The quantitative survey questionnaire method was also considered. The selection of an appropriate design was predicated on the purpose of the study and the types of data that must be collected. The qualitative tradition of case study was utilized as the most suitable method of inquiry for this research (Creswell, 2014). Several qualitative paradigms, or traditions, were examined to determine the appropriate methods to use in this study. According to Creswell (2013), these qualitative traditions included ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and narrative.

In this academic work, case study is preferred to ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative in terms of the purpose of the study and the type of data required for it. Case study allows for an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon from a wider sphere albeit bounded by time, events, activities and (or) individuals. It is rich in context and draws data from several sources (Creswell, 2014). This tradition is most suited for the studying of a given context because it provides multiple sources of data to build a comprehensive picture of what is being studied (Patton, 2005). The central research question for this qualitative case study is: What anti-bullying measures will most effectively address bullying at a Baltimore middle school?

The researcher used the following sub-questions to examine any direct or indirect factors related to the central question that could explain the varied perspectives of participants, as advocated by researchers (Creswell, 2014):

RSQ1. What is the effect of bullying from the perception of middle school teachers who have observed bullying conducts from the students within the school environment?

RSQ2. Why has the menace of school bullying persisted, despite the remedial measures in place against bullying conduct?

RSQ3. What are the present bullying remedies in the school, and is the existing or current bullying program sufficient in curtailing this menace at school?

RSQ4. What role does the family have to play in curtailing bullying activities in school?

RSQ5. What are the consequences of school bullying if the right intervention measures are not applied?

RSQ6. What measures will adequately address bullying in middle schools, including cyber-bullying, that may manifest itself on campus?

Researcher Role

The role of researcher in this study is observer, data collector, and data analyzer. I will conduct the interviews thoroughly and use appropriate methods of data interpretation. My research in the field of education, and specifically with regards to bullying, has played a large and ongoing role in my life. My inspiration for this project is predicated on the damaging effects experienced by students who are subject to bullying. The harmful behavior in question has led me to follow in the pursuit of improvements to such situations through awareness and programs. The lack of data available to find concrete ways in which to substantially mitigate bullying has led me to this work. The research conducted here can fill the need for additional research in this

area of education.

Methodology

Study Site

The school being studied operates within the Baltimore County School District. Baltimore County has a total of 174 schools within the district, and the middle school where analysis takes place has a total of 1,336 students, ranging from grades 6-8 (Greatschools, 2015). The school has a diverse population made up of different races. The largest portion of the student body is white at 43%. African Americans make up 38%, Hispanics make up 10%, Asians 5%, and American Indians 1%. The school has a total of 76 teachers, equally a ratio of 18:1 (students per teacher) (Greatschools, 2015). The school does not have a well-defined bullying program. Rather, in the student handbook, written by the county, bullying is defined, and students are made to sign a form, which states they are not to be part of bullying conduct. The form also signifies they have read the definition of the school district's anti-bullying policy (Greatschools, 2015).

Sample and Population

This segment explains the sample, as well as its size, and the categories chosen, the sampling methods and approach used for choosing the participants, and measures utilized for obtaining access to the participants in this research.

Sampling Procedure

The qualitative case study will seek to comprehend the fundamental nature and effects of anti-bullying remedies and school bullying through the perception of school teachers and school administrators. In the qualitative investigation, sampling is the method of selecting participants that are pertinent to the specified study (Polkinghorne, 2005). The targeted study population is

made up of school teachers and school administrators in the proposed school in Baltimore County. It is important to note that participants and documents will contribute meaningfully to the understanding of the topic being investigated; since according to Polkinghorne (2005), the focal point of qualitative exploration is the recounting, understanding, and expounding on human experience (p. 139). The choice of participants should be based on those who are willing and are able to relate a sequence of deep, full, and inundated accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005). The significance of qualitative case study is to contribute understanding about the phenomenon under investigation, and not how only a section, or sections, of the population experienced the issue under study. Consequently, “purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in qualitative study.” This is different from quantitative study that generalizes to other specific areas of the population (Creswell, 1998, p. 118).

In this study, I will utilize purposive sampling to select participants who are key informants and can provide useful information and insight into the issues being studied (Yin, 2014). Within the context of this study, the key informants to be interviewed are the classroom teachers, school counselors, and school administrators perceived to have knowledge of school bullying and potential bullying remedies. Data will be collected from participants in the natural setting where the incidents occurred (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). Ten school personnel (teachers, counselors, and administrators) will participate in this study. The selection criteria for participants are that they are consistently present in the school being studied, and that they have witnessed multiple bullying incidents within the classroom or on the school grounds.

To create rapport with prospective participants, the researcher must build trust (Creswell, 2014). Upon introduction to potential participants, I will explain the key points of the project and

ask whether they are willing to participate in the study. As part of the informal interview process, participants will be asked about the school bullying incidents they have observed, and the current anti-bullying programs, or lack thereof, in the school, to measure effectiveness in decreasing or eliminating bullying in school. Additionally, participants will be offered the opportunity to publish their opinions and views on the school anti-bullying programs. To encourage participation, it will be pointed out to potential participants that their experiences would contribute to the understanding and effective management of anti-bullying programs in the future.

Data Collection

I will utilize two types of data in this study: interviews, and researcher's field notes.

Interviews

In qualitative work, a comprehensive interview is one of the main sources of data collection (Hall & Rist, 1999; McReynolds, Koch, & Rumrill, 2001; Polkinghorne, 2005; Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2014). Interviews will be chosen for data collection, as researchers need to learn from participants' experiences to best present their viewpoints (Yin, 2014).

Although survey methods and questionnaires were also considered (Dixson, Singleton, & Straits, 2015), interviews were considered best for this study. Interviews will be used to obtain information from participants on the existing anti-bullying remedies in the school and at the county level, and will inquire about the various programs available for curtaining school bullying. Face-to-face interviews and semi-structured interviews that use open-ended questions will be employed. Interviews with classroom teachers, counselors, and school administrators who have in-depth knowledge of anti-bullying remedies, and those who have observed bullying behavior will be conducted.

Data Analysis

Within the qualitative research paradigm, data analysis technically commences with the start of data collection. I will utilize data analysis procedures recommended by Creswell (2014) and Dixon (2012) for a case study. Because this study focuses on the subjective perspectives of teachers, counselors, and administrators on bullying remedies, and of the bullying observed, the data will be handled with care. The data analysis process starts during the data collection phase when I begin reviewing the interview data. Early in the data collection process, preliminary analyses will be used to identify emergent findings, or themes, that may improve future observations (Creswell, 2014).

As the data collection phase continues, it will be important to use the collection process itself to identify those parts of the study that need further data. Due to the volume of data gathered, I will develop a list of all the data collected. It will then be organized into files, according to subjects, and then placed into folders. I will develop systematic codes using letters and numbers to represent the subjects as locators for easy retrieval and analysis (Creswell, 2014). Next, I will read the entire material, namely transcripts from interviews, several times until I have fully absorbed the interview data. In the course of reading, I will make reflective notes at the margins of the records and document the initial findings in the form of a memo, frequently referred to as memoing (Yin, 2014). Initial codes will be developed, and preliminary findings will be sent to selected participants for their comments. The final analysis of data will rely heavily on the coding mechanism developed for this study.

Coding

A code in qualitative analysis is for the most part an expression, word or diminutive phrase that characteristically assigns a comprehensive, important, or suggestive feature to a

segment of data, which could be language-based or visual. Code is data compression that allows the researcher to recover a large amount of momentous material, and to bring together large pieces of compatible data that can be compressed into an easily analyzable component. Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) have found out that “Code is a researcher generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytical.” The data could be taken from an interview, video, transcript, field notes, literature, observation, website, e-mail communication, etc. Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014), in citing Saldana (2013), posit that code is divided into two main phases: first and second cycle coding. “First cycle coding methods are codes initially assigned to the Data chunks” (Miles et al., 2014). The amount of data to be coded can vary from single words to multiple words, a full page, or even a series of images. For the second cycle coding method, the amount being coded can be identical to the first cycle, but it can accommodate more text, larger passages, and methodical memos regarding the data.

A coding mechanism will be developed before the data collection phase of this study is completed. This mechanism will have thematic indicators that will have the data coded by theme for each data input. The data collected from both the interviews, and through the observations, will be coded in similar ways. It is important to note that the end results reflect accurate interpretation of collected data. Thus, the interviews will be transcribed verbatim and assessed for consistency and accuracy. I will attempt to have the transcription of the interviews done by a professional transcriptionist. However, if such a service is not readily available, I will transcribe the interviews myself. The interview transcripts will be coded with a particular eye for “patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, and events repeat[ing] and [or] stand[ing] out” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Every response taken during the interviews may not perfectly fall into one of

these categories, so certain flexibility is needed in analyzing the results. Patterns and themes emerging in each category will therefore be recorded as they are discovered.

Summary

This chapter examined the theoretical method of inquiry and design for the study. This study seeks to examine the existing anti-bullying programs in the school under study, and to ascertain if the current anti-bullying program is sufficient in curtailing bullying incidents within this case study. There are few to no detailed in-depth studies to explain the dynamics involved in such an approach, so the research is warranted.

This chapter explained the various methods and techniques that will be adopted for the proposed research. The chapter presents the methods that were adopted during the data collection and interpretation, including research design and rationale, methodology, the research questions, researcher role, study site, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and limitations. The case study approach was utilized as the most suitable method because it offered an in-depth contextual perspective on the subject (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2008; Miles et al., 2014). Individual, face-to-face interviews, observation, and available documents are the methods of data observation employed for the study. (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Interviews will be semi-structured and will use open-ended questions.

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