

## THE FACE OF CHARACTER: ENCOURAGING MORALITY IN CHILDREN BY CONFRONTING BULLYING THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

For children, bullying is a moral issue common to their age group, which has escalated to an epidemic. Because research confirms the prevalence of bullying, as well as children's cognitive capacity to engage successfully in moral reasoning, there is an obvious need for moral intervention on behalf of today's children. The context for such an intervention becomes clear when considering children's daily exposure to the school learning environment, which provides an ideal means for instilling ethical and moral values through the integration of character development into education curricula, not only to equip children for handling the moral dilemmas they face, but also to guide their future moral decisions.

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is crucial that ethical and moral values be instilled in all individuals, beginning at a very early and impressionable age. Traditionally, schools are thought to provide an environment where children acquire knowledge and skills related to academic success; however, character development is another essential aspect of children's education that must also be incorporated into schools' curricula. While some might argue that children are unable to reason morally on a level that is required for successful character development, recent studies have found that children are quite cognitively capable of engaging in moral reasoning; therefore, skills applying such reasoning should be consistently encouraged. In considering a specifically challenging area of children's lives where decisions of morality and ethics must be purposefully made and strong character displayed, previous research has shown that the prevalence of bullying among children is rapidly increasing in its depth and breadth. Approximately one in three students in U.S. schools is a victim of bullying (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Knowing the prevalence of bullying among children, it is crucial to integrate character development into education curricula for children of all age groups, not only to prepare them to handle current moral dilemmas, but also to guide their future moral decisions.

The purpose of this paper is to present evidence that children possess the cognitive functioning to reason morally and thus make moral decisions, with specific emphasis on the psychological factors that influence their moral decision making. The pervasiveness and significance of bullying among children will also be discussed as a means of exposing the realities of a prevalent ethical and moral issue, unique to a young age group. Children are daily placed in a school learning environment, which is extremely conducive to the exposure of learning about and applying character development and morality; therefore, the incorporation of character education in classrooms will be explored in an effort to identify successful means of combating the occurrence of childhood bullying. Meaningful application of this knowledge will then be provided in the form of model lesson plans relevant to the elementary classroom setting, appropriate for grades three to five, to be used as learning tools to encourage values of morality, ethics, and strong character in children.

A universal theme among all theories of moral development is the acknowledgment that conscience begins to develop in early childhood. Most theories claim that a child's morality is at first *externally controlled* by adults. Over time, it becomes regulated by *inner standards*. That is, individuals who are truly moral are not motivated to do right simply as a means of conforming to others' expectations. Rather, these moral individuals have developed compassionate concerns and principles of good conduct,

which they adhere to in many situations (Berk, 2008a). It is a common misconception that children are unable to perform the level of sophisticated thinking that is required of moral reasoning, simply because their young age and thus, cognitive abilities do not allow for such mental processes. Previously conducted research sufficiently disproves this claim, instead supporting the idea that children are aware of moral issues, and that they possess the cognitive ability to reason morally. Children actively exhibit consideration of various factors of morality, and these factors reflect development of cognitive processes, psychological processes, and underlying moral theories.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF COGNITIVE PROCESSES RELATED TO MORAL REASONING**

When considering various aspects of children's cognitive development, there is an obvious connection between the cognitive processes that children begin to acquire as a result of their growth and development and the cognitive processes that are required for moral reasoning. Decision-making is one such example; previous research confirms that children do, in fact, have the skills necessary to make decisions, merely at a different level than adults. Jacobs and Klaczynski (2002) found that even young children can use the same "rules of thumb" or heuristics used by adults in decision making. Children are also just as exposed to judgment biases as adults. In addition, the research findings demonstrate that as children obtain various social concepts through experience, they begin to use social-category information as judgment heuristics, in a manner similar to adults. Because of these biased social judgment heuristics, children have a tendency to use them inappropriately when making decisions; therefore, children's decision making must be carefully monitored as it develops. Also, as children age, they slowly but steadily improve their metacognitive abilities; that is, their ability to monitor and think about the decision-making process. If children are able to manage the higher-level cognitive processes involved in decision making, then it follows that they may also be capable of the higher-level processes of moral reasoning. Decision-making is a vital process involved in morality, because in order to make a moral decision one must implement decision-making processes.

A second cognitive factor that plays an important role in children's moral thinking is active reasoning and inferring. An earlier study investigating the moral awareness of children revealed that children implemented active reasoning and inferring in their conversations regarding moral issues. This was made apparent through children's explanations of why actions are good or bad for certain reasons, as well as how particular character traits are associated with specific types of behaviors (Wright & Bartsch, 2008). Reasoning and inferring are higher-order thinking processes that require precision of thought in order to make deductions and provide detailed explanations on the basis of existing information. From the conclusions drawn by this previous study, the fact that children are capable of such advanced-level thinking also confirms their capability to reason morally.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES RELATED TO MORAL REASONING**

Psychological factors are another important aspect that influences children's moral reasoning. Wright and Bartsch (2008) conducted a longitudinal case study regarding the moral sensibility of children, using conversation as a "window on moral life" in recording that young children do, in fact, engage in moral conversations (p. 72). When making evaluations regarding morality, case study children focused mainly on the feelings and welfare not only of themselves, but of others. They also focused on reasons related to reward and punishment, as well as external motivations. Discussions between children and adults were of an interpersonal nature, that is, how individuals' attitudes and/or behaviors can be beneficial or detrimental to other people. Overall findings showed that these children demonstrated sensitivity toward moral issues, beginning at a young age. Specifically, children showed recognition of how their own behaviors or dispositions influenced the behaviors and dispositions of others, and thus the moral issue itself. In considering the changes in children's moral talk over time as they develop and age, this longitudinal study found that children began to give and request reasons during moral conversation as they matured (Wright & Bartsch, 2008). By selecting a research method which focused on the development of children's morality over an extended period of time, the implications of this study's findings are given even greater deference. The results sufficiently support the current paper's goal to

provide resolute evidence that the ability to engage in comprehensive moral reasoning does, indeed, begin in childhood.

### UNDERLYING MORAL THEORY ASSOCIATED WITH MORAL REASONING

In considering underlying moral theory that provides a solid framework for children's implementation of moral reasoning, one of the strongest theories that connects to the moral reasoning associated with bullying is Bandura's theory of moral disengagement. Bandura's work confirms that a theory involving higher-order moral reasoning can apply to children, especially when considered in the context of bullying, which will later be detailed as a moral issue consistently confronted by children. Bandura (2002) described the theory of moral disengagement as being the implementation of various mechanisms employed by individuals as a means of disengaging from immoral behavior. While Bandura described a variety of mechanisms for moral disengagement, there are several that unmistakably coincide with children's bullying-related behaviors. Euphemistic labeling is one such mechanism that describes shaping language in a positive way, so that unjustified moral acts can be "justified" in the eyes of the individual. Individuals' actions can take on a different appearance, depending upon the way they are linguistically described. If a child describes the behavior of hurtfully taunting a peer as "*just teasing*," their immoral actions appear less negative in his/her mind.

Advantageous comparison is a mechanism employed by comparing particular immoral behaviors to more extreme versions of immoral behavior, making it seem as though the behavior "could be worse"; this describes a type of cognitive restructuring. When a child is bullying a peer through hurtful words, and justifies his/her behavior by claiming, "It is not like I am physically hurting him/her," the bullying child would be employing the mechanism of advantageous comparison, making his/her immoral behavior (teasing) appear less immoral when compared to even greater immoral behavior (physically harming). Displacement of responsibility is a mechanism of moral disengagement that involves cognitively obscuring or minimizing the role one plays in certain immoral actions. Similarly, diffusion of responsibility occurs when immoral actions are conducted collectively by a group of people; each individual feels less responsible for the actions, because they were carried out by more than one individual. Both displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility could be utilized when bullying occurs in groups of children, allowing each individual child to feel that he/she has less responsibility for the bullying behavior because it was executed as a group effort. Bandura's moral theory and its connection of bullying to children's use of moral disengagement provides a solid framework to introduce bullying as the basis of a prevalent moral issue among children, which often utilizes these aspects of moral reasoning.

### BULLYING

**Bullying defined.** Among elementary school-aged students, one of the core ethical issues encountered daily is the ever-present problem of bullying. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) defined bully as:

intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words, or other behavior, such as name-calling, threatening, and/or shunning commitment by one or more children against another. These negative acts are not intentionally provoked by the victims, and for such acts to be defined as bullying, an imbalance in real or perceived power must exist between the bully and the victim. (p. 3)

Bullying is a multi-faceted issue, taking on a variety of forms. One such form is physical bullying, which is characterized by punching, poking, strangling, hair pulling, excessive tickling, or the like. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, teasing, or gossip. Emotional bullying is marked by rejecting, terrorizing, humiliating, peer pressure, ostracizing, and rating/ranking personal characteristics including race, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Sexual bullying consists of sexual harassment and abuse involving physical contact and sexual assault, exhibitionism, and voyeurism. A final form of bullying, which has recently become a greater concern with the increasing use of technology, is cyber-bullying. This is bullying that occurs through the use of technology, such as computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices. This type of bullying does not require face-to-face contact; and thus, the previously

cited moral disengagement mechanism of diffusion of responsibility becomes an even greater concern. Rates of cyber-bullying are highest at the end of middle school to the beginning of high school (U.S. Government, 2011).

**Frequency of bullying.** In identifying the occurrences of bullying among children, it is important to consider both the location and frequency of bullying. Fekkes, Pijpers, and Verloove-Vanhorick (2006) found that among children ages nine to eleven, more than 16% of students acknowledged being bullied on a regular basis (a few times a month or more) and 10% of children were bullied once a week or more. In regard to active bullying, 6% of students indicated that they bullied other students several times a month to almost daily, and 37% of students reported bullying another student at least once during the school year. This study's findings also specified that the most common place for bullying to occur was on the playground or in the classroom.

**The effects of bullying.** Bullying does not occur without its consequences. The effects of bullying can be indirect or direct and can be detrimental and far-reaching for the various parties involved. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) identified various negative effects on the victims of bullying, including social anxiety and insecurity, symptoms of depression, decreased self-esteem, and taking drastic measures, including fighting back, use of weapons, or suicide. Even observers or bystanders of bullies suffer in various ways, including fear of retribution, fear of reporting because of the potential of developing a reputation as a "tattler" or "snitch," distraction from classroom learning, feelings of guilt or helplessness for not helping to protect a classmate from a bully, and feelings of loss of control or inability to take action. In considering how bullies themselves are negatively affected, Olweus (1993) (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 1998) found that bullying beginning in early childhood may be a predictor of violent behavior, delinquency, as well as criminality.

**Roles in the bullying process.** A critical aspect to understanding the multi-faceted nature of bullying involves recognizing the various roles associated with the bullying process. Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukialnen (1996) identified six different participant roles in the bully process; these roles include the bully, the victim, the assistant of the bully, the reinforcer of the bully, the defender of the victim, and the outsider (or onlooker). While the roles of bully and victim are unmistakable when examining the bullying process, the other four roles require some elucidation. The assistant of the bully was portrayed as being actively involved in the bullying process of the victim; however, instead of taking a leadership role in the bullying behavior, the assistant is more of a follower in the process. The reinforcer of the bully was depicted as the individual who encourages the bullying behavior through laughing, observing, and simply being present in the situation as to provide an "audience" for the bully. The defender of the victim was described through behaviors that include supporting the victim, taking the victim's side in the situation, and actively persuading others to help stop the bullying process. Finally, the outsider was portrayed as the individual who is "doing nothing," avoiding any interaction with the bullying situation (p. 4).

Through this study, the researchers concluded that bullying can be considered a large group phenomenon, in which almost all children in the situation can be given a defined role as a participant in one capacity or another. In all of these participant roles, if children were compared to their peer-given evaluations of behavior, they had a tendency to downplay their aggressive behaviors and emphasize their prosocial and withdrawal behaviors, which are considered to be more socially acceptable (Salmivalli et al., 1996). This provides evidence that children are cognizant of the negative connotations associated with aggressive and bully-type behaviors; and thus, they are aware of the moral implications of such actions, whether consciously or unconsciously. Based upon the findings of this study, it is suggested that bully intervention methods should not only be geared towards the bully and the victim, but instead, the entire group, because all group members are found to be involved to some degree.

Another study that examined the peer victimization occurring in kindergarten classrooms discovered that this type of negative peer interaction begins at a young age, and it is prevalent among newly created peer groups. Results showed that 20.5% of kindergarten students, from both the fall and

spring semesters, reported experiencing moderate to high levels of peer victimization-related behavior. However, for many of the students, victimization did not become an enduring experience (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Whether or not the peer victimization resulted in a stable experience for children, the findings of this study provide clear verification of the specific role that peer groups as a whole play in peer victimization, or bullying. Gini (2006) focused on moral cognition involved in bullying, and identified that moral disengagement, as described by Bandura (2002), was at a higher level among the aggressive roles of bullies. That is, individuals in aggressive roles, and specifically bullies, had a greater propensity to absolve themselves from self-punishment and thus, rationalize the use of aggressive behaviors. These findings are significant because of the evidence provided regarding the role of aggression in bullying behaviors, as well as the lack of morality associated with taking on such a role.

**Bullying in current research and psychological theories.** Olweus (1995) identified various psychological sources that may contribute to a bully's actions. One such source is a child's strong need for power and dominance. Another source includes feelings of hostility developed as the result of family situations and the conditions under which children have been raised. A final psychological source associated with a bully's actions is instrumentality, in which bullies feel that their behavior is rewarded with a higher status; and therefore, they can forcibly persuade their victims to provide them with certain favors or objects. Another study found that there was a positive relationship between the presence of peer victimization in a child's life and his/her feelings of loneliness and the desire to avoid the school environment (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). That is, the more a child experienced peer victimization, the more he/she had feelings of loneliness and negative feelings about his/her school environment. This is a significant finding when considering the long-term implications of victimization or bullying behaviors for children.

**Effective solutions to bullying.** Previous research has identified a variety of effective solutions to bullying in the school environment. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) acknowledged several successful aspects of bully intervention programs recognized by *The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence*. School-level interventions are one of the most crucial aspects required in confronting the issue of bullying. These include a structured step by step process involving questionnaires to determine baseline bullying behavior; a committee of teachers and professional staff to plan, implement and monitor the school's bullying initiative; teacher in-service days for anti-bullying training; involvement of all parties in the school from parents to bus drivers; and school-wide activities to launch the program, monitor progress and reinforce pro-social behaviors.

Classroom activities provide another means of successful bully intervention. By incorporating role play and artistic activities into classroom learning, students become informed about ways of handling and preventing bullying in the school setting. Fekkes et al. (2006) observed that by role-playing, children become educated about specific strategies that could be useful when intervening on a bullying situation, feeling better equipped to handle such. Individual intervention is another important tool to consider in an effort to achieve a successful bully intervention program. This includes immediate involvement of staff and school counselors when specific issues of bullying arise, as well as development of support groups, or "friendship groups" for victims of bullying. Lastly, community activities provide efforts to make the anti-bullying initiatives of the school known at a community level. With greater support, comes greater likelihood for success of a bully intervention program (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

The U.S. Department of Education (1998) also emphasized that strategies for teachers are a vital feature of successful bully intervention, considering that teachers spend the majority of the school day with students, and therefore, have the greatest degree of influence. Teachers should openly and consistently discuss bullying with students and gain their support in recognizing bullying as an intolerable behavior both within the classroom and outside of the classroom. Clear rules against bullying should be established, and teachers should ensure that students strictly adhere to these rules. To allow these rules to hold greater meaning, students should develop the rules themselves, allowing for greater accountability. Classroom activities and discussions that deal with bullying and violence, including the

harm caused by bullying, methods of reducing the occurrence of bullying, and steps to take when bullying is observed, should occur on a consistent basis. By establishing these rules regarding bullying and providing opportunities for discussions about such, it becomes a more accepted practice in the classroom, allowing children to feel more comfortable with being honest about their personal bullying experiences (Fekkes et al., 2006). Values of positive peer interaction do not only need to be supported in the context of anti-bullying efforts. Rather, teachers can also take advantage of opportunities to encourage successful interactions among students through cooperative learning assignments in all academic areas (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

While there are many aspects to consider in regard to a successful, worthwhile bully intervention program, there are certain qualities that every program should possess. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) described a key feature to any bully intervention program as being the preservation of a zero-tolerance policy of bullying with strict, easily-implemented consequences for engaging in bullying-type behaviors. Another indispensable feature to any bully intervention program is that of a warm atmosphere that encourages kindness and respect, where bullying is not tolerated, nor is it necessary.

**Bully intervention programs.** There are many types of intervention programs available to schools in an effort to combat the issue of bullying. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) highlighted one of the most widely recognized and highly regarded bully intervention programs. In 2000, Olweus and Limber (as cited in Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005) described the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. This program creates a school environment characterized by “warmth and involvement, has firm limits on unacceptable behavior, consistently applies non-hostile consequences to violations of rules, and allows adults to act as both authority figures and role models” (p. 106). However, when situations in which rules against bullying behavior are violated, there should also be clear, non-hostile, and consistently applied consequences for such violations. Olweus (1995) explained that the program was created under a theoretical framework regarding development and modification of behavior problems, specifically aggressive behavior. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been met with great success, seeing significant reductions in bullying behavior in schools, close to 50%. Another beneficial aspect of the program is the simplicity with which it can be implemented, and with minimal costs. The main focus of the program involves a shift in the attitudes, behaviors, and routines within the school environment.

“Bullybusters” is another successful bully intervention program to be implemented in schools. Beale (2001) described this program that involves students acting out various skits of bullying scenarios to inform and educate their fellow students. The drama performance provides an uplifting and engaging means of demonstrating positive behaviors and attitudes for children to adopt; it is a lively and exciting twenty minute performance with an undeniable message – do not give in to bullying, either as a bully or a victim. The purpose behind the skit is to provide a bullying scenario that children could find believable, and would encounter in their real lives. The performance first portrays the negative consequences of bullying, and concludes by providing specific action steps students could take to overcome a bullying situation. There is particular emphasis placed upon the victim’s feelings and reactions in response to being bullied. After the completion of the school-wide skit, individual classroom discussions occur, which allows for students to express their own views about bullying and develop methods for handling bullying situations they encounter.

## **CHARACTER EDUCATION**

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**Introduction to character education.** With the expansive knowledge regarding bullying and its prevalence among children, it is quite evident that the issue of bullying is a growing concern for children in our society, with far-reaching implications. While there is an obvious awareness of this epidemic among children and detailed efforts are available to eradicate, or at least significantly diminish, this issue, a question remains to be posed. Is there something missing from bully intervention programs that would strengthen the efforts against bullying and be met with even greater success? Character education may be this missing piece. Character Education Partnership (2010) defined character education as “the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures. To be effective, character education must include all stakeholders in a school

community and must permeate school climate and curriculum” (p. i). Knowing this, could consistent and purposeful integration of character development into education curricula for children of all ages have the potential not only to equip children in handling current moral dilemmas they face, but also to help guide their future moral decisions into adulthood? Evidence from previous research contains both supportive and contradictory findings regarding this issue of the effectiveness of character development into education curricula.

**Benefits of character education.** There are many positive aspects to implementing character education programs, as outlined by various research findings. By implementing a character education program, developing high standards of character becomes the central focus of faculty, students, and parents alike. Such programs nurture the personal, social, and emotional growth of students in a positive and enjoyable manner, resulting in students who exemplify these character traits in their own actions both inside and outside of the classroom (Cali, 1997). Revell (2002) analyzed children’s views about character education programs in schools; the study’s results found that elementary-aged school children had quite a positive view of character education. Not only did they view it as an essential part of the curriculum, just as is math, science, or language arts, but they also expressed the belief that it taught them how to be better people.

**Challenges of character education.** There are also findings related to the negative aspects, or challenges, associated with a character development program. A previous research study regarding the implementation of a program that taught social skills to students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom, acknowledged the important realization that many teachers feel pressured by district and state standards to focus their teaching solely on the standard-related curriculum, as well as the high-stakes standardized tests. Therefore, with these pressures, teachers feel unable to use a portion of their teaching time for social skills. Regardless, because the research found such positive effects from implementing social skills programs in schools, it was encouraged that schools take advantage of resources, such as social workers, to assist teachers in developing social skills groups for students, teaching important social skills, and providing proactive behavior interventions (Coombs Richardson, Toison, Huang, & Lee, 2009). The hope of implementing such social skills programs in schools is that the long-term result will be a classroom that is easier to manage with students who are less anxious and more eager to learn.

Another negative aspect to a character education program is the likelihood of children to develop negative attitudes toward such, as they age. While Revell (2002) found that elementary-aged school children had quite a positive view of character education, the study’s findings also identified that as students aged, more negative views about character education were expressed. Despite the findings of negative views held by older students, the research also found that many high school aged students believed that the inherent ideals of character education were positive, although they did not personally embrace these ideals as being beneficial. For this reason, it is important to instill enduring positive associations with character education, beginning in the early elementary years. Although older children may outwardly express negativity toward character education, their knowledge of its importance may merely be concealed and that the acceptance and application of these ideals will surface during adulthood. Even if students who engage in character development activities during elementary school do not demonstrate less aggressive or bullying-type behaviors in middle school and high school, it does not mean the implementation of such programs should not still be encouraged. Entrance into adulthood may very likely be the point in time when such character development becomes meaningful to these individuals, and thus, the values endured.

**Successful application of character education.** Despite both supportive and contradictory findings of character education programs, there has been research that clearly demonstrates evidence of a successful character development program that was implemented in a school environment. In earlier research, which involved a teacher who piloted a character development program in her school, there was clear recognition of character education being used as a fundamental means of teaching students ethical

principles (Cali, 1997). "Creatures of Character: Winning with Character Education" was a character development program that integrated curriculum-based learning from all regular academic areas, including math, science, and language arts. This program emphasized eight character traits including, responsibility, respect, citizenship, caring, self-control, fairness, honesty, and courage. It is widely known that children possess a love for animals; and because of this knowledge, animals were chosen as the subject to be integrated with the character development traits. Previous research has also shown that children learn through association. Therefore, associating specific character traits to a particular animal would ensure for better recall of the meaning of each character trait.

The two main goals of this character education program were to assist students in developing knowledge related to the eight character traits, through their specific associations to a particular animal, as well as to encourage students to demonstrate their understanding of these character traits using application through personal examples and hands-on experiences (Cali, 1997). The implementation of this program was met with great success. All parties involved, including students, parents, and faculty, evaluated the program with overwhelming support and encouragement. By involving these various stakeholders, the commitment to expand children's knowledge and experience with important character traits became a united effort, allowing for even stronger assurance of preparing children for their futures as moral individuals (Cali, 1997).

**Goal of character education.** Regardless of the opposing views concerning the effectiveness of character education programs for the use of improving the epidemic of bullying, the value of character development is ultimately rooted in its focus and definitive goal. Instead of simply focusing on anti-bullying, an alternative view is to

instill, reinforce, and reward the values of empathy, compassion, and acceptance. Instead of anti-bullying programs, we need a pro-kindness strategy. Kind people don't bully or look the other way when someone is bullied. We need to create a Culture of Kindness, encouraging a spirit of generosity and love where differences are accepted and celebrated rather than targeted. In a Culture of Kindness, students stand up for and next to one another, all for one and one for all. A dedicated effort to teach, advocate, and model kindness will work much better than efforts to punish meanness. (Josephson, n.d.)

## CONCLUSION

Through the previous discussion, it has become evident that children need to be instilled with the values that create an ethical individual of high character and morals, as well as tangible solutions for dealing with relevant moral issues in their lives, with one of particularly great pertinence being bullying. In an effort to initiate the provision of such tangible means for children to effectively confront the issue of bullying, while simultaneously promoting the development of strong character, the following are two model lesson plans to be applied in the elementary classroom.

The first lesson plan utilizes a case study to present a relatable bullying scenario for children, with a follow-up discussion and activity in the form of role-play. The purpose of this lesson is to disseminate the falsehoods and truths related to bullying behaviors. The second lesson plan specifically emphasizes character education by providing the means for initiation of a particular character education program entitled "Bucket Fillers" (McCloud, 2006). This program is based upon McCloud's book, *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* The "Bucket Fillers" program highlights the importance of kindness and respect. The ultimate goal of these two sample lesson plans is to initiate the support of efforts to be purposeful in educating children, starting in the early elementary years, about the realities of the moral and ethical dilemmas they will face in their daily lives.



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**APPENDIX**

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**LESSON I: Bullying Scenario and Role Play**

**A. PLANNING**

**Lesson Topic & Main Concept (Big Idea):**

The issue of bullying will be examined through students' interactive experience with a bullying scenario. Using the scenario, students will take part in active discussion to identify the negative bullying behaviors present in the scenario, as well as the various roles involved in the bullying process. In addition, students will be able to develop potential solutions to the bullying situation.

*Rachel is very excited, because she is celebrating her ninth birthday soon. To celebrate her birthday, she is having a big birthday party and wants to invite all of her classmates.*

*She asks her teacher for a list of all of the students in the class because she wants to write the invitations with her mom when she gets home.*

*On the bus ride home, Rachel is looking at the list, and she notices Jason's name on the list. Rachel doesn't like Jason because his hair is longer than hers and she thinks that makes him weird. She decides that if Jason is weird, she doesn't want him at her birthday party, so she crosses his name off the list before she gets home.*

*That evening as Rachel and her mom are writing her birthday invitations, her mom sees that one of the names has been crossed off of the list. When Rachel's mom asks her why there is a student's name crossed off of the list, Rachel lies and tells her mom that Jason moved to a different school a week ago, so he didn't need to be invited to the party. They finish writing the invitations and the next day at school, Rachel gives the invitations to all her classmates, except Jason.*

*Since her birthday party is still two weeks away, all of the other children are excited and begin talking about her upcoming party. When Jason hears his classmates talking about Rachel's party, he wonders why he didn't get an invitation when the rest of his class did.*

*Jason asks Rachel if she had forgotten his invitation by mistake. Rachel tells him he isn't invited, but doesn't give a reason why.*

*Soon, everyone finds out that Rachel didn't invite Jason to her party. The rest of the class is afraid that they won't be able to come to the party if Rachel sees them talking with Jason, so they all decide just to avoid him. Jason feels very sad and left out (McDonald, 2010).*

**Rationale:** Bullying is a prevalent ethical issue encountered among elementary-aged children. Knowing this, students would greatly benefit from exposure to learning opportunities related to bullying. Specifically, this lesson will help to disseminate the falsehoods regarding bullying, as well as develop classroom and school-wide efforts to combat bullying. By shedding light on this issue, as well as holding regular classroom discussions and activities related to bullying, students will feel more comfortable and safe to discuss and handle bullying situations that may arise in their own lives, or seek help in appropriately handling such.

**Background Information:**

a) *Analysis of student knowledge-* Students' prior knowledge will be activated regarding their own definitions of bullying. Through whole-class discussion, students will also be asked to share past experiences they have encountered when they have felt bullied and how it made them feel. An extension of this discussion should include students sharing their experiences of when they viewed others bullying and what actions they took when encountering such behaviors.

b) *Teacher content knowledge*

McDonald, J. (2010). *Rachel the bully girl, age 9*. Retrieved from

<http://bullysolutions.com/index.php/rachel-the-bully-girl-age-9>.

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

- 9.1.4.A.1 Recognize a problem and brainstorm ways to solve the problem individually or collaboratively.
- 9.1.4.A.2 Evaluate available resources that can assist in solving problems.
- 9.1.8.A.2 Implement problem-solving strategies to solve a problem in school or the community.
- 9.1.8.D.1 Employ appropriate conflict resolution strategies.

Objectives	Assessments
Students will be able to respond to the bullying scenario by discussing the various types of negative bullying behaviors that are present in the scenario, as well as the various roles involved in the bullying process. <i>(Cognitive/Affective)</i>	Teacher will assess students’ understanding based upon their interactions with the bullying scenario, as well as the quality of their responses.
Students will be able to apply problem solving strategies to develop possible solutions to the bullying problem in the scenario. <i>(Cognitive/Affective)</i>	Teacher will assess students’ understanding based upon the quality and depth of their problem solving strategy(ies).
Students will be able to implement their strategies for solving the bullying scenario by role playing the situation with a small group of fellow students. <i>(Cognitive/Affective/Psychomotor)</i>	Teacher will assess students’ understanding based upon their ability to work cooperatively with group members, as well as the quality of their final role play presentation.
Students will be able to extend the knowledge they acquired through the current bullying activity by signing “Anti-Bullying Pledge Cards,” in which they pledge to do their part to help stop bullying behaviors. <i>(Cognitive/Affective/Psychomotor)</i>	Teacher will assess students’ understanding based upon the quality of their responses and interactions with the idea of personally pledging to stop bullying behaviors.

Materials:

- ✓ Bullying scenario to be projected on an overhead (SMARTBoard, or any other interactive whiteboard) *or* a video created to depict the bullying scenario for students to view
- ✓ Overhead projector ( SMARTBoard, or any other interactive whiteboard)
- ✓ Chart paper (SMARTBoard, or any other interactive whiteboard)
- ✓ “Anti-Bullying Pledge Cards”
- ✓ Markers/Crayons/Colored pencils

**B. PROCEDURE:**

1. Motivational Beginning and Activating Students’ Prior Knowledge:

Students’ prior knowledge will be activated regarding their own definitions of bullying. Through whole-class discussion, students will also be asked to share past experiences they have encountered when they have felt bullied and how it made them feel. An extension of this discussion should include students sharing their experiences of when they viewed others bullying and what actions they took when encountering such behaviors.

2. Logistics/Classroom Management:

- **Grouping**-whole-class instruction during discussion; cooperative group work during role play
- **Timing**- 5 minute initiatory discussion, 15 minute reading/ discussion of bullying scenario, 15 minutes for students to develop their solutions and prepare for their role play, 20 minutes for all students to present their role-played scenarios, 10 minute closure (with students completing their “Anti-Bullying Pledge Cards”)
- **Transitions**-students will move from their desks to the reading carpet for whole-class discussion; students will move back to their desks for discussion of bullying scenario; students will be interspersed around the classroom as they prepare for their role play; students will return to their desks to be an audience for each group’s role play.

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- ***Student roles and Clean-up-*** participate in class discussion; offer insightful ideas; listen quietly and attentively to fellow students as they share; cooperatively work with classmates to develop a role play of the bullying scenario; respectfully and attentively listen to classmates' presentations; clean up and return all supplies used in preparing for their role play presentation.

### 3. Lesson Steps:

1. Students will take part in an initiatory discussion regarding their prior knowledge of bullying, as well as past experiences they have encountered with bullying behaviors.
2. As a whole class, students will read the bullying scenario about Rachel's birthday party. Students will be asked to identify the actions that could be seen as bullying in this scenario.
3. Students will be asked to identify the various roles of the individuals involved in the bullying scenario (*Rachel-bully; Jason-victim; Classmates-observers/bystanders*). These roles, along with other roles involved in the bullying process in general (assistant to the bully, reinforcer of the bully, defender of the victim) will be disseminated to ensure that children understand that even though they may not be the bully, they still play a role in perpetuating or stopping the bullying behavior. To ensure greater meaning and recall, students will be asked to develop their own names for these different roles involved in the bullying process.
4. Students will be divided into small groups of 3 or 4 to work together to problem solve and employ conflict resolution strategies to develop a solution to the problem found in Rachel's bullying scenario. In these groups, students will be asked to assign each group member to one of the roles identified in this bullying scenario (bully, victim, observers/bystanders).
5. Once students have identified the course of action they wish to take in solving the problem, they will prepare and act out the solution they have developed.
6. After all students have presented, a final whole-class discussion will be held regarding the importance of dealing with bullying in a positive, effective manner. Specific emphasis will be placed on the idea that there are various roles involved in the bullying process, and even though a student may not be the bully, they still play a role in perpetuating or stopping the bullying behavior.
7. As a conclusion to the lesson, students will be asked to decorate and sign their own "Anti-Bullying Pledge Card" as a reminder that they will do their part to help stop bullying behaviors.

### 4. Questions:

- Can you explain what "bullying" means to you? What are some of the actions or behaviors of a bully?
- Can you describe an experience you have had with bullying in the past, whether it was you or someone you knew?
- Using your describing words, can you tell me how it feels to be bullied (or to see someone else be bullied)?
- After reading this story about Rachel, who can explain to me some of Rachel's behaviors that may have been hurtful to others?
- Even though Rachel's actions are hurtful and she is being unkind, what do you think is the best way for someone to respond to Rachel and tell her that she is being unkind?
- Working together in your groups, what are some possible solutions to the story we just read about Rachel? Once you have come up with positive solution that you think will be successful and treats everyone in the story with kindness, create a skit that will allow you to act out your solution to share it with the rest of the class.
- After having learned how hurtful bullying can be, how do you think we as a class can make sure that no one in our class (or school) feels the way Jason felt after being left out of Rachel's birthday party?

5. Curriculum Integration: Students will improve their ability to think critically and empathetically towards others, as well as problem solve when working with the bullying scenario.

- **Differentiated Instruction:** Teacher will work independently with those students who have difficulty expressing their thoughts or ideas in a large-group manner, or need verbal instructions repeated. Groups for role play activity will be heterogeneously organized; students with differing abilities will work together.

6. **Closure:** Students will sign “Anti-Bullying Pledge Cards” as a reminder that they will do their part to help stop bullying behaviors.

7. **Follow-up/Next Steps:** Opportunities to discuss bullying and the importance of combating bullying behaviors will continue to be enforced in the classroom. Specifically, students will continue to have opportunities to explore and understand the various roles in the bullying process, aside from just the bully and the victim (assistant to bully, reinforcer of bully, defender of victim, and observers/bystanders). In this way, students will become aware that even when they are not the bully, they are still a part of the bullying process. Gradually, students will develop a set of classroom rules to be followed regarding anti-bullying behaviors, and they will be held accountable to uphold these rules through their daily actions inside and outside of the classroom. Intertwined with anti-bullying discussions will be lessons in character education to help emphasize to students the importance of replacing a culture of bullying with a culture of kindness and respect.

## **LESSON II: Character Education (Kindness/Respect)**

### **A. PLANNING**

#### Lesson Topic & Main Concept (Big Idea):

*Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* is read aloud to students, and the “Bucket Filler” behavior management and character development program is introduced to the class (McCloud, 2006).

**Rationale:** Character education is an important component in considering the development of children’s morality. To provide balance to anti-bullying initiatives, character education should be incorporated into education curricula as a means of emphasizing the value of important character traits, such as respect and kindness. When these positive character traits are emphasized, it becomes evident to students that not only are bullying behaviors not tolerated, they are not necessary.

#### Background Information:

a) *Analysis of student knowledge-* Students will take part in a whole-group discussion of why and how we should do and say kind things to people (including our classmates and teachers) and how it makes us feel when kind or unkind things are said to us. Students’ prior knowledge regarding previous discussions related to anti-bullying will also be connected to the theme of kindness in the story.

b) *Teacher content knowledge-*

McCloud, Carol (2006). *Have you filled a bucket today?* Northville, MI: Nelson Publishing and Marketing.

Josephson, M. (n.d.) *We don’t need anti-bullying programs* 712.5. Retrieved from

[http://charactercounts.org/michael/2011/03/we\\_dont\\_need\\_anti-bullying\\_pro.html](http://charactercounts.org/michael/2011/03/we_dont_need_anti-bullying_pro.html).

#### New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

3.4.4.A.1. Listen actively for a variety of purposes such as enjoyment and obtaining information.

3.4.4.B.1 Demonstrate competence in active listening through comprehension of a story, interview, or oral report of an event or incident.

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Objectives	Assessments
Students will be able to respond to the story’s message and personalize their own buckets. ( <i>Cognitive/Affective/Psychomotor</i> )	Teacher will assess students’ understanding based upon their interaction with the story, as well as their connections to previous lessons regarding anti-bullying efforts.
Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the “Bucket Filler” program by beginning to write kind or encouraging things to fill one or more of their classmates’ buckets. ( <i>Cognitive/Affective/Psychomotor</i> )	Teacher will assess students’ understanding based upon their ability to appropriately fill out the “Bucket Filler” forms with kind and/or encouraging words for one or more of their classmates.

Materials:

- ✓ Have You Filled a Bucket Today? book (1 copy)
- ✓ “Bucket Filler” buckets (24, one for each student)
- ✓ Crayons/markers (for each student)
- ✓ Stikki-Clips (to hang buckets in the classroom)

**B. PROCEDURE:**

1. Motivational Beginning and Activating Students’ Prior Knowledge: To engage students in the lesson, they will be asked to refresh their memories about our classroom’s number one rule (respect). Students will also be asked to recall previous classroom discussions and activities related to anti-bullying efforts.

2. Logistics/Classroom Management:

- **Grouping**-whole-class instruction during discussion and read aloud; independent work when students decorate their own buckets and complete “Bucket Filler” forms.
- **Timing**- 5 minute discussion, 20 minute read-aloud, 5 minute explanation of “Bucket Fillers” program, 10 minutes for students to decorate/personalize their buckets and complete “Bucket Filler” forms
- **Transitions**-students will move from their desks to the reading carpet for the read aloud, and students will move back to their desks to personalize their own buckets.
- **Student roles and Clean-up**- participate in class discussion; offering insightful ideas; listen quietly and attentively during the read aloud; and clean up their desk and supplies (markers, scissors, etc.) after coloring their own bucket.

3. Lesson Steps:

1. Students will take part in an initiatory discussion about how it feels when kind and unkind things are done or said to them. The classroom’s number one rule of “respect” will also be reiterated.
2. Students will listen while the teacher reads aloud the book, Have You Filled a Bucket Today?
3. Students will be introduced to the rules of the new “Bucket Filler” program of the classroom, including how to fill out the “Bucket Filler” forms, modeled through a sample form filled out by the teacher for each student.
4. Students will decorate their own bucket to be hung on the classroom’s front board.
5. Students will begin to fill out “Bucket Filler” forms, writing kind or encouraging words to their classmates/ teachers (to be placed in their classmates’/teacher’s buckets)

4. Questions:

- Can you describe a time when someone did/said something kind to you, as well as time when someone did/said something hurtful? How did it make you feel?
- Can you explain why it is important to be someone who is a “bucket filler,” rather than a “bucket dipper”?

5. Curriculum Integration:

- Students will improve their ability to think empathetically towards others, through the purpose of the story, Have You Filled a Bucket Today? This will also serve as a means of character development.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Teacher will work independently with those students who have difficulty expressing their thoughts or ideas in a large-group manner, or need verbal instructions repeated (specifically when decorating their own buckets.)

6. Closure: Once students have completed personalizing their buckets, they will have the opportunity to begin filling out "Bucket Filler" forms to encourage their classmates/teachers with kind or encouraging words.

7. Follow-up/Next Steps: The "Bucket Fillers" program will be a continuous behavior management and character development program present in the classroom throughout the school year. This program will serve to keep students mindful of making good choices and being individuals who exemplify kindness and respect through all of their words and actions.