



Relationship solutions: Fostering positive teacher-student relationships for bullying prevention and intervention

Karen Bouchard

Recent research has connected teacher-student relationships to students' involvement in bullying. For example, studies have revealed the intimate connection between students' relationships with teachers and students' propensity to engage in bullying behaviours and the likelihood of experiencing peer rejection and victimization (Runions & Shaw, 2013; Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011). Much of the research and professional literature is focused on the content of bullying intervention (e.g., what to do, and when and how to do it), with little attention to the relational context for implementing these strategies. This gap may partially explain the relatively modest effects of prevention programs on bullying rates (e.g., Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). A perspective on these relational processes would complement the current focus on content in bullying prevention and intervention discourse and serve to bring teacher practices more in line with the wider view of bullying as a complex "relationship problem that requires relationship solutions" (Craig & Pepler, 2007).

In this workshop, the presenters will first provide a justification for their central thesis – namely, the interconnected nature of teacher-student relationships and children's bullying experiences – substantiated by current literature and grounded within a bioecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 2005). Participants will then engage in two experiential introductory activities designed to promote skills that cultivate positive teacher-student relationships and potentially diminish children's bullying experiences. Throughout the workshop, they will have the opportunity to (a) enhance their attunement to the social organization of children's peer groups; and, b) learn and practice effective communication skills in the service of caring relationships with students. Each activity will be 30 minutes in length and introductory in nature. We will rely on a variety of instructional strategies, including watching a short video, the discussion of vignettes, practicing skills with a partner, and individual reflection.

To conclude the workshop, the presenters will provide further suggestions for how current pre-service teacher training could be expanded to include an emphasis on teachers developing the relationships skills to be maximally effective in their work. In so doing, the presenters will provide specific examples from course curricula used at an Ontario university to help teacher-candidates build relationship capacities in school contexts. Participants will leave the workshop with an understanding of the subtle, yet influential, role of teacher-student relationships in children's bullying experiences, and will be equipped with important skills that can positively influence complex social processes in the classroom, such as bullying and victimization.