Authoritative School Climate and Peer Victimization

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Main Points

1. Need for a theory-based model of school climate
2. Good schools are like good parents – demanding, but supportive.
3. An authoritative school has less bullying, as well as less aggression toward teachers.

School Climate

1. School climate is broadly defined with many components.
2. There is a need for theoretically grounded measures that have good psychometric properties.
3. The authoritative school climate model provides a theoretical foundation for school climate and bullying research.

Bullying

1. Bullying is a widely recognized problem in schools, especially the middle grades.
2. Bully victimization is associated with both emotional and academic problems.
3. Many prevention authorities assert that a positive school climate can help reduce bullying.

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Dr. Cornell has studied youth violence for 30 years and has assisted numerous schools in the development of violence prevention programs. He has authored more than 200 publications in psychology and education, including two books: Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence and School Violence: Fears versus Facts.
Classic study of parents

Two contrasting groups
- "Authoritarian" strict discipline-oriented
- "Permissive" lacking in discipline

Source: Baumrind, 1966

Survey of principals

Two contrasting groups
- "Get-tough" strict discipline-oriented
- "Be supportive" prevention-oriented

Source: Skiba & Edl, 2004

Measurement Needs

1. Brief measures of structure and support for students and teachers.
2. Prior research has overlooked the nesting of students within schools. Need a multi-level assessment of factor structure.
3. Criterion-related validity in relation to student outcomes.

Prior study of 9th grade developed measures of Structure and Support.
Multilevel Multi-Informant Structure of the Authoritative School Climate Survey

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The Authoritative School Climate Survey was designed to provide schools with a brief measurement of 2 key characteristics of school climate—disciplinary structure and school support—so that they could identify important school climate issues. The factor structures of these 2 constructs were examined with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses in a statewide sample of 78,604 students (9th to 12th grade) in 425 schools. Nonlinearity in the analysis resulted in non-linear relationships and the structural components differed across grades. These findings provide schools with a core set of school climate measures guided by authoritative discipline theory.

New study of 7th and 8th grade
http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=browsePA.ofp&jcode=spq
**Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying Scale**

| Agree/Strongly Agree |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Bullying is a problem at this school. | 53 |
| Students here often get teased about their clothing or physical appearance. | 71 |
| Students get teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity at this school. | 37 |
| There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school. | 54 |
| Students here get teased or put down about their sexual orientation. | 40 |

- Stable factor structure
- Works for males and females, grades 6-12, white and minority students
- Teacher and student versions

**How much teasing and bullying do we observe in schools with different levels of structure and support?**

**IV** - 4 groups of schools

**DV** - School percentile in Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying

**Multi-level multivariate analysis of peer victimization and school climate**

**Prevalence of Teasing & Bullying**
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Interaction Effect of Structure and Support on PTB

Structure has a stronger effect on PTB when support is high.
Schools with high structure and high support:

Findings are consistent across schools varying in:
• School size
• Student poverty %
• Minority students %
• Urbanicity

Recommendations for schools:

• Schools should assess their levels of structure and support.
• Schools do not have to choose between strict discipline and being supportive.
• Improving school climate may improve student behavior.

Virginia Secondary School Climate Study

In collaboration:
• Virginia Department of Education
• Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and Center for School Safety

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Virginia Youth Violence Project

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