Through Teachers' Eyes: Understanding and Addressing Bullying and Peer Victimization in Classrooms within the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District

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June 2016

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts

Abstract

Most bullying and peer victimization occurs in schools (Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004), making teachers essential to intervention efforts (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Voeten, & Sinisammal, 2004). However, school staffs' understanding of bullying may influence whether they actually perceive incidents as bullying and whether they intervene appropriately. Though the damaging effects of peer victimization are widely recognized (see Hawker & Boulton, 2000 for a review), a consensus on a single definition of bullying has proven difficult to achieve. As such, the current study investigated perceptions and understandings of bullying and peer victimization in a unique sample of 100 school personnel from the Avalon East Region of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). School staff were asked to define peer victimization, and their responses were compared to the NLESD's definition of bullying in their Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013). School staff were also asked which strategy they would first implement when addressing peer victimization, as well as how important they perceived teachers to be in the lives of children who have been victimized by their peers. Results indicated that the majority of school staff defined peer victimization as being physical or verbal, and few defined the concept with reference to all three defining features of bullying, these being: intent, repetition, and a power imbalance. Most school staff reported using indirect strategies, such as restructuring the classroom environment, to address instances of bullying. This finding did not vary by staff grade level taught or years of experience. The majority of school staff ranked their role in the lives of victimized children as of medium importance, and this finding did not vary according to grade level taught or years of experience. Results can have important implications for future

intervention and prevention of bullying behaviours and peer victimization in schools within the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District.

Résumé

L'intimidation et la victimisation par les pairs se produit en majeure partie dans les écoles (Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004). Les enseignants sont donc essentiels quant aux efforts d'intervention (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, voeten, & Sinisammal, 2004). Cependant, la façon dont le personnel d'école comprend l'intimidation peut déterminer si les incidents d'intimidation sont effectivement perçus comme tel et si le personnel y intervient de manière appropriée. Bien que les effets néfastes de la victimisation par les pairs sont largement reconnus (voir Hawker et Boulton, 2000 pour un synthèse), un consensus sur une définition unique de l'intimidation s'avère difficile à réaliser. À ce titre, la présente étude a examiné la perception et la compréhension de l'intimidation et de la victimisation par les pairs parmi un échantillon de 100 membres du personnel scolaire de la région du East Avalon du Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). Les membres du personnel des écoles inclus dans cet échantillon ont été invités à définir la victimisation par les pairs, et leurs réponses ont été comparées à la définition de l'intimidation du NLESD dans leur protocole d'intervention pour intimidation (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013). Les membres du personnel scolaire ont également été demandé de décrire la première stratégie qu'ils mettent en œuvre lorsqu'ils abordent un problème de victimisation, ainsi que leur perception de l'importance des enseignants dans la vie des enfants qui ont été victimes d'intimidation. Les résultats indiquent que la majorité du personnel scolaire défini la victimisation par les pairs comme étant un acte physique ou verbale. Peu d'entre eux ont définis le concept en faisant référence aux trois caractéristiques qui définissent l'intimidation : l'intention, la répétition et un déséquilibre de pouvoir. La plupart des employés de l'école ont déclaré qu'ils utilisent des stratégies indirectes, telles que la restructuration de l'environnement de la classe, pour intervenir aux cas

d'intimidation. Cette constatation ne varie pas selon le niveau enseigné ni par les années d'expérience du personnel. La majorité du personnel scolaire a classé leur rôle dans la vie des enfants victimes comme étant d'importance moyenne, et cette conclusion ne varie pas en fonction du niveau enseigné ou des années d'expérience. Les résultats peuvent avoir des implications importantes pour les futures interventions et la prévention des comportements d'intimidation et de victimisation par les pairs dans les écoles au sein du NLESD.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Steven Shaw, for his continued support; thank you for trusting that I could change my thesis idea last minute and make it work. To the labbies, thank you for being so encouraging when my original research project started to fall apart; lab meeting after lab meeting, you made me feel like I could somehow find a way out of the mess I was in (and I did!). A special thank you goes to Marie-Michelle Boulanger; you are the lab mate (and friend) I hoped I would meet when I moved away from home for graduate school. I will be forever grateful for your kindness, mentorship, and words of encouragement.

To my McGill friends – thank you for keeping me sane throughout this process. To Emily, my first McGill friend, I am grateful for your humour and friendship; to Loredana, thank you for always being there to listen, nonjudgmentally, and for talking through my research questions and data analyses with me (Devin, you deserve a shout out here, too. Thank you!); to Vanessa, I am so grateful for your honesty, continued support, and for our newfound friendship.

Most importantly, I am so lucky to have the greatest family and friends in Newfoundland. I can feel your love and support all the way over here on the mainland. Erica, Stacey, and Sarah – our friendship is like no other. Thank you for being my personal cheerleaders, congratulating me on every single accomplishment. Mom and Dad, no words can ever describe my appreciation for you. Thank you for absolutely everything, as I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. I would also like to thank my siblings, Megan, Luke, and Leah, and my Auntie Bev, for their support.

Koady, you deserve the biggest "thank you". I am so appreciative of your patience and for making long distance work. Not once did you try to stop me from pursuing my passion. Thank you for understanding how important my work is to me, but also for reminding me how important it is to stop and take a break every once in a while.

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Introduction

A school should be a safe space that promotes community and belonging, in which students feel respected, comfortable to participate, and willing to make mistakes and be challenged (Boostrom, 1998). However, this is not the case for many students; in a large-scale Canadian study of over 11,000 children and youth, 21% of elementary students and 17% of secondary students reported feeling unsafe within their school environment (Vaillancourt et al., 2010a). Such perceptions of safety, or lack thereof, can be linked to student experiences of bullying and peer victimization. Though precise prevalence rates of bullying vary across studies, such that 10 to 33 percent of students identify as the victim and five to 13 percent of students identify as the bully, this phenomenon and associated implications are undoubtedly worthy of further investigation (Cassidy, 2009; Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2006; Kessel Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Nansel et al., 2001; Perkins, Craig, & Perkins, 2011; Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006). Because teachers are essential to intervention efforts (Salmivalli et al., 2004), it is crucial to gain insight into how school staff identify and intervene in incidents of peer victimization before targeted strategies and interventions can be implemented with the utmost level of effectiveness.

Though school boards make use of numerous evidence-based interventions, policies and protocols, they are of little use if school staff do not accurately define the phenomenon of interest. Through surveying school staff, the current study aims to further investigate how these individuals define bullying and peer victimization, as well as their intervention efforts and perceptions of their importance in the lives of children victimized by their peers.

Literature Review

Defining Features and Implications of Bullying and Peer Victimization

Following the pioneering work of Olweus (1978, 1993, 1997), bullying is most commonly defined as a subcategory of interpersonal aggression, characterized by unwanted negative actions or aggressive behaviours that are *intentional*, *repetitive*, and the result of a *power imbalance* between two or more persons. It is the imbalance of power that distinguishes bullying from other forms of aggression (Smith & Morita, 1999; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). A power imbalance exists when the student subjected to the negative actions is helpless and unable to defend him or herself, as a result of being physically weaker than the bully, or even the mere perception of being physically or mentally weaker than the bully (Olweus, 1997). A power imbalance can also occur when the precise source of the negative actions is not easily identifiable; for example, in instances of social exclusion from the group, speaking negatively of an individual behind their back, or even by spreading anonymous offensive or hateful notes (Olweus, 1997). This definition of bullying and peer victimization has been widely accepted by researchers and practitioners (Smith & Brain, 2000). From a Canadian perspective, Craig and Pepler (2007), both leading researchers in the field of bullying, further describe the phenomenon as a "destructive relationship problem" (p. 86) in which bullies and victims engage in a vicious cycle wherein bullies learn to control and cause distress to their victims through the use of power and aggression, and victims are unable to defend themselves and thus become increasingly powerless.

The many faces of bullying. Negative actions or behaviours can be direct, in which attacks are relatively open and obvious, or they can be indirect and more covert (Olweus, 1993). They can also take many forms, from physical harm (i.e., physical victimization); to taunts and

threats (i.e., verbal victimization); to social isolation and intentional exclusion, rumor-spreading and humiliation (i.e., relational or social aggression); and even electronic harassment via text message, e-mail, or social media (i.e., electronic victimization or cyberbullying) (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Not only does peer victimization influence overall school climate and students' perceptions of safety on school grounds, but it has implications for children's well-being and psychosocial development.

Implications for children and adolescents. In a meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies, peer victimization was positively associated with depressive and anxious symptoms, feelings of loneliness, and low self-esteem in children (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Being a victim of bullying is also associated with self-harm, psychotic symptoms, and violent behaviour, all of which are indicative of future psychopathology (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010). In fact, a bullied child's risk of becoming violent with age has been reported to exceed a non-bullied child's risk by approximately one third (Ttofi, Farrington, & Lösel, 2012). Peer victimization also has damaging effects on a child's academic achievement, as measured by school grades, standardized test results, and teacher ratings of achievement (Morrow, Hubbard, Barhight, & Thomson, 2014; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010; Wang et al., 2014). Such findings have been found to be consistent and stable over time regardless of the informants of victimization (e.g., self-report versus peer nominations) and measurement of academic achievement (e.g., GPA versus teacher reports of academic engagement) (Juvonen, Yueyan Wang, & Espinoza, 2010). Instances of peer victimization are visible in children as young as five and six years of age, in which peer victimization has been shown to be a predictor of kindergartener's school adjustment problems, such as school avoidance and liking, loneliness, and academic achievement (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).

Peer victimization is more commonly linked to social-emotional, psychological, or academic problems; however, it also has unfavourable implications for a child's physical health, such as more frequent and severe health problems, increased abdominal pain, and more frequent health visits (Knack, Jensen-Campbell, & Baum, 2011). Experiences of peer victimization are associated with a high likelihood of reporting adverse physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, abdominal and back pain, dizziness, and sleeping difficulties) and poor physical self-concepts (i.e., one's perception of their physical health, appearance, and physical capabilities), both concurrently and over time (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016). Youth victimized by their peers also experience lower cortisol levels immediately after waking and before going to bed, an atypical pattern that differs from that of non-victimized youth but is similar to individuals with stressful life experiences, particularly those with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Knack et al., 2011). There is also evidence to support the idea that peer victimization can alter one's genetic makeup (see Shalev et al., 2012; Ouellett-Morin et al., 2012). Such alterations in normal biological functioning speak to the urgent need to prevent instances of bullying.

Implications for adults. The negative consequences of childhood peer victimization do not wane with the transition into adulthood; in fact, bullying in childhood actually contributes to long-lasting adjustment problems that persist throughout the lifespan. For example, in a meta-analysis of 29 longitudinal studies, the probability of victims of bullying being depressed up to 36 years later was significantly higher than that of non-victimized students (Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2013). These results were significant even after controlling for multiple major childhood risk factors. In a longitudinal study that examined the prolonged effects of bullying involvement at six different time points (age nine, 11, 13, 19, 21, and 24-26), victims were more likely to develop an anxiety disorder, bully-victims (i.e., individuals who were bullied and also

engaged in bullying behaviours) exhibited a higher chance of developing depression and panic disorder, and male bullies were at an increased risk for suicidality (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Involvement in childhood peer victimization also has damaging effects on adult outcomes such as health, risky or illegal behaviour, wealth, relationships, and the likelihood of completing secondary school (Moore et al., 2015; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Peer victimization is not merely a temporary problem that is easily rectified once a child leaves school; this phenomenon has severe acute and long-lasting implications on one's development throughout the lifespan.

Peer Victimization within a School Context

Teachers' definitions of peer victimization. Most bullying occurs in schools (Kasen et al., 2004), which makes teachers essential to intervention efforts (Salmivalli et al., 2004). However, teachers' understanding of bullying may influence whether they actually perceive incidents as bullying and whether they intervene appropriately. Though the damaging effects of peer victimization are widely recognized, a consensus definition of bullying and peer victimization has proved difficult to achieve. In a qualitative study that aimed to explore teachers' understanding of bullying, teachers' definitions of the concept differed slightly; though all teachers made reference to a power imbalance and the act of bullying as being intentional, their definitions differed with regards to how seriously they perceived various forms of bullying, such as indirect and direct bullying (Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). For example, one teacher did not consider non-physical behaviours, such as spreading rumors or teasing, to be bullying behaviour. Furthermore, some teachers incorporated the concept of bullying behaviours as repetitive in their definitions, whereas others did not (Mishna et al., 2005). In his study on teacher's views of bullying, Boulton (1997) found that most teachers considered the following

behaviours indicative of bullying: physical assaults, verbal threats, and forcing others to do things they do not necessarily want to do. Despite this consensus, behaviours such as name calling, spreading hurtful stories, intimidating by staring, and taking others' personal belongings were not considered bullying by approximately one in four teachers. Craig, Henderson, and Murphy (2000) found similar results in their study of perspective teachers' perceptions of bullying, as incidents of physical aggression were considered bullying behaviour more often than verbal aggression.

Teachers' perceptions of bullying behaviours. The perception of the seriousness of bullying behaviours play an integral role in how teachers may understand, define, and intervene in instances of peer victimization. In a study that examined preservice teachers' responses to six written vignettes describing school bullying incidents, preservice teachers perceived relational bullying to be less serious than other forms of bullying (e.g., physical) (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). Similar results were found in a study of British and Canadian teachers' attitudes towards bullying, in which teachers were less likely to make reference to relational bullying in their definitions of bullying in comparison to both physical and verbal forms (Holt & Keyes, 2004). As such, teachers may be less likely to recognize or intervene in situations involving relational victimization.

How teachers understand and respond to incidents of bullying also varies as a function of other factors, such as whether they think that the victimized child was responsible for the incident and whether the victimized child fits their assumptions about victim characteristics and behaviours (Mishna et al., 2005). Teachers' feelings of empathy towards the victimized child, as well as their past experiences of bullying, also influence teacher's present perceptions and reports of bullying incidents (Mishna et al., 2005; Waasdorp, Pas, O'Brennan, & Bradshaw,

2011). This may contribute to inadequate implementation of school bullying interventions.

Teachers' intervention efforts. Such factors may have implications for the way in which teachers ultimately address and intervene in instances of peer victimization. In a study that examined teachers' responses to bullying incidents, teachers were less likely to get involved in instances of social exclusion (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). This, in turn, resulted in teacher strategy use such as ignoring the incident and having the victim and bully work out the problem on their own (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Such intervention strategies are troubling, as they may reinforce inappropriate bullying behaviours and leave victims feeling helpless. In a naturalistic observation study, Craig, Pepler, and Atlas (2000) found that teachers rarely intervened in instances of bullying, both in the classroom and on the playground; specifically, teachers intervened in 14% of classroom incidents of bullying and only 4% of incidents that occurred on the playground (Pepler & Craig, 2000). The authors suggested that this lack of intervention may be the result of difficulty with detecting bullying, which may stem from inaccurate or misleading conceptualizations of what explicitly defines bullying behaviour.

Discrepancy between student and teacher perceptions of bullying. Not only is there a discrepancy between teachers' definition and perception of peer victimization, but there is also a lack of consensus regarding bullying frequency among teachers and students. In a large-scale school-based study of staff and student perceptions of bullying behaviours and attitudes towards intervention and retaliation, more than 49% of students indicated that they were victimized by a peer in the past month; however, approximately 71% of teachers estimated that merely 15% or less of students were frequently victimized (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007). It is likely that teachers underreport instances of peer victimization because they do not have an accurate definition of just what exactly peer victimization looks like. This disparity is alarming and

speaks to the need to ensure that each school abides by a specific set of guidelines or protocol to inform definitions of and intervention strategies for bullying and peer victimization. Ultimately, failure to incorporate all forms of victimization into one's definition of peer victimization and to recognize the seriousness of a bullying incident will only further damage the victimized child.

Teachers as a Support System

Benefits of the student-teacher relationship. Teachers not only play a significant role in intervention efforts to stop bullying from occurring, but they also have the potential to serve as a strong source of support and emotional security for children, especially those who have been victimized by their peers (Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011). The teacher-child relationship is often described based on dimensions of closeness and conflict (Hughes, 2011; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995), in which closeness refers to a relationship consisting of warmth and support, and conflict refers to a relationship characterized by tension and resentment (Pianta et al., 1995). It is within a close relationships that teachers can provide children with support, assist in the development of coping skills, and strengthen academic motivation (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). The benefits of a close, supportive student-teacher relationship are well-documented in the literature, such that strong student-teacher relationships are predictive of students' school belongingness, academic motivation, classroom engagement (Hughes, 2011; Ryan et al., 1994), and academic achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, 2011). It is this close adult-child relationship that can have significant implications for a child's ability to successfully navigate through many school situations, particularly instances of bullying and peer victimization.

Teachers' role in bullying situations. Olweus (1993) emphasized the integral role of teachers, stating that: "The attitudes of the teachers toward bully/victim problems and their behavior in bullying situations are of major significance for the extent of bully/victim problems

in the school or the class" (p. 26). As such, teachers have the ability to affect the bullying dynamic among students within the classroom in various ways (Saarento, Garandeau, & Salmivalli, 2015). Emotional support from teachers may engender a supportive classroom climate, which may, in turn, prevent instances of peer victimization (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011). Teachers who exhibit an emotional connection and are responsive to their students' needs may model relational skills necessary for positive peer relationships; for example, they may provide support for children at-risk for victimization by helping them acquire social skills and coping strategies (Serdiouk, Rodkin, Madill, Logis, & Gest, 2015).

The positive impact of teacher support. Receiving, or even perceiving, support from a teacher can also serve as a buffer against problems associated with peer victimization (Saarento et al., 2015). In a study of the relationship between peer victimization and emotional and behavioural problems, adolescents who received high levels of emotional support from their teacher were less likely to experience behavioural problems associated with relational aggression (Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010). The results of the same study indicated that emotional support from the teacher at time one moderated the association between time one relational victimization and both emotional and behavioural problems two years later. As such, adolescents with high levels of emotional support from their teacher were less likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems due to relational victimization over the span of two years in comparison to adolescents with low levels of teacher emotional support (Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010). Davidson and Demaray (2007) found that male students who experienced high levels of victimization but had high levels of support from their teacher had less internalizing distress compared to males who experienced high levels of victimization but had low teacher support. Teacher support has also been identified as a positive and significant predictor of students' self-reported grades and

self-perceived academic competence, especially for victims of peer victimization (Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009). Perceptions of adult support are significantly and negatively associated with reports of victimization, school avoidance, and substance use (Darwich, Hymel, & Waterhouse, 2012), and have also been shown to have a buffering effect such that it lessens the impact of bullying on students' quality of life (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009).

Perceptions of support provided by the teacher may also influence a child's willingness to seek help and disclose bullying incidents; for example, students who perceived their teachers as caring, respectful, and interested in them were more likely to indicate that they would speak to a teacher when they themselves or a classmate were the subject of victimization (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010). In a study of the effects of teacher-student relationships on peer harassment, students' perceptions of teacher support in situations involving peer harassment was associated with reductions in students reports of physical property attacks and verbal-social exclusion, both of which are examples of peer victimization (Lucas-Molina, Williamson, Pulido, & Pérez-Albéniz, 2015). The results of the same study also indicated that there was a positive relationship between problematic teacher-student relationships and peer victimization experiences (Lucas-Molina et al., 2015). Such findings speak to the positive impact and importance of teacher support in reducing peer victimization.

Supportive teacher-student relationships can also be beneficial for the perpetrators of peer victimization; Troop-Gordon and Kopp (2011) found that a positive relationship with the teacher (as measured by feelings of closeness) was negatively associated with subsequent physical aggression. (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010) found that students who had a more supportive relationship with their teacher engaged in less bullying behaviour compared to students with a

poorer quality teacher-student relationship. Such a relationship provides the context in which children can develop and make use of more adaptive social and emotional skills as opposed to resorting to unkind behaviours.

The negative impact of the absence of teacher support. On the other hand, a lack of support (or perceived support) from teachers can have adverse consequences for victims of peer victimization; in a two-year longitudinal study, Troop-Gordon and Kuntz (2013) found that students' school adjustment (as measured by school liking and academic progress) was negatively affected by peer victimization and the teacher-student relationship, such that children who experienced a combination of victimization and a poor quality relationship with their teacher fared the worst. In a study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning youth, students who reported low levels of adult support at school reported higher levels of victimization pertaining to their sexual orientation, as compared to students who reported receiving moderate or high levels of adult support at school (Darwich et al., 2012). Teacher-student relationships characterized by the disempowerment of students have been shown to be predictive of students' bullying behaviour (Nation, Vieno, Perkins, & Santinello, 2008).

Bullying and Peer Victimization in Newfoundland and Labrador

The present study is unique in that it explores teachers' perceptions of bullying and peer victimization within Newfoundland and Labrador, a province with a relatively homogeneous population and a single English-speaking school district for the entire province. According to the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District's (NLESD) Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013), bullying is defined as:

> "repeated behaviour that is intended to cause harm to another person(s). A person participates in bullying if he or she directly carries out, assists or encourages the

> behaviour in any way. Those that engage in bullying behaviour are perceived to be in a position of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal, social and/or electronic. In some circumstances bullying is an illegal activity" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador-Education, 2013, p. 1).

The document further describes bullying as a behaviour that is repeated, intentional, and the result of a power imbalance, all of which are reflected in Olweus' (1978, 1993) widely recognized definition of peer victimization. Four forms of bullying are also described in detail, such that:

1. "Physical bullying includes, but is not limited to, hitting, spitting, taking or damaging personal belongings and unwanted touching.
2. Verbal bullying includes, but is not limited to, taunting, malicious teasing, making threats and racist or homophobic comments.
3. Social bullying includes, but is not limited to, spreading rumors, excluding from a group, and manipulation of relationships.
4. Electronic bullying involves the use of cell phones, computers, and other devices to socially and/or verbally bully another" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador-Education, 2013, p. 1).

Conclusions

Teachers play a unique role in the lives of students; not only do they contribute to students' academic learning, but they can also contribute to social and emotional well-being by building and strengthening resiliency skills for those at risk for, or presently experiencing, peer victimization (Eliot et al., 2010). Only once teachers accurately identify instances of peer victimization can they intervene to address the incident and tend to those who have been

targeted. In understanding the definition of bullying and peer victimization, teachers can act as agents of change to improve the lives of victimized children, the relationships that they have with other students, and the overall school climate in general.

As such, the goal of the current study was to understand how school staff of the NLESD perceive, and ultimately define, bullying and peer victimization relative to the NLESD Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013). Secondary goals of this study were to gain insight as to which strategies school staff use to address instances of peer victimization, as well as how important they perceive the student-teacher relationship to be for a child who has experienced peer victimization. Thus, the following research questions were addressed: 1) Do school staff within the NLESD define peer victimization with reference to the four forms of bullying (i.e., physical, verbal, social, and electronic) as outlined in NLESD's Bullying Intervention Protocol? 2) Do school staff within the NLESD include Olweus' (1978, 1993) defining criteria (i.e., intent, repetition, and power imbalance) in their definitions peer victimization, as outlined in NLESD's Bullying Intervention Protocol? 3) What is the most common strategy that school staff report using to address peer victimization? 3a) Does strategy use vary by grade taught? 3b) Does strategy use vary by years of teaching experience? 4) How important do school staff perceive the student-teacher relationship to be in the lives of children who have been victimized by their peers? 4a) Does this perception vary by grade taught? 4b) Does this perception vary by years of teaching experience?

Based on previous research findings (e.g., Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Holt & Keyes, 2004), it was hypothesized that school staff would make reference to physical and verbal forms of victimization more often than social (i.e., relational) and electronic victimization. Again, based on previous literature (Mishna et al., 2005), it was hypothesized that school staff would be

more likely to make reference to peer victimization as *intentional* acts of harm-doing associated with a *power imbalance*, and less likely to indicate that peer victimization is a *repetitive* behaviour.

Strategies that reflect more indirect intervention efforts, such as restructuring the classroom environment so as to separate victim and aggressor, have been cited as successful strategies for reducing levels of peer victimization (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008); as such, it was hypothesized that school staff would indicate such strategies as their first choice when addressing instances of peer victimization, as opposed to more direct strategies, such as offering advice to the victim or discussing the incident with both the victim and aggressor. More specifically, it was predicted that school staff would report "restructuring the classroom environment" as their number one strategy for dealing with instances of peer victimization. There was no specific prediction with regards to whether strategy use would vary as a function of grade taught or years of teaching experience.

Due to the existing literature on the benefits of a positive and supportive student-teacher relationship (e.g., see Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001), it was hypothesized that school staff would perceive the student-teacher relationship as being of high importance for children who have experienced peer victimization. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that school staff working in primary and elementary schools, and also school staff with more years of experience, would rank the relationship with a teacher as more important for bullied children in comparison to staff employed in junior high schools with less years of teaching experience.

Methods

Participants

Participants for this study were school staff recruited from primary/elementary (grades K-

6) and intermediate/junior high (grades 7-9) schools in the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). This School District represents all English speaking students and schools in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The District includes 259 schools, approximately 67,000 students, and over 8,000 employees (Newfoundland & Labrador English School District, 2016). Of these 8,000 employees in the District, only those employed in open and operating schools within the Avalon East Region of the School District (n=1,537) were directly solicited for participation in this study.

Of the 1,537 employees solicited via email, the final sample consisted of 100 school staff. This resulted in a response rate of 6.5%. Due to the close proximity of the schools within this region, detailed questions regarding participants' demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, institution of employment, etc.) were not included in the survey in order to preserve participant anonymity. Furthermore, the limited diversity of the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland and Labrador speaks to the homogeneity of the sample population; for example, results of the 2006 Statistics Canada Census indicated that less than three percent of residents living in the Avalon area identified as an immigrant, and approximately 98% of respondents identified English as their first language (Statistics Canada, 2006). A breakdown of the sample by teaching position is presented in Table 1.

Measures

The survey was developed by the principal investigator in order to better understand how school staff employed in the Avalon East Region of the NLESD understand and address instances of peer victimization in their classroom or school. The survey was developed using SurveyMonkey, an online service that allows users to develop online surveys. The present survey contained a variety of question formats; respondents were asked to select, rank, and rate a list of

options, as well as provide written responses to several open-ended questions. The survey consisted of 10 questions; however, only information from four of the 10 questions were used for this study (questions 1, 3, 8 and 9). This was done for the purpose of using only quantitative data, as data from the qualitative questions will be presented as a separate research study.

Survey development. The first question of the survey asked participants to describe their definitions of social rejection and peer victimization. Questions two through four were based on a multilevel model of teacher beliefs about peer victimization, teacher management strategies when addressing peer victimization, and children's coping strategies, as described by Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008). Questions five and six investigated whether teachers had a student in their classroom whom they could identify as being socially rejected, as well as what characteristics (e.g., specific behaviours, appearance, etc.) made this student rejected. Question seven explored school staff's opinions about what activities and/or relationships could aid in increasing victimized children's self-worth, whereas question eight asked school staff to rank (in order of importance) specific relationships that may be beneficial for a child who has been victimized by his or her peers. Demographic information was gathered through the ninth question, and question 10 provided participants with the opportunity to express any other comments or concerns about the research topic. A copy of the survey is shown in Appendix A.

Procedure

Following approval from the McGill University Research Ethics Board and the NLESD Ethics Committee, school staff were contacted via email between March 5th, 2015 and March 27th, 2015. A standardized script (Appendix B), which described the purpose of the study, the structure of the survey, and time commitments, were included in each email. A link to the survey was also provided, and a consent form (Appendix C) and documents confirming proof of ethics

approval from both McGill (Appendix D) and NLESD (Appendix E) were included as attachments. School staff were told that they had until April 17th, 2015, to complete the survey. Follow-up emails were also sent out to the 1,537 school staff to remind them that the survey would close on this date. All emails containing questions and concerns were addressed by the principal investigator.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The current research project used a cross-sectional design. All survey data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20, 2011). Chi-squared tests were conducted using SPSS at the $p < .05$ significance level to examine the relationship between: school staff's strategy use and grade level taught; school staff's strategy use and years of experience; school staff's perception of their importance in the lives of victimized children and grade level taught; and school staff's perception of their importance in the lives of victimization children and years of experience. All other research questions were answered through the use of simple percentages.

Results

Assumptions of Chi-Square Analysis

The chi-square analysis assumes that expected frequencies must be greater or equal to five in 20% of all cells. Two cells (16.7%) had an expected count less than five, meaning that the expected frequencies were greater than or equal to five in 83.3% of all cells, thus satisfying the critical assumption of the chi-square analysis. A second assumption of the chi-square analysis is that observed frequencies should be independent from one and other; this assumption was also met, as each participant selected only one option for questions pertaining to strategy use, grade level taught, and years of teaching experience.

Definition of Peer Victimization

It was hypothesized that school staff would make reference to physical and verbal forms of victimization more often than social and electronic victimization. This hypothesis was supported, as 37% of the sample made reference to physical victimization, verbal victimization, or both, in comparison to social (7%) and electronic (1%) victimization. It should be noted that an alarming 44% of school staff's definitions of peer victimization did not make reference to a single form of bullying, as outlined by the NLESD Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013). In total, verbal bullying was referenced 37 times; physical bullying 29 times; social bullying 17 times; and electronic bullying was mentioned only twice. Frequencies of participant's individual responses are shown in Table 2.

The second research hypothesis was also supported, as school staff were more likely to include aspects of *intent* and *power imbalance* in their descriptions of peer victimization in comparison to *repetition*; specifically, 44% of school staff indicated that bullying was characterized by *intentional* harm-doing behaviours that were the result of an *imbalance of power* between victim and aggressor(s). Furthermore, 11% of respondents made reference to *intent* only, and another 11% made reference to *power imbalance* only. Only 6% of school staff indicated that bullying required the *repetition* of aggressive behaviour. Twenty-eight percent of the sample did not include any of the three criteria in their definitions. Frequencies of participants' individual responses are shown in Table 3.

Strategy Use

As expected, school staff reported using more indirect strategies as their first strategy of choice to deal with instances of bullying in comparison to more direct strategies (i.e., providing the victim with advice, communicating with the victim and bully, etc.). Thirty-seven percent of

school staff indicated that they resort to such strategies first. As hypothesized, the majority of school staff (24%) indicated that they would first attempt to restructure the classroom environment so as to separate the victim and the aggressor before implementing any other strategies (if any). However, contrary to the research hypotheses, staff's strategy use was not associated with the grade level they taught, $\chi^2(2, N = 87) = .92, p = .63$, nor was it associated with school staff's years of teaching experience, $\chi^2(2, N = 91) = 1.06, p = .59$. Observed counts are displayed in Table 4 and 5. A breakdown of specific strategies by strategy type (i.e., direct strategies directed towards victim; direct strategies directed towards victim and bully; and indirect strategies) is shown in Table 6.

Importance of the Student-Teacher Relationship

Contrary to the hypothesis, most participants (45%) ranked the student-teacher relationship as being of medium, and not high, importance to a child who has been victimized by peers. Of the remaining 55% of the sample, 39% and 16% indicated that teachers were of high and low importance, respectively. Contrary to the hypotheses, participants' perception of the importance of teachers in the lives of victimized children was not associated with the grade level they taught, $\chi^2(2, N = 94) = 1.71, p = .43$, nor was it associated with their years of teaching experience, $\chi^2(2, N = 99) = .14, p = .93$. Observed counts are displayed in Table 7 and 8.

Discussion

Explanation of Results

Overall, definitions of bullying and peer victimization varied significantly among school staff of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District; a large portion of the sample (44%) either did not adequately define the concept or they failed to make reference to either physical, verbal, social, or electronic bullying in their definitions. The NLESD Bullying

Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013) clearly outlines these forms of bullying, yet not a single respondent included all four forms, and a mere 6% of the sample described peer victimization referencing at least three of the four forms. This may be in part due to the more covert and subtle nature of relational aggression, causing this form of victimization to be far less recognizable to school personnel. Similar to Mishna and colleagues' (2005) study, physical and verbal forms of bullying were most frequently cited in school staff's definitions of peer victimization, and social (i.e., relational) victimization was mentioned less frequently. This can have severe implications for victims, as school staff may be less likely to recognize and intervene in instances of relational bullying. Relational bullying is associated with negative consequences for children and youth, at times even more so than more obvious and direct forms of bullying (see van der Wal et al., 2003). In fact, social victimization has been reported as the second most common form of victimization experienced by students; Vaillancourt et al. (2010b) found that almost 40% of grade four through 12 students indicated that they were the victim of social bullying. This finding speaks to the need of educating school staff on what negative actions constitute social/relational bullying, and the strategies that are best suited to intervene in bullying incidents of this form. Perhaps merely having a protocol in place, such as the Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013), may not be sufficient; school administrators must ensure that all school staff read school protocols and ensure that they understand the content. A clear anti-bullying policy is one of the tenets of an effective schoolwide bullying prevention model (Olweus, 1993; Olweus et al., 2007), but such a policy is of little use if it is not internalized by school staff.

Of note is the finding that electronic/cyberbullying was rarely acknowledged as a form of bullying (only two participants referenced this form). This is troubling, as cyberbullying has

been found to uniquely contribute to several internalizing problems for victims and bullies (e.g., depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation), above and beyond the contribution of involvement in more traditional forms of bullying, such as physical, verbal, and social victimization (Bonanno & Hymel, 2013). Furthermore, rates of electronic victimization have been on the rise; in a study of youth online harassment, Jones, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2013) found that online harassment rates have increased from six percent in 2000 to 11% in 2010. Vaillancourt et al. (2010b) found that 12% of grade four through 12 students reported being cyberbullied by peers. Despite the growing prevalence rate of cyberbullying, many teachers find this form of bullying to be difficult to detect. From the perspective of a study participant employed as an elementary teacher with 15 years teaching experience, "Technology makes it much harder to monitor victimization." Similar sentiments were expressed by the assistant principal of a junior high school: "Technology is here to stay but as adults/educators we need to ensure that the school setting does not become a forum for students to use this technology in a negative capacity. It is hard to police and many strategies are utilized to ensure that technology is used in a proactive fashion." As such, increasing teachers' awareness of cyberbullying through professional development seminars and additional training with the goal of increasing the regulation of technology and identification of cyberbullying is warranted.

A possible explanation for the virtual absence of electronic bullying in participant's definitions of victimization may in part be due to the age of school staff's students; as children in primary and elementary school are between the ages of five and 12, they may be too young to use cell phones or computers for electronic communication and accessing social media sites and Apps, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. It may be more relevant to assess high school teachers' definitions of peer victimization to investigate whether they are more likely

to include electronic bullying in their definitions, as high school students typically have more access to cell phones, computers, and social media.

Several participants made reference to "emotional", "psychological" and "mental" forms of bullying and/or harassment in their definitions. It is unclear what behaviours or actions these terms were meant to encompass, but it can be inferred that participants were referring to outcomes, and not defining characteristics or forms of bullying. This further highlights the importance of ensuring that schools have appropriate and accurate bullying policies and educational seminars in place so that staff clearly understand the various forms of bullying and can distinguish bullying behaviours from consequences of bullying (i.e., bullying can have psychological *consequences,* but there is not a form of bullying that is classified as "psychological bullying" per se). Furthermore, many respondents loosely defined peer victimization as "aggressive behaviour" or "experiences inflicted… that have a negative impact." Such definitions are vague and do not explicitly reflect actual forms of bullying (i.e., physical, verbal, social, or electronic). If teachers and other school personnel conceptualize "aggressive behaviour" as only physical bullying, then they may be less likely to intervene in instances of social, verbal, or electronic aggression. In order to effectively address bullying in schools, staff (and students, with the help of staff), must recognize a range of behaviours in the conceptualization of bullying, which includes both direct and indirect forms.

Olweus' (1993) seminal definition of bullying states that "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students'' (p. 9), characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength. Components of this definition were also included in the NLESD Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013), yet only

three out of 100 school staff made reference to all three characteristics in their definitions. Only 44% of participants indicated that peer victimization is both intentional and the result of a power imbalance, yet very few perceived peer victimization as something that is repeated over time. It is crucial that school staff define bullying with these three criteria, as it can help them to distinguish bullying from teasing. Children engage in teasing behaviours (e.g., name calling) that are playful and relatively friendly in nature on an everyday, and at times repeated, basis, and the children involved in the teasing are usually of equal power or strength (Olweus, 1997). It is when the repeated teasing becomes degrading, offensive, and persists despite obvious signs of distress from the target, that it is considered bullying (Olweus, 1997). This is important for both school staff *and* students to be aware of; for school staff it can aid in the identification of true instances of bullying, decrease time spent on disciplining students for actions that are not actually indicative of bullying, and facilitate discussion with students regarding what exactly constitutes bullying behaviour. This last point may actually serve to decrease students' likelihood of "tattling" about teasing, and not actual bullying, behaviours. Teachers should set aside class time to discuss with their students what bullying is, as research highlights the importance of dialogue surrounding this topic (Olweus, 1993; Olweus et al., 2007). By engaging in classroom discussion surrounding the definition of bullying, teachers can help students learn how to better interpret social situations and how to respond more appropriately to teasing, whether it is real or imagined. Classroom discussion on this topic can also provide children with strategies and the language for intervening in instances of bullying as opposed to being idle bystanders (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000).

As expressed by a participant who teaches at the elementary school level, peer victimization "can easily be misinterpreted and/or miscalculated… Sometimes what we consider

"bullying" was actually a one-time incident where a child misspoke or reacted negatively in response to something." Another participant expressed that "sometimes [peer victimization is] over-exaggerated and labelled 'bullying' based on a one-time offence!" As such, understanding that bullying and peer victimization are *intentional* acts of harm-doing, over a *repeated* period of time, in which there is a *power imbalance* is vital to effective identification and intervention efforts.

Overall, school staff reported using more indirect strategies than direct strategies to deal with instances of peer victimization. Specifically, most participants reported resorting to restructuring the classroom environment in order to separate the students involved in the bullying incident as their go-to strategy. Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008) found that the implementation of this strategy led to significant reductions in occurrences of peer victimization. Furthermore, research shows that teachers who use strategies that promote an egalitarian classroom environment by reducing student status extremes (i.e., through separating students/restructuring the classroom so social status is less relevant) have less instances of peer victimization in their classrooms (Serdiouk et al., 2015). The implementation of effective classroom management strategies is critical, as well-managed classrooms have been shown to have a more positive climate, to be safer and more supportive for students, and have reduced rates of bullying and other associated aggressive behaviours (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012). Larson, Smith, and Furlong (2002) reviewed five school-based primary prevention strategies for combating school violence, in which the overarching goal of each program was to restructure the existing environment so as to improve classroom relations. Findings from the present study suggest that school personnel of the NLESD use intervention strategies that have been proven to reduce instances of peer victimization.

Though the majority of participants reported using intervention strategies that have proven effective, there is still a need for more teacher training on effective strategy use. For example, several participants reported that their first choice strategy for addressing bullying would be to advise the victim to ignore the bully; however, avoidance may actually increase socioemotional maladjustment for the victim (Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010). Despite the ineffectiveness of this strategy, many teachers believe that it is still useful (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2013). Furthermore, when victimized children expect that their teacher will advise them to ignore or stand up to bullies, they actually experience more emotional distress (Troop-Gordon & Quenette, 2010). Though school staff's strategy use did not vary according to the grade level they taught or years of teaching experience, the variability in participants' individual responses speaks to the need for additional training pertaining to intervention efforts. Such training would ensure that all staff under the same school district, as is the case with schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, respond to bullying with strategies that are evidence-based.

Over 80% of participants ranked teachers as being of medium or high importance to students who have experienced victimization at the hands of their peers. This finding suggests that a sample of teachers of the NLESD understand the significance of the role they play in instances of bullying, especially as it relates to the victim. Because the large majority of participants perceived their relationship to be vital for victims, it can be inferred that they are knowledgeable of their important role, as extensively documented in the literature (e.g., see Troop-Gordon & Kuntz, 2013; Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011). These findings are encouraging, as they suggest that NLESD school personnel, regardless of the grade level they teach (i.e., primary/elementary versus junior high) and years of experience they have, see their value in the lives of children victimized by their peers. Though students typically report feeling less close to

their teachers in middle school (i.e., junior high) (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997), these findings show that the student-teacher relationship is valued from the perspective of teachers. Though the nature of the student-teacher relationship may change as students mature and transition through grade levels, students' need to be emotionally connected to adults in a school setting remains strong from preschool to 12th grade (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Ultimately, this close relationship can serve as a protective factor against bullying, as it can help students to get along better with their peers (Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994).

Implications

The results of this study can have important implications for future intervention and prevention of bullying behaviours and peer victimization in schools within the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. By ensuring that school personnel accurately define peer victimization, they may be more likely to recognize instances of such abuse. This is especially important for more covert forms of victimization, such as social and electronic aggression. By accurately defining bullying and peer victimization, school staff will be better equipped to identify bullying behaviours and intervene appropriately. This can have significant implications for the victims of peer victimization by preventing adverse consequences, such as: symptomatology associated with anxiety, depression and psychosis, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, poorer academic achievement, decreased physical health, and so on (Arseneault et al., 2010; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Knack et al., 2011; Morrow et al., 2014; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010; Wang et al., 2014). An understanding of the maladjustment associated with victimization may also engender change in teachers' perceptions and attitudes surrounding what constitutes bullying behaviour.

This research can also have implications for future teacher training on the topic of bullying. Because there is a single English speaking school district for the entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador, it would be feasible to implement a district-wide training program for school personnel. Such training would ensure that the ways in which teachers understand, define, intervene, and serve as a source of support for victimized students would be relatively similar across all schools within the District. Such consistency would ensure that no teacher is left uncertain about their role in school bullying situations.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study had several limitations. Firstly, the low response rate (6.5%) hinders the generalizability of the findings to all school personnel within the NLESD. Though the study sample was deliberately selected in order to investigate a unique, homogenous province with a single English speaking school district, this also served as a limitation as it did not allow for generalizability on a larger scale (e.g., across provinces). Future studies should expand this survey to other regions within the NLESD, and ultimately other school districts across Canada. An analysis of school staff's perceptions of bullying and peer victimization in a more diverse sample would also prove interesting, such as a comparison of teacher perceptions from rural and urban schools.

Another limitation of this study involves the procedure used to collect the data. Though SurveyMonkey is a well-known and sophisticated software for collecting and analyzing survey data, there are limitations to collecting such personal information electronically. A possible future direction would be to conduct in-person interviews with school staff, as this would allow for the collection of rich data and provide the opportunity to pose follow up questions based on participants' responses.

The absence of data from high school teachers was also a drawback of this study. As high school students (those in grades 10-12 in Newfoundland and Labrador) are emerging adults, it is reasonable to assume that high school teachers may have different perceptions of what constitutes bullying behaviour among this age group. Furthermore, the intervention strategies that these school personnel use, in addition to how important they perceive the student-teacher relationship to be, may be distinct. Collecting data from all grade levels is a future direction that would permit unique comparisons of teacher perceptions across grade levels.

A final limitation of the study was that demographic information was not collected from participants; as such, the description of the sample did not rely on participant reported information, but was instead assumed based on characteristics of the Avalon East region according to Statistics Canada demographic data. As such, group differences based on sex and other demographic variables could not be examined.

Conclusion

The present study investigated school staff's understanding and perception of bullying and peer victimization. Of particular interest was how school staff defined peer victimization, particularly in reference to the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District's Bullying Intervention Protocol (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – Education, 2013); in addition to the strategies school staff use to intervene in instances of peer victimization; as well as how important they viewed themselves in the lives of children victimized by their peers. The findings suggest that school personnel define peer victimization as being mostly physical and verbal in nature (as opposed to physical, verbal, social and electronic), and that most do not characterize bullying as being intentional, repeated over time, *and* the result of a power imbalance. Most school staff reported using indirect strategies (such as restructuring the

classroom environment) to address bullying, and the majority of school staff indicated that teachers are of medium importance to children who have been victimized by their peers.

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Table 1.

Frequencies of Participant Teaching Position

Teaching Position	Frequency
Classroom Teacher	*62*
Support Teachers	*22*
Guidance/School Counselor	8
Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT)	13
School Counselor & IRT	1
Specialty Teachers	*8*
Physical Education	5
Music	2
Technology	1
Administrator	*7*
Not Specified	*1*
Total	*100*

Table 2.

Frequencies of Forms of Victimization Included in Participants' Definitions of Peer Victimization

Form of peer victimization included	Frequency
Physical only	9
Verbal only	16
Social only	7
Electronic only	1
Physical & Verbal	12
Physical & Social	2
Verbal & Social	3
Physical, Verbal & Social	5
Physical, Verbal & Electronic	1
None included	44
Total	100

Table 3.

Frequencies of Key Components Included in Participants' Definitions of Peer Victimization

Key defining components of peer victimization	Frequency
Intentional only	11
Repeated only	0
Power Imbalance only	11
Intentional & Power Imbalance	44
Repeated & Power Imbalance	3
Intentional, Repeated & Power Imbalance	3
None included	28
Total	100

Table 4.

Participants' Strategy Use as a Function of Grade Level Taught

Grade Taught	Strategy Use			Total
	Direct Strategies (Victim)	Direct Strategies (Victim and Bully)	Indirect Strategies	
Primary/Elementary (K-6)	13	24	23	60
Junior High (7-9)	4	10	13	27
Total	17	34	36	87

Note. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.28.

Table 5.

Participants' Strategy Use as a Function of Years of Teaching Experience

	Strategy Use			
Years of Teaching Experience	Direct Strategies (Victim)	Direct Strategies (Victim and Bully)	Indirect Strategies	Total
0-24	13	29	28	70
25+	6*	7	8	21
Total	19	36	36	91

Note. *1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.38.

Table 6.

Description and Frequency of Participants' Intervention Strategies

Strategy	Frequency
Direct Strategies (Towards Victim)	*19*
Advise victim to stand up for him/herself	9
Advise victim to ignore harassing peer/walk away	7
Advise victim to avoid harassing peer	3
Direct Strategies (Towards Victim &/or Bully)	*36*
Punish student(s) committing harassment	11
Discuss incident with victim and bully to facilitate reconciliation	23
Educate aggressor	2
Advise students to handle victimization on their own	0
Indirect Strategies	*37*
Ignore instances of peer victimization	0
Restructure classroom environment	24
Contact parents of students involved	10
Consult with school staff	3
Other	*8*
Total	*87*

Table 7.

Participants' Perceived Level of Importance of the Student-Teacher Relationship in the Lives of Children Victimized by Peers as a Function of Grade Level Taught

	Level of Importance of Student-Teacher Relationship			
Grade Taught	Low	Medium	High	Total
Primary/Elementary (K-6)	12	25	27	64
Junior High (7-9)	4	16	10	30
Total	16	41	37	94

Note. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.11.

Table 8.

Participants' Perceived Level of Importance of the Student-Teacher Relationship in the Lives of Children Victimized by Peers as a Function of Years of Teaching Experience

	Level of Importance of Student-Teacher Relationship			
Years of Experience	Low	Medium	High	Total
0-24	12	34	31	77
25+	4*	10	8	22
Total	16	44	39	99

Note. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.56.

Appendix A

Title of Survey: *Through Teachers' Eyes: Understanding and Preventing Social Rejection in the Classroom*

1. This survey aims to understand how teachers perceive and understand peer rejection and peer victimization in the classroom. How would you define "social rejection"? How would you define "peer victimization"?

2. Please answer the following question in relation to your definition of peer victimization that you previously mentioned. Which types of strategies do you use when dealing with peer victimization in your classroom? (Check all that apply).
    - Contact the parents of the students involved
    - Advise the victim to stand up for him- or herself
    - Punish the students committing the peer harassment
    - Tell students to handle victimization on their own
    - Advise the victim to avoid the harassing peer
    - Advise the victim to ignore the harassing peer/walk away
    - Restructure the classroom environment so as to separate the aggressor and the victim
    - Ignore instances of peer victimization
    - I do not perceive there being any instances of peer victimization in my classroom
    - Other (please specify)

3. Please answer the following question in relation to your definition of peer victimization that you previously mentioned. Which strategy is the first strategy that you would use when dealing with peer victimization in your classroom? (Check only one/the most appropriate answer).
    - Contact the parents of the students involved
    - Advise the victim to stand up for him- or herself
    - Punish the students committing the peer harassment
    - Tell students to handle victimization on their own
    - Advise the victim to avoid the harassing peer
    - Advise the victim to ignore the harassing peer/walk away
    - Restructure the classroom environment so as to separate the aggressor and the victim
    - Ignore instances of peer victimization
    - I do not perceive there being any instances of peer victimization in my classroom
    - Other (please specify)

4. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1=*Strongly Disagree;* 2=*Disagree;* 3=*Neutral;* 4=*Agree;* 5=*Strongly* Agree), please rate how you feel about each statement regarding peer victimization:
    - Children would not be bullied or picked on if they stood up for themselves

- Peer victimization is a normal behaviour, as it helps children learn social norms
- Children would not be bullied if they avoided mean children

5. Do you currently have at least one student in your class who you would consider is "socially rejected" by their peers?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I am not sure

6. If you answered yes to the previous question, what makes the student(s) rejected by their peers? (e.g., behaviours, appearance, etc.).

7. Who or what (e.g., specific relationships, activities, etc.) do you think can contribute to higher feelings of self-worth (i.e., the extent to which a child likes him- or herself) for children or youth who are socially rejected by their peers?

8. On a scale of 1 (*Least Important*) to 9 (*Most Important*), please rank how important you think each relationship is in the lives of children and youth who are victimized by their peers.
    - Parent/Guardian
    - Sibling
    - Classmate
    - Cousin
    - Aunt/Uncle
    - Grandparent
    - School teacher
    - Coach/Instructor/Older role model/Etc.
    - Peer out of school

9. Please specify your current teaching position, what grade(s) you currently teach, as well as how many years of teaching experience you have.

10. If you have any other opinions or beliefs regarding peer rejection or peer victimization, please indicate them below.

Appendix B

Recruitment Script

Hello teachers,

My name is Micah Tilley and I am a graduate student in the School and Applied Child Psychology program at McGill University. I am from Conception Bay South, NL, and I completed my undergraduate degree at Memorial University.

I am interested in understanding how teachers perceive social rejection and peer victimization in primary, elementary, and junior high school classrooms. The invaluable, first-hand information related to this topic that only teachers possess could further my understanding of social rejection, peer victimization, and how this complex issue can be addressed. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the issue in order to conduct future research that will lead to the development of interventions for socially rejected children and adolescents.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to complete a short online survey that consists of 10 questions. This survey will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Your choice to participate is completely voluntary, and you do not have to indicate your name or any other identifying information on any aspect of the survey. You will have until Friday, April 17th to submit your responses.

Please read through the consent form attached to this email. If you have any questions about participating in this study, please do not hesitate to contact me via email or telephone (709-743-4236).

Here is the link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YKHCLQH

Thank you,
Micah

*(Informed consent form, McGill ethics approval, and NLESD ethics approval to be attached)

Appendix C

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Institution: Faculty of Education, McGill University

Title of Project: Through Teacher's Eyes: Understanding and Preventing Social Rejection in the Classroom

Researcher: Micah Tilley

Supervisor: Dr. Steven Shaw, PhD

Dear teachers,

We invite you to participate in a research project that investigates teacher's perspectives of social rejection and peer victimization in the classroom. Please consider the following information before you agree to participate in this research project. This consent form explains the goal of the study, the procedures, advantages, risks and inconvenience, as well as listing people to contact should the need arise.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how teachers perceive and understand social rejection and peer victimization in the classroom. More specifically, the goal of this study is to understand, from teacher's perspectives, how social rejection and peer victimization are defined, the extent to which it occurs in the classroom, how and whether this issue is addressed and dealt with, and also how it impacts students social, emotional, and academic development. We want access to the invaluable, first-hand information that teachers possess regarding these issues. The results of the study will be used to inform future research projects and interventions that will aid to provide socially rejected children with resources to protect against peer victimization and feelings of low self-worth. Results may also be published in scientific journals and presented at professional conferences.

What will you be required to do?
If you give consent to participation in this study, you will be asked to fill out an online survey consisting of 10 questions about your thoughts, opinions, and perceptions of specific questions pertaining to social rejection and peer victimization in the classroom. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. The survey can be completed at the time and location of your choice. Your participation should require no more than 20 minutes. Please keep in mind that withdrawal from this study is not possible once you have submitted your responses.

Risks and Inconveniences
The study does not use any procedures that cause discomfort or create a risk of injury. However, should you have questions regarding the online survey, we will be readily available answer any questions or concerns that you may have.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Your name will not be indicated on or attached to the survey. You will be assigned a file number and your information will be designated by that number. When this research is presented, identifying information will not be revealed.

By completing and submitting your survey responses, you are agreeing to participate in this research study. If you have any questions regarding the study, feel free to contact the principal investigator (Micah Tilley). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Sincerely,

Micah Tilley, BA (Hons.)
Faculty of Education, McGill University
3700 McTavish, Room 614
Montréal, Québec
H3A 1Y2

Contact information:
Principal investigator: Micah Tilley, BA (Hons.)
micah.tilley@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Steven Shaw, PhD
steven.shaw@mcgill.ca

Appendix D
Confirmation of McGill Ethics Approval

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
James Administration Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West. Rm 429
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4644
Website:
www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board II
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 306-0215

Project Title: Through Teacher's Eyes: Understanding and Preventing Social Rejection in the Classroom

Principal Investigator: Micah A. Tilley

Department: Educational & Counselling Psychology

Status: Master's Student

Supervisor: Prof. Steven Shaw

Funding Agency/Title: SSHRC JA Bombardier Graduate Scholarship

Approval Period: February 27, 2015 – February 26, 2016

The REB-II reviewed and approved this project by delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

Deanna Collin
Research Ethics Administrator

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* All research involving human participants requires review on an annual basis. A Request for Renewal form should be submitted 2-3 weeks before the above expiry date.
* When a project has been completed or terminated a Study Closure form must be submitted.
* Should any modification or other unanticipated development occur before the next required review, the REB must be informed
and any modification can't be initiated until approval is received.

Appendix E
Confirmation of NLESD Ethics Approval

Newfoundland & Labrador English School District

OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
Jeff Thompson
709-757-4663

Chairperson: Milton Peach
CEO/Director of Education: Darrin Pike

Conditions of Approval for Research Project: Through teacher's Eyes: social rejection in the Classroom - Micah Tilley

Your request to conduct research in our district is approved subject to the conditions / requirements checked below:

1. A list of selected schools must be forwarded to my office before the research can begin. ☐
   1a. The list of targeted schools has been received. ☐
2. Final approval to conduct this study will rest with the principal of each targeted school and the targeted group of teachers/students where applicable. ☑
3. Conducting the research will in no way negatively impact instructional time for students and teachers. ☑
4. Conducting this research must not put any burden of responsibility on our school administrators or other staff unless they specifically agree to it. Such agreement must not negatively impact instructional time. ☑
5. Participation in the study will be voluntary and participants will be able to opt out at any time without prejudice. This must be clearly communicated to the participants at the outset. ☑
6. For students under 16 years of age, the researcher must secure parental consent and confirm such consent with the principal before the research proceeds. Students 16 years of age and older must provide their own consent. Regardless of age, youth must be clearly informed from the outset that they may refuse to participate, even if their parents consented to their participation. ☐
7. Anonymity of participants must be ensured. ☑
8. Before the research project can begin, it must receive final approval from your university's Research Ethics Committee and a copy of this approval must be sent to the Associate Director of Education as per the contact information listed below. ☑
   8a. Ethics Committee approval letter has been received ☑ 8b. Not applicable ☐
9. Given the inherent potential risk in this research project that some participants may relive a traumatic experience which can cause emotional or psychological stress, counseling services and other appropriate supports must be available during and subsequent to the data collection process. ☐
10. A copy of the research findings and resulting papers/reports must be directed to the Associate Director of Education and to the regional Assistant Directors of Education (Programs) where applicable. ☐
11. Research results must be made available to the schools involved and the individual participants who request them. ☑
12. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District takes no responsibility in conducting this research, and will not be held liable for any negative impacts relating to this research effort. ☑

Signature of Approval: _____ March 23, 2015
Jeff Thompson
Associate Director of Education
Date

Signature of Compliance: Micah A. Tilley
Researcher
March 23/15
Date

A signed copy of this form MUST be returned to the address below and to the target schools before research can begin:

Attention: Associate Director of Education
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District Suite 601, Atlantic Place
215 Water Street
St. John's, NL A1C 6C9
jeffthompson@nlesd.ca