

Preparing Preservice Teachers to Address Bullying through Cartoon Lessons

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Abstract

Students who qualify for special education services are at risk for being bullied because of their cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or physical differences. Currently, teachers are not effective enough in reducing bullying; better preservice teacher preparation in this area may help to alleviate the problem. The current study explored the effects of preservice teachers using cartoons to spark discussion of bullying issues during practicum experiences with elementary students at urban schools. Twenty-one preservice special education teachers participated in the mostly qualitative study that presented an analysis of their reflections after teaching three cartoon-focused lessons on bullying to students in small groups, each containing at least one student with special needs. Reflections revealed the success of the cartoon lessons with positive effect on classroom climate. Preservice special education teachers became aware of the motivating effects of cartoons, the pervasiveness of bullying and the eagerness of elementary students to discuss it.

Preparing Preservice Teachers to Address Bullying through Cartoon Lessons

Bullying is one of the most common and pervasive behavior problems in school settings (Espelege & Swearer, 2003; Heinrichs, 2003). It has been a concern for generations, probably as long as there have been school systems, and is a national and international phenomenon (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Bullying is defined as repeated acts of aggression or intentions of harm, intimidation, or coercion against a victim who is weaker than the perpetrator in physical size, social power, or other areas that cause a notable power differential (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Farrington, 1993; Glumbic & Zunic-Pavlovic, 2010; Olweus, 1987; Olweus, 1993; Olweus, 1999; Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). Key features of bullying include intent to harm, the repeated aspect of harmful acts, and power imbalance between the bully and victim. Besides physical aggression (hitting, pushing, and kicking), bullying can be exhibited through relational aggression, such as social exclusion, as well as verbal harassment or intimidation (name calling, provoking, making threats, and spreading rumors) (Berger, 2007; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). These behaviors can occur in the school building, on school grounds, going to and from school, or in cyberspace (Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012).

Bullies tend to have poor academic skills, lack empathy, have a heightened risk for substance use and criminal behavior, and grow increasingly unpopular as they age. They are often described as hot-tempered, impulsive, and good at talking themselves out of difficult situations. Bullies typically come from homes with poor parental role modeling for how to problem solve without aggression and they lack consistent and effective discipline (Merrell et al., 2008; Olweus, 1993; Schwartz, 2000). Victims tend to be physically smaller and weaker than bullies. They often are anxious, fearful, insecure, depressed, and have poor self-esteem. Victims tend to avoid school and at times drop out of school as a result of bullying. Victims are also more likely than perpetrators to bring weapons to school to seek revenge (Merrell et al., 2008). As a consequence of bullying, victims may develop emotional and social problems leading to increased social isolation which amplify social problems (Kim, Leventhal, Koh, Hubbard, & Boyce, 2006; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007).

Bullying and Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs are overrepresented within the bullying dynamic (McLaughlin, Byers, & Vaughn, 2010). As victims, nearly all students with special needs are in danger of verbal harassment, and even physical and sexual violence (Martlew & Hodson, 1991; Morrison, Furlong, & Smith, 1994; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). Students with special needs can potentially become victims because they lack personal qualities valued by their peer groups and bear a stigma related to their learning, physical, or emotional challenges. Additionally, many lack the social skills necessary to avoid being bullied and are often placed in inclusive environments that do not provide adequate protection from bullies. As a result, some special needs students react violently to bullying and become victim-bullies (Glumbic & Zunic-Pavlovic, 2010; McLaughlin et al, 2010; Nabuzoka, 2003; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993). Additionally, restrictive educational placements (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2009) and overreaction to rough play (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1999) can place students with special needs at greater risk for becoming a victims, bullies, or bully-victims (Swearer et al., 2012; Whitney & Thompson, 1994).

Students with special needs are described as being twice as likely to be identified as victims and bullies (Rose Monda-Amaya, and Espelage, 2011). Specifically, students with intellectual disabilities (28%) report having been bullied compared to students in the general population (9.8%) (Dickson, Emerson and Hatton, 2005). Whitney, Smith, and Thompson (1994) found that 55% of students with mild disabilities and 78% of students with moderate disabilities reported moderate to severe victimization in inclusive settings compare to 25% of other peers in the same setting. Students with behavioral, emotional, or developmental problems were also two times more likely to become a victim and three times more likely to become a bully or bully-victim in comparison so students without special needs (Van Cleave and Davis, 2006).

Children with clinically significant behavior problems, such as conduct disorders, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, and peer problems were more likely to experience physical and relational bullying, than children without significant behavior problems

(Woods and Wolke, 2004). Students with observable disabilities, such as language and hearing impairments, were more likely to be victimized and bully others compared to students in general education, while students with non-observable disabilities, such as a learning disability, describe similar levels of victimization and bullying as students without disabilities (Swearer et al., 2012). As a result, special attention must be paid to therapeutic and educational programs which empower all students with special needs (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007).

Approaches to Addressing Bullying

Bullying is part of social interaction and peer culture at a particular school (Smith 2004) allowing interventions that focus on turning bystanders into defenders to be successful for pre-puberty students (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Voeten, & Sinisammal, 2004). In contrast, interventions that view bullying as an individual personal problem, grouping bullies into therapeutic groups focused on empathy-building, self-esteem enhancement, or anger management created more confident bullies rather than decreasing negative behaviors, as in most cases bullying is a larger social problem not based on anger or low self-esteem (Limber, Nation, Tracy, Melton, & Vlerx, 2004).

Effective bully prevention programs involve the entire school community, with awareness and commitment from adults serving as a prerequisite for success (Heinrichs, 2003). Research has revealed teachers are generally ineffective in their efforts to intervene and address bullying in schools (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008). For example, Fekkes, Pijpers, and Verloove-Vanhorick (2005) discovered that of the children who reported they were bullied several times a week and told their teachers, only 28% of teachers were successful in stopping the bullying, while 8% did not attempt to assist the students. Office referrals were a primary intervention taken by teachers and staff when bullying behaviors were observed or reported by students (Swearer et al., 2012). Teachers also view strategies such as talking with the bully, the victim, and their parents to discuss the problem and generate solutions as effective for addressing bullying. Teachers also endorsed punishment for the bully, but supported the notion of counseling before implementing punitive actions (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003; Harris & Willoughby, 2003).

Teachers and other adults attempting to successfully address bullying at the school, classroom, and individual levels need prevention programming, which facilitates the following essential components: increases awareness and understanding of bullying; gathers information on bullying; has rules for bullying behavior; includes both teacher discussions and student class meetings; increases supervision in high-risk areas; provides social skills training for victims and bullies; and involves parents (Heinrichs, 2003; Swearer et al., 2012; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). This programming should also have adaptations and modifications to meet the learning and behavior characteristics of children with special needs and assist them in becoming better integrated into general education classrooms by directly teaching age appropriate social skills students can use with their peers (Heinrichs, 2003).

Limited and consistent teacher success and school-wide intervention programming in stopping bullying has been attributed to the limited anti-bully education in undergraduate or graduate teacher preparation programs. Given the inevitability of encountering incidents of bullying in schools, preparation to handle such incidents should not be left to chance. Reliance only on short lived conferences and school in-service sessions is insufficient in preparing teachers with a variety of strategies to stop bullying (Bauman, et al., 2008; Heinrichs, 2003). What has been recommended is that anti-bullying education be part of teacher preparation programs. The preparation should go beyond awareness of bullying, but provide a variety of strategies for preventing, managing, and responding to bullying. This preparation should not be exclusively didactic, but provide future educators with the opportunity to practice the new skills by role playing and observation (Bauman et al., 2008).

Given the previously discussed findings on the importance of preparing preservice teachers to address bullying, a study of preservice teachers using a relatively new instructional strategy – cartoons – to teach about bullying was designed to provide firsthand experience in hearing about elementary students' bullying experiences and the opportunity to teach several lessons on this topic.

Teaching with Cartoons

Political cartoons have been successfully used to teach social studies concepts such as history and political science for many years (Dougherty, 2002; Risinger & Heitzmann, 2008). This instructional strategy motivates students through humor, wordplay, emotional and often exaggerated situations, symbolism, and interesting, creative drawings. Analyzing cartoons for humor and political or social studies concepts allows students to practice problem-solving skills, maintaining their attention because students want to discover the “jokes” or essential messages (Berk, 2002). Several investigations have been undertaken to find the best teaching strategies for assisting students in making political cartoons, such as making analogical or symbolic substitution lists and concepts maps of ideas before completing cartoons (e.g., Bickford, 2011). These strategies have resulted in students producing more complex social studies cartoons.

Using cartoon panels or comic strips at the start of a lesson to focus attention is a technique long in use for a variety of settings (Trefts & Blakeslee, 2000). However, teaching content information with cartoons is a newer technique that has been shown to be effective in teaching of science concepts (Rule & Auge, 2005; Rule, Sallis, Donaldson, 2008; Sallis, Rule, & Jennings, 2009) and discussing concepts related to gifted education programming (Rule & Schneider, 2009). Rule and Auge (2005) found in a counterbalanced study that elementary students studying rocks and minerals by analyzing cartoons featuring rock and crystal characters excelled in content knowledge and motivation with a large effect size compared to more traditional teaching methods. Besides analyzing the cartoons for humor and science content, students suggested improvements to the cartoons, completed partly-finished cartoons, and then made original cartoons of their own to show additional rock or mineral concepts.

The strategy of using cartoons was investigated for teaching about bullying in this study because this approach was found to be useful in presenting affective ideas about perfectionism to primary grade students (Zousel, Rule, & Logan, in review). The investigators of the current study thought that the humor and charm of visual cartoons and the opportunity to self-express through cartoon completion or creation would motivate elementary students. Therefore, we provided preservice teachers with cartoons for prompting conversations with students on bullying to give them practice in addressing this issue and the opportunity to reflect on the usefulness of this instructional tool.

Method

This study examined reflections of preservice teachers who were seeking endorsements in special education after instructing elementary students with special needs in small groups about bullying using a new cartoon curriculum. This was a qualitative study except for the tabulation of responses in each category.

Participants

Twenty-one undergraduate preservice teachers (20 female, 1 male; 21 Caucasian) who were pursuing an endorsement in special education participated in this study. Fifteen of the participants were seeking endorsement for teaching children with high incidence (kindergarten – 8th grade) disabilities while the remaining six participants were seeking endorsement for low incidence or severe/profound mental disabilities (kindergarten – 12th grade). Each participant was enrolled in two methods courses, as well as a three credit practicum experience. The courses focused on methods of assessment and curriculum along with behavior management. The practicum involved spending 12 hours a week in a local classroom for a period of eight weeks. All of the participants were assigned to the practicum in pairs and were responsible for designing and teaching daily lessons to a group of 3-8 students. The preservice teachers seeking the severe/profound endorsement taught lessons in self contained special education classrooms and all children in their groups had IEPs. Conversely, the 15 participants in the high incidence program taught lessons in general education settings and groups consisted of children with IEPs, as well as students experiencing a variety of academic difficulties.

The data in this report reflect the ideas of the twenty-one participants. All participants gave written permission for their work to be included in this article. This study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the overseeing university.

Preservice Teacher Practicum Work and Reflection

Preservice teachers spent a total of 72 hours over the semester working with a partner from the course with a group of students, one or more who qualified for special education services, as explained previously. As part of this work, the college students were assigned to teach three short lessons (approximately 15 minutes each) on bullying that used cartoons. Preservice teachers were given a set of lesson plans with three pages of cartoons that conveyed information about bullying to discuss and a set of student

worksheets of partly-made cartoons including a blank area for the elementary student to construct his/her own cartoon. See the appendix for these cartoon lessons. After the preservice special education teachers had completed the lessons, they were asked to reflect on that experience. Preservice teacher responses to reflection questions were used in this analysis of the use of cartoons with elementary students in teaching about bullying.

The Cartoon Bullying Lessons

The sequence of the three lessons was designed so discussions would follow a logical unfolding of the topic. The first lesson defined bullying, the second lesson addressed what bullies do, and the third lesson brought to light ways to prevent or stop bullying. After reading and viewing the cartoons, preservice teachers engaged students in discussion. Finally, each lesson ended with the group making a cartoon together followed by students completing partly-finished cartoons or creating their own original cartoons.

The cartoons used in these lessons had been made by graduate students in an introductory gifted education course taught by the first author of this article, because gifted students, like special education students, represent exceptionality to more typical students and are often the target of bullies. The graduate students were provided backgrounds for the cartoons made from Microsoft clipart and drawing functions in PowerPoint software. They added captions, talking bubbles, and other details. These cartoons were revised by graduate student classmates and then edited by the course instructor, the first author of this article. Appropriate cartoons for elementary students were selected and assembled into three lesson sets for kindergarten-first graders, second-third graders, and fourth-fifth graders. Permission was obtained from the graduate students to use their cartoons in the study and to publish them so that others may benefit from their use.

Figure 1 shows one of the cartoons from the set for kindergarten through second graders. This cartoon uses a group of eagles initially picking on a small bird to show how one person standing up against the bully may be enough to cause a change in bullying behavior. Figure 2 shows a cartoon from the grades three to four set. This cartoon shows the negative consequences of ignoring bullying behaviors. Figure 3 is another cartoon from the grades three to four set, showing how body language can help deter bullies. Finally, Figure 4 is from the grades five to six set and shows how standing up for friends or classmates can stop bullying. All cartoons and a description of the lessons can be found in Rule, Logan and Kohler (2012).



Figure 1. Eagle cartoon



Figure 2. Cat Cartoon

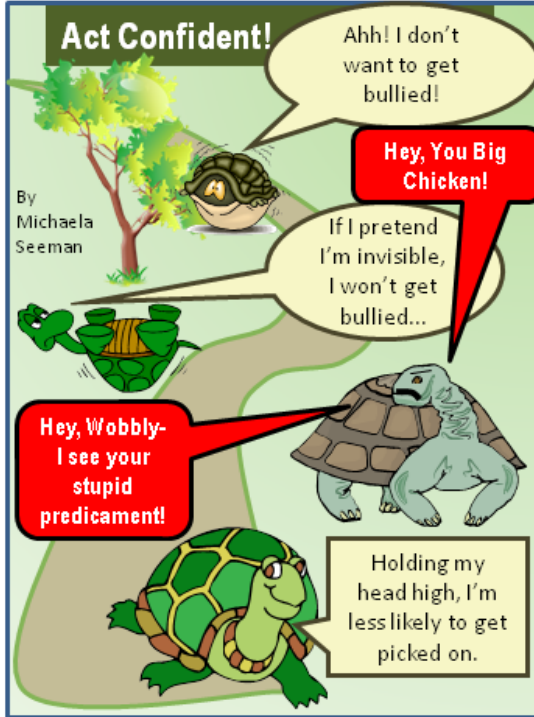


Figure 3. Turtle Cartoon



Figure 4. Friends cartoon.

The Reflection Questionnaire

The instrument used to collect reflection data from the participating preservice teachers contained eight questions. Most students were provided an electronic file of the questionnaire and worked with their partners to complete it, but a few completed theirs individually. The questions asked are listed here:

1. What evidence did you see that students did or did not find the cartoon activities engaging or motivating? Describe facial expressions, body postures, comments, etc.
2. What problems or issues did you encounter teaching the lessons that were related to the cartoon format or the topic of bullying?
3. What things would you change to improve this lesson or approach?
4. What advantages or disadvantages does the cartoon approach have compared to using a picture book or novel, a video; and role-play?
5. When you are a classroom teacher in a year or two, do you think you will use these cartoons to teach about bullying - why or why not? Give reasons.
6. What surprised you about the lesson?
7. What do you now think is particularly important that you did not perceive previously as so important?
8. What new information about bullying did you learn from the cartoons?

Results

Success of the Cartoon Lessons

The overall tone of the preservice teacher reflections was very positive toward teaching about bullying with cartoons. The main issue preservice teachers encountered was that some of the students with severe disabilities, especially those in kindergarten through second grade, struggled with the cognitive and emotional skills necessary to interpret the cartoons and react appropriately to the feelings of others. However, in most cases, progress was made so that, in general, the vast majority of students profited from the lessons.

Table 1 shows observations reported by preservice teachers of student engagement or lack of engagement during the cartoon lessons. The great majority of observations indicated that students were actively involved and motivated to participate and learn during the lessons as evidenced by eye contact, body language, facial expressions, volunteered discussion comments, effort in making cartoons, and immediate application of their learning through expressing concern for others. Only three students were observed to be disengaged; two had severe special needs or emotional issues, while a third was disengaged at first, but gradually became interested in the lesson.

Table 2 lists the problems or challenges that preservice teachers encountered when teaching the bullying lessons. Some issues were more related to the special population of children they were teaching than to the teaching strategy. For example, some students

with more severe cognitive impairment had difficulty reading and understanding the vocabulary used in the cartoons. Additionally, some students with social-emotional disabilities lacked understanding of the feelings of people being bullied. Preservice teachers also reported a desire to have more time for slower-working students and for discussion because students wanted to tell more of their experiences related to bullying. Some students needed to review possible concepts about bullying that might be portrayed in a cartoon before they were successful in making one.

Table 1. Reported Observations of Student Engagement in the Cartoon Bullying Lessons

Observation	Frequency
Eager to raise hands, said, “Oh! oh!” and waved hands high to gain attention.	11
Students kept eye contact and paid attention.	9
Shared feelings and experiences concerning bullying often without prompting.	9
Commented and discussed eagerly.	9
Students expressed excitement in drawing cartoons, adding details.	8
Volunteering to read the cartoons.	6
Students leaned toward the teacher or moved closer.	5
Student body language/ facial expressions changed in reaction to the tone of the cartoons or discussion.	5
Were able to explain the point concerning bullying of the cartoons	4
Students wanted to share cartoons with the group.	4
Students showed immediate application of the lesson by moving evenly between classmates to not make them feel left out for by apologizing for bullying.	4
Students spoke with emotion.	4
No students were playing with other items or messing around.	4
Some students disengaged from lesson because of severe special needs or emotional conflict.	3
Students focused attention on the pictures.	2
Some students understood the real life scenarios better.	2
Students laughed at the humor in the cartoons.	2
A student who was disengaged at first gradually became an active participant.	1

Table 2. *Problems Encountered during the Lessons*

Reported Problem	Frequency
Some vocabulary/ idioms/ phrases with multiple meanings were difficult for our students with cognitive difficulties	10
Students needed more ideas before they could make their cartoons - reviewing ideas about stopping and avoiding bullying helped.	5
Needed more time for the lesson because students wanted to discuss more	5
This topic is such a large issue - we did not always know how to respond to student questions	4
Our students had social difficulties and therefore had difficulty understanding and discussing bullying issues.	4
No problems or issues were encountered.	4
Make the cartoons larger so they will be more in focus when projected on a screen.	4
Difficult for many to control emotions when discussing bullying.	4
Students would rather discuss issues than make cartoons.	2
Fitting the lesson into a busy schedule	2

Preservice teachers' suggestions of ways the lessons could be improved are shown in Table 3. As already indicated by previous responses, many agreed that fifteen minutes was too short for the cartoon lessons; time should be extended to at least a half hour to allow students to fully discuss bullying issues. Because many of the kindergarten special education students had difficulty understanding the cartoons, those teaching these children suggested additional simpler cartoons for these students. Preservice teachers also suggested that other methods of teaching about bullying be used in addition to the cartoons.

Table 3. *Ways to Improve the Lessons*

Suggested Improvement	Frequency
Have more time for the lessons: 30 minutes rather than 15.	15
Have simpler cartoons and alternate activities for kindergarten special education students.	9
Combine with other activities such as writing a play about bullying or watching a video.	9
Make sure each student has a copy of the cartoons or make the original larger for clearer projection	8
Start the lessons by defining bullying and asking "Who has ever been bullied?" and "Who has ever been a bully" so that students see how common this problem is.	6
Show additional bullying situations in the cartoons and what students should do.	5
Teach these lessons to the general classroom population, rather than just students with special needs.	2
Present the lesson early in the year so that student bullying and meanness is prevented.	2
Have detailed directions for teaching the lessons.	2

Advantages and disadvantages of teaching about bullying with cartoons identified by preservice teachers are shown in Table 4. These college students recognized the advantage of using cartoons for attention-getting, short lessons on this topic. They also appreciated the literacy skills practiced in using cartoons and their highly visual, often humorous nature. Although they thought videos might be more engaging and show reality better, and although children's books may have more appealing illustrations and a more in-depth story, they expressed that cartoons should be added as an effective strategy for teaching this topic.

Table 4. *Preservice Teacher Views of Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Cartoons to Teach Bullying*

Advantage or Disadvantage	Perception	Frequency
Advantage	Cartoon lessons can be short and effective, allowing students to maintain attention.	21
Advantage	Students practice literacy skills of reading and speaking when they use expression in reading the cartoon captions and talking bubbles.	6
Advantage	Non-readers can gain understanding from the visual nature of cartoons.	6
Advantage	Students generally feel more comfortable reading and writing cartoons than acting roles in front of peers.	6
Advantage	Students can be creative when they make their own cartoons.	4
Advantage	Making cartoons allows students to work at own pace and self-express feelings.	4
Advantage	Discussing the cartoons and showing cartoons being made was very interactive but still under control.	4
Advantage	Cartoons incorporate humor, which motivates students.	3
Advantage	Cartoons are a new and novel resource for teaching.	3
Advantage	Having animals in the cartoons allows very volatile issues to be discussed through a more distant situation.	2
Advantage	Easier to provide multiple copies of a few pages of cartoons than books.	2
Disadvantage	Videos may be more engaging as they have music and action.	15
Disadvantage	Role play may allow the student to better internalize the issues and feelings	14
Disadvantage	Picture books may have better illustrations and more graphic detail.	11
Disadvantage	Picture books show a continuous story while cartoons are only scenes of many different stories.	7
Disadvantage	Books are easier to read and interpret than cartoons.	4
Disadvantage	Videos may show more situations.	2
Disadvantage	Videos may be more realistic and better show the feelings involved in bullying.	1

It came as no surprise, then, that a strong majority of preservice teachers stated that they planned to use these cartoon lessons themselves when teaching students in their future classrooms, as shown in Table 5. They expressed that they had positive results teaching these lessons and felt very comfortable using them again. The highly interactive nature of the lessons was valued, along with the visual nature, humor, and creative cartoon-drawing activity. College students who thought they would probably not use them were those who taught younger students with severe cognitive and social-emotional impairments.

Table 5. *Preservice Teacher Responses to, “When you have your own classroom, will you use these cartoon lessons to teach about bullying?”*

General Response	Reason Given for Response	Frequency
Yes	I had good results with the cartoon lessons and am comfortable using them.	12
Yes	The lesson encourages interactive discussion about bullying.	10
Yes	Students enjoy drawing and creating cartoons to tell how they feel.	6
Yes	These cartoon lessons reinforce ideas about respect and the feelings of others that I want to teach.	6
Yes	Important information about bullying, such as cyber-bullying, was relayed by the cartoons.	6
Yes	The animals in the cartoons were appealing and allowed students to discuss issues through animals without enraging others.	4
Yes	I would use cartoons as a part of multiple approaches and ways of teaching about bullying	4
Yes	The visual nature of the cartoons was effective.	3
Yes	The humor and cartoon characters of the cartoons are motivating.	3
Yes	The levels of the cartoons were appropriate and useful.	3
Yes	Students enjoy drawing and creating cartoons to tell how they feel.	1
Yes	I would choose different cartoons with people as characters.	1
Partly	We would use cartoons as part, but not the entire lesson.	3
No	Students who are very young and have severe special needs may not be able to read or understand the cartoons.	11
No	Would use something more kinesthetically active like role-play.	2

Preservice Teacher Insights Concerning Teaching about Bullying

Table 6 reveals the aspects of the lessons that surprised preservice teachers. The most frequently reported surprise was the awareness and experiences of elementary students with bullying. Many preservice teachers stated that they expected students to be unfamiliar with the topic and to have few experiences being bullied. Several remarked that even kindergarten students with special needs knew what bullying was and reported having been bullied; some second graders knew what cyber-bullying was; and fifth graders were aware of the recent deaths of students related to bullying that were reported in national news stories. The high level of student interest in the topic caught them off guard.

Table 6. *Preservice Teacher Responses to: "What Surprised you about the Lessons?"*

Aspects that Surprised Preservice Teachers	Frequency
Students gave many personal examples of how they or a relative had been bullied.	17
The level of student interest in the topic and less was a lot higher than expected.	6
Most students pledged to help stop bullying and identified ways to do this.	4
Even though the teacher had told us the students with which we worked had been bullies to others, these students only talked about how they themselves had been bullied.	4
Even kindergarten students with special needs knew a lot about bullying and demonstrated learning at the close of the lesson.	4
The number of students using the example cartoons and half-completed cartoons in their work rather than creating new original cartoons.	2
Second graders already knew about cyber bullying.	2
Our students, who usually have behavior problems, behaved very well during the lessons.	2
Fifth grade special education students knew about the recent deaths of students nationwide because of bullying.	2
A student became very emotional when the topic of bullying was brought up.	2
One of the boys said that if he saw somebody getting bullied, he would punch the one who started it. He didn't see the connection that punching may also be bullying.	1
The statistics about how prevalent and damaging bullying is were surprising.	1

Related to the ideas expressed in the previous paragraph, preservice teachers most frequently commented that what they now perceived as important was teaching students about bullying at a young age and near the start of the school year to set the tone for mutual respect in the classroom and to prevent or halt bullying behaviors. They commented that cartoons can be an effective strategy for teaching about bullying that may be used in concert with other methods. Preservice teachers also evidenced a greater understanding of the causes of bullying and the insight that stopping it will involve continued effort.

Table 7. Preservice Teacher Responses to What they Now Perceive as Particularly Important

Aspect Now Perceived as Particularly Important	Frequency
Take the time to teach about bullying and stop any bullying before it gets worse.	12
Using cartoons to teach is an effective strategy that can add variety to teaching.	5
Discussing bullying can have a positive effect on student behaviors in the classroom	4
Some kids continue to bully even when they know how it hurts others and that it is wrong.	4
Bullying needs to be addressed at a young age because there is much more bullying occurring with young children than we thought.	3
It is important to talk about cyber bullying and identify it as bullying before students begin to do it.	2
Some children bully others because they are bullied at home or at school.	2

The final reflection question asked of preservice teachers, “What new information about bullying did you learn from the cartoons?” drew responses reiterating many of the concepts already discussed such as the new awareness that most young students have already experienced bullying, their willingness to divulge their experiences, and the positive effects of classroom discussions of bullying. See Table 8. They also reported learning new information about the prevalence and devastating consequences of bullying and ways it is perpetuated or halted. Finally, several reported that they learned the new effective teaching strategy of using cartoons.

Table 8. *Preservice Teacher Responses to: “What New Information did you Learn through Teaching these Cartoon Bullying Lessons?”*

New Learning	Frequency
Learned surprising statistics about the prevalence or damage caused by bullying.	7
Most people have been bullied and have been bullies.	5
Most students were eager to share what bullying is and the different ways it can happen.	4
Important to teach people to stand up for themselves and friends and tell the teacher about bullying.	6
Bullying hurts feelings and bodies and can lead to depression.	6
Some students do not tell on bullies because of fear of reprisals.	4
An environment of equity including the golden rule prevents bullying.	4
I learned that cartoons can be effective in the classroom.	3
Some students don't make the connection that hurting the person who is bullying may also be bullying.	2
Cyber-bullying should be addressed at an early age.	2
Confident children are less likely targets for bullies.	2

Conclusions and Recommendations

The cartoon curriculum was enthusiastically received by the majority of elementary–age special education students and peers along with the preservice teachers who taught them. The exceptions were preservice teachers instructing kindergarten through second grade students with severe cognitive or social-emotional disabilities. Nevertheless, it should be noted that at least one positive comment was always given by all participants regarding the use of cartoons for teaching this topic.

Through this teaching experience, preservice special education teachers became more aware of the pervasiveness of bullying in our schools and homes, the eagerness of students to discuss and find solutions for their experiences, and the positive outcomes for

student behavior of such lessons. Therefore, we recommend these lessons for special education students with mild disabilities and for elementary students without disabilities.

Preservice teachers also noted the efficacy of the cartoon format for teaching bullying concepts to elementary students, particularly noting the short time frame of lessons and the motivation of students. However, they also noted that other modes of lesson delivery such as bibliotherapy, role-play, and videos have positive aspects. Therefore, we recommend that these lessons be taught in combination with other lesson delivery strategies to provide variety.

Third, because so many young students reported to our preservice teachers their bullying experiences and because the lessons promoted an atmosphere of respect and equity in the classroom, we recommend that teachers not wait until upper elementary or middle school to discuss these issues. Our preservice teachers reported positive effects in student interactions after the bullying lessons. We hope that practicing classroom and special education teachers will use these lessons in discussing this important social issue.

A concluding note comes from the third author, who is a professor teaching the special education classroom management and methods course for preservice teachers. After reviewing the results of this trial of cartoon bullying lessons reported here, he has decided to incorporate three cartoon bullying lessons as a permanent part of his course for the following reasons:

- Bullying is one of the most pressing and pervasive current school problems (Carney & Merrell, 2001): preservice teachers need experience addressing it through lessons during a practicum experience (Bauman et al., 2008).
- The data presented here suggest that the cartoon format, as found in other studies (i.e., Rule & Auge, 2005) was effective for facilitating discussions with elementary students and for causing preservice teachers to reflect on their work during the lessons, gaining important insights.
- Just the younger elementary students (kindergarten through grade 2) with severe disabilities seemed not to benefit from the lessons. Older students with severe disabilities were able to understand and participate in the lessons. Students with mild disabilities and their typical peers appeared to benefit substantially from the lessons.

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