

**Bullying and Belonging:**

## Tier 2 Behavior Intervention in the Middle School Special Education Classroom

Context

This is my second year teaching at a school located in the North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago. The school is situated across from a homeless shelter and from a large city park. My school is a Chicago Public School (CPS), preK - 8, that is managed by the private non-profit, Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL). The school was turned around in the previous year. The first year of the "turn-around" was the 2013 - 2014 school year. In June 2013, the entire staff, excluding custodial and lunchroom management was fired. No one from before the turn-around was rehired.

In the previous school year, 2013 - 2014, the school enrolled 364 students. 98.6% of the students enrolled were African American, with the remaining 1.4% identifying as Hispanic. 99.5% of the students were on free and reduced lunch, the national indicator of poverty. 13.5% of students were identified as diverse learners with IEPs, with a mobility rate of the students being held at 37%.

For the 2013 - 2014 school year, the school's average composite ISAT score was 28.2%, 24.3% below the CPS average. The school was in the 1st percentile for NWEA reading growth and the 17th percentile for NWEA math growth. These percentiles were made in comparison with nation wide testing.

I am a Learning Behavioral Specialist in the Diverse Learner's department. I teach 3rd - 7th grade math in a pull-out setting, 2nd grade math in an inclusion setting, and 6th-8th grade language arts in a pull out setting. I see 24 different students throughout the day. My 3rd - 6th grade math class contains 12 students, my 2nd grade inclusion class has 2 students with IEPs that I service. My 6th - 8th grade language art class has 12 students, and my 7th grade math class has 5 students. I have known and taught almost all of my 7th and 8th graders (10 students) the previous school year. My 3rd - 6th pull-out math block is 90 minutes per day, my inclusion math block is 90 minutes per day, and my 7th grade pull-out math block is 60 minutes per day. My middle school language art block is 60 minutes a day as well.

I administer Tier III reading intervention, for 30 minutes a day inside my classroom. I service to two 3rd grade students who both read on a pre-K level in September. As of May, they are reading at a 2nd grade level.

My school has many after school programs, run through a grant by the United Way. These include after-school homework help, step team, pom squad, cheerleading, football, basketball, soccer, and track. This year we are offering Girl Scouts for the first time. I am the Daisy Troop Leader, for girls ages K-1st. This year my school is one of 33 schools in the nation participating in the National Turn-Around Arts Program. Our school, along with 2 other schools in Chicago, in the AUSL network, were selected to receive national funding and training on infusing the arts into the curriculum, in order to help close the achievement gap. Although we do not have an art teacher, and will be unable to have one for 5 years because the position was closed, we have a music and drama teacher. This year, with help from the Turn-Around Arts Program, we put on a spring musical, Annie, in April. Currently, we do not have a very active Local School Council (LSC), and the principal is an interim principal, instead of a contract principal, and is appointed by AUSL.

## Rationale and Literature Review

Bullying within the classroom has become a nationwide problem. Espelage and Swearer identify bullying as one of the most common and pervasive behavior problems in the school setting (2003). According to a 2010 study by Robers et al, between 28% and 32% of American school children experience some level of victimization at school, within a 6 month period. If you consider the role of the bystander, and include them in the numbers of children who are involved in bullying, bullying becomes an issue that includes almost the entire school population. Within my own self-contained special education classroom, the entirety of my middle school students, grades 6th - 8th, either participate in, are victimized or are bystanders with regard to bullying behavior.

My self-contained classroom includes a variety of disabilities; I teach students with specific learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, and mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. This school year, the majority of my students that partake in bullying behavior, or are victims, have emotional/behavioral disabilities and intellectual disabilities. However, my students with specific learning disabilities also partake in, are victims of, or bystanders of bullying. According to McLaughlin, Byers, & Vaughn, students with disabilities are overrepresented within the bullying dynamic( 2010). Whitney, Smith, & Thompson write that students who are identified as having a disability and are enrolled in diverse learning services are the perpetrators and victims of more bullying than their peers without disabilities (1994). Kuhne & Wiener write that students with disabilities may exhibit more aggressive behaviors than students without disabilities (2000). This piece of information might tie in with the amount of bullying I observe within my own special education classroom.

Nabuzoka writes that students with disabilities may lack the social skills necessary to avoid victimization (2003). The author proposes that students with disabilities may engage in bullying behaviours because they misinterpret social stimuli and misread social communication. Limber writes that children who engage in bullying behavior tend to be nonconformist, impulsive, and dominant in relationships, and they tend to view violence as a positive means for resolving conflict (2002). My students struggle with impulsivity and also view violence as a possible means for resolving conflict. Limber also writes that children involved in the bully/victim spectrum have poor school performance, troubled interpersonal relationships, inappropriate behavior and feelings, as well as a predisposition toward depression and anxiety (2002). These factors appear consistent with the student characteristics for Emotional Disabilities, described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. I have multiple students in my class who have emotional disabilities, as well as a predisposition toward depression and anxiety, have troubled interpersonal relationships, display inappropriate behavior and feelings and have a poor school performance.

This year, I have a new student, Miracle, with an intellectual disability, who is constantly being bullied by her other classmates. She is teased for being smelly, and for other behaviors such as not following directions. On December 2nd, I wrote in my teacher journal, "Miracle came in today telling me she wanted to talk to me in the hall. She whispered in my ear that Angel and Jarell are saying she smells like fish and she says she doesn't." This type of bullying is in line with the most frequently occurring types of bullying, according to Nansel et. al (2001). They cite that the two most frequent types of bullying reported are direct verbal, and indirect; for example, being "belittled about looks or speech," and indirect; being the "subject of rumors". When students are confronted about their bullying, they say that this student bullies them as well, calling them "bitch" and mouthing things to them. Other complaints are that she is always looking at them. They complain that, "She acts so innocent," but also partakes in the bullying of other students. When this is brought up to her, she says that she, "Didn't do nothing."

In a 2012 article by Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, and Baker, they report that a greater percentage of youth with intellectual disability (62%) reported being the victims of bullying than those with typical development (41%). However, though reported to be bullied more, this study found that students with intellectual disabilities were not bullied more chronically or severely than students with typical development or other disabilities. The author's also write that poor social skills may preclude forming close friendships and thus minimize opportunity to receive social support following incidents of victimization. These facts coincide with the social worker's assessment, that this student with an intellectual disability, uses the reporting of bullying in order to gain attention from her peers and the adults around her, especially since she has not been able to make long-lasting, positive, peer relationships.

Students have been suspended for their bullying of this child, and it hasn't ceased. In October, things came to a head when the mother of the victim, the victim, myself, and another special education teacher had a meeting and mom said that sometimes this student comes home and says, "I want to kill myself if these kids don't keep picking on me." In a study, Craig writes that students who report being victimized by bullying may be more likely to report feelings of depression and low self-esteem (1998). Moor and Lang write that they see that bullying was common in students with intellectual disability who were between 12–21 years old (2009). Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, and Baker, from 2012 write that victimization was related to social problems and to social withdrawal. My student who is the main victim of bullying in my classroom, has multiple social problems. She struggles to receive appropriate attention. In fact, the majority of students in my special education class have social problems, and struggle to maintain positive peer relationships. The following is a conversation that I documented in my teacher journal from January 9th:

*Angel: He said I'm slow, he didn't even know what time it was.*

*Miracle: He [Jarell] was mad at Angel because she got on Vmath and she got done first and...*

*Angel: And I said I'm smarter than everybody and he said no one's smarter than me and I said you don't even know how to tell time.*

Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, and Baker, writing about adolescents with intellectual disabilities who are bullied, say that the social behavior deficits of a youth with an intellectual disability may account for the status group difference in victimization.

Therein, the problem in my classroom becomes, what do I do to lessen bullying within my classroom? And, what happens to my students self-esteem when I work to lessen bullying within my classroom? In a 2009 study, Pellegrini asserts classrooms that serve students with emotional disabilities should be sensitive to the effects of bullying on their students, especially the girls. Also, when intervening with the bullies and the victims, differences in students with EDs should be considered for program planning and intervention. Pellegrini writes that small school size, a sense of community, and close supervision are factors that help to reduce bullying behavior in schools (2009). Thus, as I work to reduce bullying within my classroom, I will work to foster a closer sense of community in my students, and look at what happens to their sense of community during my work. I will also have to modify any interventions I plan to use as I work to reduce bullying in my classroom.

## Research Question and Subquestions

What happens when I work to reduce bullying in my classroom?

- What happens to my students' self-esteem when I work to reduce bullying in the classroom?
- What happens to my students' concern for others when I work to reduce bullying in the classroom?
- What happens to the target children's sense of comfort and value in the classroom and their school when I work to reduce bullying in my classroom?

## Tools for Data Collection and Method

My original plan to work to reduce bullying in my classroom consisted of administering socio-emotional learning lessons and implementing Circle of Power and Respect/Morning Meeting to my language arts class that contained Miracle and two other students, Angel and Jarell, that seemed to be the biggest instigators of the bullying. Angel and Jarell had been suspended earlier in the year for their bullying of Miracle. However, as so frequently happens in schools with high mobility rates, the school year progressed and children with IEPs moved into the school and out of the school, IEP minutes changed, and staff changed. By December, I had a completely new schedule and was no longer teaching the language arts block I had chosen to do my research on. I had to come up with a new plan.

I decided that I would do a case study on the 3 students who were my biggest offenders in the bullying and being bullied dynamic. Starting in early January, I would pull these 3 students at least once a week for 30 minutes to have socio-emotional learning lessons with me, and a modified version of Morning Meeting/Circle of Power and Respect. I would then look at changes in their behavior (through anecdotes taken in my teacher journal). I would also look for changes in their responses on a self-esteem survey and changes in their responses to a questionnaire/ interview from the beginning of the year (November/December) to the end of the year (end of April). The 3 students I chose are in the same homeroom and spend their entire day together in the pull-out special education setting for their core classes (language arts, social studies, science, and math), and with their general education peers at specials, breakfast, lunch, and recess. None of the 3 students chosen have been diagnosed with emotional/ behavioral disabilities. These students were, you guessed it, Miracle, Angel, and Jarell.

In this 30 minute weekly group, I made lesson plans that modified elements of Morning Meeting and lessons from the 7th grade Second Step curriculum. At 11 (the first half of the children's specials period), on alternating days so they only missed 30 minutes of a special (music, drama, physical education) every three weeks, I picked up the 3 students from their special education math class and took them to my classroom where the 4 of us sat around the kidney bean table to have our lessons. I started every meeting with the same greeting, going around saying, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I like myself." After a month of meetings, I added on to the greeting, by adding the portion, "...I like myself and I'm good at \_\_\_\_\_." On days when our group was a modified Morning Meeting, we would then talk about a question I had that either stemmed from a previous conversation, lesson or conflict. For example, "What does it mean to work in a group? What does it look like when you're listening? How do you show other people you are listening to them?" We would then conclude with a team building activity from the Morning Meeting book (for example, mystery drawing, wherein a student is shown a picture and has to describe how to draw it to the other students) and then I'd give them a question to think about or something to observe until we got to our next meeting (for example, "Try and notice

if you see anyone being bullied in class this week. You don't have to do anything or say anything, just notice to see if it's happening and how the two students react). On days when I would lead a modified Second Step lesson, I chose lessons out of the first three units: empathy and communication, bullying prevention, and emotion management. I did not take lessons from the units on goal setting and substance abuse and prevention as I felt they did not pertain to the questions of my research. In these lessons, I would modify the script the curriculum gave us. When there were discussion questions, I had to facilitate more of the discussions rather than just letting them talk, due to students varying disabilities. For example, a lesson asked the question, "How does it feel to be excluded by people you thought were your friends?" and I had to define the word exclude as well as give them options for feelings, such as jealous, angry, sad and describe the way these emotions are different. Also, because of the students in the group 2nd - 3rd grade writing ability, all of the written activities from the lessons were done as an oral discussion or skipped. The lessons we used from Second Step were:

- Working in Groups
- Leaders and Allies
- Handling a Grievance
- Negotiating and Compromising
- Bullying in Friendships
- Labels, Stereotypes, and Prejudice
- De-escalating a Tense Situation
- Coping with Stress

To collect data for my research, I would use three tools. The first was my teacher journal. I have used to teacher journal to record what happens in the weekly/bi-weekly group held with my 3 students. I try to record students' responses to questions I've posed to them and students' interactions with each other in the group. I also have tried to record instances I observe outside of group that show any of the 3 students bullying each other, being the victim of bullying, or showing kindness and respect to one another.

The second tool I used was a student self-esteem survey. Original self-esteem surveys were done in early November. All 3 students that took this survey took it earnestly and seriously. However, when reading their answers (as will be discussed in the interpretation portion), it seems like students had difficulty understanding some of the questions. For instance, they were answering with a "strongly agree" on a certain question but then "strongly disagree" to a question in a similar vein. When the final self-esteem survey was administered in late April, I modified the presentation of the survey. It was in a one-on-one scenario, and I was sure to have real world examples to give that helped students answer more thoughtfully.

The third and last tool I used was a student questionnaires and interview. Initial student questionnaires/interviews were done in late December. All 3 students participated in this interview willingly, alone in the classroom with the teacher, during their lunch/recess period. Their answers seemed, for the most part, honest and comfortable (not trying to tell me things that I want to hear or that they think I should hear). However, these 3 students had little context as to why were doing this interview other than them knowing that it was for a project I was doing, looking at how make them feel more comfortable at school. Their final questionnaire/interview was given in late April under the same conditions. By this point, students had more context for the interview because of their participation in "group" for the last 4 months.

## Data

The first student in my group is a 13 year old 7th grader named Jarell. He has a mild intellectual disability and was new to Chalmers this year. He reads and performs math at approximately a 2nd grade level. He writes at approximately the late 1st grade level. Jarell loves positive attention from teachers and peers. He is sensitive and affectionate, liking to pat his teachers on the back as he's talking to them and constantly asking his teachers, "Are you mad at me?" when he doesn't turn in his homework or gets redirected. His attribute of liking attention from peers seems to have pulled him to be a part of the "bullying triangle", as a way to seem "cool" or to make friends.

On Jarell's initial self-esteem survey, taken on November 7th, he scored a 25 out of 40 possible points (where a higher score indicates higher self-esteem). He reported that he is happy with himself, feels he is able to do things as well as most people, feels that he is a person of worth, at least equal to his peers, doesn't feel like he is a failure, and has a positive attitude toward himself. However, he also thinks he is, "no good at all," doesn't feel like he has a lot of good qualities, feels he doesn't have much to be proud of, feels useless at times, and wishes he could have more respect for himself. Jarell was the only student of the 3 that reported they feel like "no good at all." My interpretation of this is because, though all 3 of these students struggle to follow classroom rules and procedures, Jarell becomes genuinely distraught when given consequences from a teacher and is fixated on the notion of being "bad" and "good" in class. For example, on February 10th, during a discussion about including everyone in conversations and how to do that, Jarell said, "Yeah, some teachers will skip you [in discussions]. Like if you are bad in their class or have a bad day, they are gonna skip you and make you line up last." When he does get in trouble he will always come later and say sorry, try to shake hands or hug after his apology and gets extremely upset when yelled at by a teacher. His sensitivity is what may be leading him to his interpretation of himself, that he is "no good" at all, particularly when most students in my setting see following the rules as "being good" and not following the rules as "being bad." He also struggles with our group greeting, sometimes refusing or stumbling when he has to say, "My name is Jarell and I like myself." On a meeting on March 5th, when it came to his turn in the greeting, he said, "Ms. Servais, I don't like doing that stuff, I don't wanna do it." I asked him, "Can you just do it just for us and group, even if it's just pretend?" Jarell responded, "No." Then, Miracle asked, "So you don't like yourself? Jarell responded, "Yeah I like myself, I just don't like doing that stuff."

In order for Jarell's sense of self-esteem to improve, I would like him to separate "being bad" and "being good" from bad behavior and good behavior. I would also like him to become more comfortable speaking positively about himself, sharing opening and honestly, and communicating inside a group in a positive way.

On Jarell's end of the year self-esteem survey, taken on May 4th, Jarell scored a 40 out of the 40 possible points. According to his survey he now strongly disagrees that he is, "no good at all," that he "doesn't have a lot of good qualities," that he "feels he doesn't have much to be proud of," that he "feels useless at times," and that he "wishes he could have more respect for himself." I think Jarell's self-esteem has improved, particularly when it comes to believing in his good qualities. In the beginning of the year, Jarell was only able to identify qualities [of himself] as academic, in which he has significant deficits. However, through our weekly meetings and sharing out, he was able to see that there are a lot of qualities that make a person that aren't academic. Because he can now identify positive non-academic skills in himself, he also doesn't seem himself as useless and sees that he has things to be proud of.

On Jarell's initial interview, when asked if he feels comfortable at school, he answered, "Yeah, cuz we get more work done." When he was asked how he feels when other students get in trouble, he answered, "I worry about myself but sometimes I get mad because, yeah, I get mad sometimes because, like if there's a girl or a boy and both of them arguing and [only] one of them get in trouble that's not fair. Like if we get into with Miracle, and she says something to us, and we say something back, we get in trouble. She doesn't get in trouble for it. We gotta get outta the classroom and stuff but she don't." Clearly, Miracle is someone who he thinks of immediately when he thinks about getting in trouble at school, and he seems to blame Miracle for times when he gets in trouble. When asked if he was a bully and if he was bullied himself, he answered, "No," and "Nuh-uh." When asked, "How do you feel when other students in your class are being teased or bullied?" He answered, "That makes me mad cuz they need to stop doing that. They don't like people bullying on them so how they gonna do it to others?" When asked, "How often do you see bullying in school?" he responded, "Like once in a while." When I asked what bullying looks like he said, "They are talking about people and stuff and want to fight them. Like, 'oo you dirty, you stink, we want to fight.'" When asked if he laughs when he hears people say this stuff, he responded no. This is untrue, the majority of times I see Jarell get into verbal conflicts it is one that has already started. Or, it is a conflict that has already started between other students and he laughs or responds to it, and involves himself. When asked, "How do you feel when other students in your class look like they're having fun and you're not?" Jarell responded, "I feel nothing. I get upset because they are supposed to get in trouble, we are doing our work, and they are playing." Jarell is very fixated on the pronoun, "they" and the fact that he seems to see other students not getting in trouble when they are supposed to, or when he gets in trouble when in his eyes, someone else should be. When asked if Jarell feels like his teachers like it when he comes to school he answered, "Yes. Because they want to teach us." When I asked if he feels like he's wanted at school, Jarell answered, "Yes." When I pushed further and asked what made him feel that way, he said, "Cuz they probably miss us." When asked how he knows that, he said, "I don't know, I just say that." I asked Jarell, "Are there any classes you hate?" and he answered, "No." I asked him if he ever says, "I hate this class or that's why everyone hates this class?" and he said, "I say that when I'm mad." When asked what makes him mad he answered, "Like when the teachers start hollering at me when I didn't do nothing." Again, Jarell is focusing his frustrations on the fact that he gets in trouble for doing "nothing". He has also voiced a concern that all three of the participants stated, which is that they get angry and upset when they get yelled at at school.

On Jarell's final interview, given on April 13th, Jarell answered the same set of questions. When asked, "Do you feel comfortable at school?" he answered, "Yes. Because it's like the teacher's got us and like, I really can't say it, I forgot. Like in class, I can't really pronounce it. Like, we are in the classroom and someone comes in and tries to make trouble and she press the button and they will come and get them out." When asked, "How do you feel when other students in your class get in trouble?" Jarell responded, "I don't feel nothing because it ain't me." These two answers show a shift in his thinking, he is less fixated on the "injustice" of others getting in trouble (he said before he sometimes gets mad when only one kid gets in trouble because it's not fair) or teachers not being fair. Here, he praises his teachers, saying that they "got him," (instead of, "We gotta get out but they don't."). When asked if he is a bully, he again said no, but gives a slightly more in depth answer than, "Nuh-uh," but definitely a more truthful one, when asked if he is bullied. He says, "Sometimes, not no more like that." This time, when asked how he feels when other students in class are being bullied or teased, instead of feeling mad, he says, "I be feeling bad for them because they didn't do nothing to nobody and they're getting picked on for no apparent reason. Now they bully that boy Tyberius and it makes me feel bad because he doesn't do nothing to people." When asked how often he sees bullying in school, instead of "once in a while" he answered, "Like days, not like everyday, but like maybe not today but probably tomorrow." Being able to see yourself as a victim of bullying, being able to feel bad instead of mad when you see another student being

bullied and being able to identify more instances of bullying in the school indicate a growing sense of empathy within Jarell and also concern for the other students in the school. When asked, "Do you feel like your teachers like it when you come to school?" Jarell answered, "Yeah, because I believe they want us to learn so when we grow up and have our own kids we can take them to school or so when we grow up we can be a teacher." When asked, "Do you feel like you're wanted at school?" Jarell answered, "Yes." When prompted, "How do you know?" Jarell answered, "Cuz teachers want me here. Like when I'm gone, they'll say, 'Where were you yesterday?' or, 'I'm glad you're back, I missed you.'" In his initial interview, Jarell was unable to identify why or how he knew he was wanted at school. On his final interview, he gave a specific example of how he knew he was wanted at school. I believe that our intervention time has helped Jarell be able to identify more of the positive interactions he has at school, increasing his sense of value and comfort.

The second student in my group is Angel. Angel is a 13 year old 7th grader who has attended Chalmers for her entire school career. She was diagnosed with a specific learning disability last year in the 6th grade. She currently reads and writes at the 2nd grade level and performs math at the late 3rd - 4th grade level. Angel currently has 3 brothers at the school and is a middle child with many more siblings at home. She receives social work services from the school and from an outside source. She is constantly mired in conflict and has trouble keeping her thoughts to herself around peers or adults, she is very loud. She craves attention, positive and negative, and is "notorious" to most of the teachers and staff in the school. She wants to do well in school but becomes agitated when she feels "dumb" or doesn't understand what is going on. When she does understand, she is eager to let everyone know. For example, on February 17th, when picking up the kids for group from their math class. Jarell had to stay behind with another teacher because of a conflict. When I asked what happened, Angel reported, "He [Jarell] said I'm slow, he didn't even know what time it was." She then said, "I said I'm smarter than everybody and he said no one's smarter than me, and I said you don't even know how to tell time." Angel struggles to take responsibility for her actions. Because we were in group, I asked, "Why do you call each other slow?" Angel then said, "I don't call people slow. Jaquez said that. I told him not to pick on him." When I asked, "Ok, well why do Jaquez and Jarell call each other slow, she answered, "Because they don't know how to tell time. I'm smarter than all of them. They got to still work on their time packet."

On Angel's initial self-esteem survey, taken on November 7th, she scored a 25 out of 40 possible points (where a higher score indicates higher self-esteem). She reported that she is happy with herself and has a lot of good qualities. She doesn't think she is "no good at all," doesn't feel like she is a failure, and doesn't need to have more respect for herself. However, she also reported that she isn't able to do things as well as most people, doesn't have much to be proud of, feels useless at times, doesn't feel like she is a person of worth at least equal to her peers, and doesn't have a positive attitude toward herself. My initial interpretation of her survey results, taken from those responses and from my knowledge of Angel, is that her self-esteem is tied to her low academic performance. Angel has a severe learning disability and currently reads at a 2nd grade level in the 7th grade. She performs math around the 3rd - 4th grade level. Looking at the anecdote above, this is an accurate interpretation. Angel is eager to bully others for being "slow" to hide her own academic deficits.

In order to Angel to lessen her own bullying and improve her self-esteem, she needs to be able to take ownership of her actions, see herself more clearly, and not have her self-esteem be so dependent on putting down others to make up for her own shortcomings.

On Angel's end of the year self-esteem survey, taken on May 4th, she scored a 29 out of 40 possible points, raising her score by 4 points. When answering the questions, "All in all, I am happy with myself," she put strongly agree instead of agree. She previously disagreed with the statement, "I am able to do things as well as most other people," but on her May 4th survey put that she strongly agrees with that statement. She now disagrees with the statement, "I feel useless at times," where she had previously strongly agreed. She now agrees with the statement, "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least equal to my peers," where she previously disagreed. In November, she disagreed that, "All in all, I feel like I am a failure." In May, she strongly disagreed with that statement. In November, she also put that she disagreed that, "I have a positive attitude toward myself," wherein May, she agreed with that statement. Unfortunately, in May she strongly agreed with the statement, "I wish I could have more respect for myself." This is a shift from her answer in November, where she strongly disagreed with the statement. Interestingly, but still regrettably, she moved her answer from "strongly agree" to "agree" when given the statement, "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." So, she still agrees with the statement but not as strongly. Angel's overall self-esteem has gone up, but she now, conversely from the beginning of the year, she says she has little to be proud of and wishes she could have more respect for herself. I think this is because throughout this year, she has spent time in our group becoming more self-aware of herself and her bullying behaviors. I believe this realization has not made her proud of herself.

In Angel's original interview and questionnaire she had a lot to say. The most significant answer she gave, I believe, was the following. She says she that feels bad when other students get in trouble, because of how the ESPs [support staff/security] and teachers react. She says that they are always "yelling and doing all that." She also reports that they are, "Grabbing our arms and stuff like we're adults or something." When asked if she was a bully, she said, "No, Why? Cuz it's not good to be one. That's what people say I do but I don't." When I asked her why she thinks people say she is a bully, she responded, "Because of the way I treat people. I don't like people staring." I then asked her, "How do you treat people?" Angel answered, "I do treat them right, I just don't like them staring. How they react and then they say I'm bullying them." Angel then reported that she never sees bullying at school. When asked if she feels wanted at school, Angel said no. When asked why she feels that way, Angel answered, "Because of how all these teachers be treating people. Because when I ask him to go to the bathroom he says no, and stuff like that. Like they don't care. They don't care what work I do or even if I'm trying to get my act together, they don't care. Like, Mr. Banks tried to put me in in-school [suspension] for the remainder of the year." When asked what teachers would do to make her feel more wanted at school, Angel replied, "They could help me with my work even if you don't need help. They could like, give like, special equations. When asked what that means, she responded, "I don't know. Like we could play like a half game or something and then go back to work." When asked about her role in the classroom, Angel responded that she is the comic. When asked for examples, Angel answered, "I'm funny. I play and laugh all day. When asked if she thinks the kids play and laugh with her, she said, "Mm-hm." When asked what her and the other students laugh and play about, Angel smacked her lips. She then said, "You gotta know all this? We don't play about nothing, we just make funny faces and stuff and then kids laugh. I asked, if anyone gets their feelings hurt when she does this. Angel answered no.

Angel's responses, as I listed above, are very interesting. Firstly, she seems to be reacting in school to the way she is treated (or perceives she is being treated) by the adults in the building. She responds that because of the adults in the building she doesn't feel wanted at school, but also feels bad when other students get in trouble. It seems that she's saying that teachers don't notice or care when she is trying to improve her behavior. However, when asked what teachers could do to make her feel more wanted at school, she doesn't cite behavioral things, she talks about getting help with her academic work. These responses coincide with my interpretation of her

self-esteem survey, that her low academic abilities are affecting her self-esteem. It now seems that her low academic abilities are also impacting her behavior and her feeling welcome at school. Her other telling responses were about her inability to see herself as a bully. It is unclear to me if she is lying to me, or truly lying to herself about whether or not she is a bully. I personally would not categorize Angel as the class, "comic." I would categorize her a class member who is loud and sassy, but also tries to be helpful to adults.

Angel took her final interview on April 14th. When asked, "Do you feel comfortable at school?" Angel answered, "Yeah, why wouldn't I be comfortable at school? It's a school. They always wanna make sure you're safe. That's what all teachers say, 'I wanna make sure you're safe.' You say that all the time too." This is in stark contrast to the original answer she gave to this question. In early December, 4.5 months prior, when asked if she felt comfortable at school, she said, "Sort of. I feel sorta comfortable at school because it's not much to do. Well, there is. I dunno." When asked how she feels when other students get in trouble, she answered, "I got no feelings. I don't feel like nothing. I don't be feeling nothing, I be wondering. I just be wondering what they do."

When asked if she is a bully or bullied by others, she still answered, "No." However, when asked how she feels when she sees other students being bullied, instead of her original response of, "I dunno. Feel like that's not ok. I be wanting to [do something about it] but I just don't cuz it's none of my business," she answered quite differently. She said, "Um. I feel sad. Cuz it's not right. Well, to be honest, I didn't really know what bullying was, when I was bullying but now I know, so I don't bully anymore." When I asked her, "What is bullying?" she said, "I think bullying is constantly when I, well, bothering somebody or talking about them." I asked her, "So now that you know what bullying is, you don't do it anymore?" She replied,

"No. I only did it, well, I wasn't bullying people, but when somebody said something to me I say something back [but now] I ignore them. That's what people be on drama in our classroom I just be like \*gives thumbs up\* 'good for you,' and I be wondering like, 'You all got no training. And you all be talking about somebody because I used to do it, so I know, but I don't do it no more.' So I'm good. Some people bully for attention."

So even though Angel still couldn't directly refer to herself as a bully, she admits that now that she knows what bullying is, she doesn't do it anymore. She also gives the definition of bullying. She also refers to the things we have learned in our group as "training" which indicates that she is starting to generalize what she has learned, or at least know the purpose behind what we are doing in group. Her being able to identify herself as a bully or identify bullying is a far cry from Angel in October. During a parent-teacher conference after school on October 23rd, Angel was in trouble for shouting out to the entire hallways of middle schoolers, "Ew, look at Miracle, she's licking the water fountain!" and proceeding to get the entire middle school to laugh at Miracle. At the conference, I tried to explain to Angel that she was bullying and that was bullying behavior. She just kept saying, "How?" and, "But how is that bullying?" I explained that she shouted out just to get everyone to laugh at Miracle, having everyone "gang up" on someone else is a textbook bullying scenario and she refused to believe or admit that she was bullying, she just kept saying, "But how is that bullying?" On her final interview in April, she also says that she sees bullying, "a lot" in the school, versus in December when she said she saw bullying, "Never." or when "someone wants to be bullied."

When asked, "Do you feel like your teachers like it when you come to school?" Angel answered, "Yup, just to say something to me. Cuz Ms. Sargas and Mr. Vaught got a good bond and they be talking about people. [Here,

Angel means she thinks these two teachers like it when she comes to school so they can talk about her.] I asked Angel to think of some teachers that do like it when she comes to school. Angel said, “Basically all of the teachers but they be keeping it to themselves. I asked her, “So you wish that they would tell you more that they like it when you come to school?” She said, “I guess.” I then asked Angel to think of one teacher that likes it when she comes to school. She replied, “mmm...probably last year, Mr. Meiers.” When I asked her of any other teachers that liked it when she came to school, she became defensive and said, “No, how I’m supposed to know their feelings?!” I asked her, “Well what could teachers do with their actions and behaviors to show that they like it when you come to school, maybe not tell you but show you?” Angel answered, “They could ask, how you doing today, and say I’m fine, and they could say, “I’m glad that you’re here.” I then told her, “Well, Angel, I’m happy everyday when you come to school. And I’m glad you’re here.” Angel responded by saying, “Some people be lying though.” I asked her if she thought I was lying to her and she said no. Being able to identify at least one teacher that likes it when she comes to school, and even identifying teachers that like it when she comes to school for her perceived negative reasons, is growth from her original answer to this question, which was, “No.” and that teachers don’t care. When asked on her final interview in April if she feels like she’s wanted at school, she does answer, “Yeah, because everyone wants kids to learn. Well, all of the adults want kids to learn.” This is in contrast to her answer to this question on her initial interview where she says, “No [I’m not wanted at school] because of how all these teachers be treating people.” She also said that to make her feel wanted at school teachers could help her with her work. What a contrast to the end of the year when she says that all the adults want kids to learn and want her at school.

The third student in my group is Miracle. Miracle is a 13 year old 7th grader with a mild intellectual disability. She performs math, reads and writes around the 2nd grade level. This is her first year at Chalmers, the year previously she was at Learn Charter more the majority of the year and a few other charters for the end of the 2014 - 2015 school year as well as the beginning of the current school year. Miracle wants to make friends and have people like her but struggles to do. She is immature and struggles with her personal hygiene at times. She also struggles with the reality of a situation. On November 21st, I told Miracle to go and do her reading at a separate desk because I saw her mouthing to Jarell that he was a “bitch.” I told her that when she was ready to cooperate and be part of a group she could rejoin the group. At her desk, she refused to sit down, do her reading, or follow any directions. She kept repeating, “I didn’t do nothing, I didn’t do nothing.” I explained that she wasn’t being punished, she just needed to do her reading away from the group and could rejoin later. However, she just kept saying, “I didn’t do nothing.”

On the beginning of the year self-esteem survey, taken on November 7th, Miracle scored a 27 out of 36 possible points (where a higher score indicates higher self-esteem). She reported on her original self-esteem survey that she is happy with herself, feels she has a lot of good qualities, is able to do things as well as most people, has much to be proud of, doesn’t think she is “no good at all,” and has a positive attitude towards herself. However, she also reports that she feels useless at times, doesn’t feel like she is a person of worth, at least equal to her peers, and feels like she is a failure.

On Miracle’s end of the year self-esteem survey, taken on May 4th, she scored a 36 out of 40 possible points, raising her score by 15 percentage points (her previous score was out of 36 due to the fact that she skipped a question). In November, Miracle strongly agreed that she felt useless at times. In May, she strongly disagreed with this statement. By the end of the year, she strongly agreed with the statement, “I am a person of worth, at least equal to my peers,” where in November, she disagreed with that statement. In the fall, she strongly agreed that she felt like she was a failure, in May she strongly disagreed with that statement. However, she strongly

agrees with the statement, "I wish I could have more respect for myself." (Miracle had no previous data for this question as it was the one she skipped in November). I am not sure what Miracle means by wishing she could have more respect for herself. This answer is particularly interesting because this is the only question where she gave an answer to indicate a low self-esteem. Because she sometimes is still a victim of bullying, I wonder if she has transferred peoples' lack of respect for her into her own lack of respect for herself.

In Miracle's initial questionnaire/interview, one of her most interesting answers was about how she feels when other students get in trouble at school. She said,

"If they do get in trouble, if they get in trouble for something they do, that's their fault. But if they get in trouble for something they didn't do, I'm gonna tell so they don't get in trouble, so someone else can get in trouble cuz it wasn't even them. Like, um, when we was in gym yesterday, somebody had screamed, like, "whore" at Angel or something, but it really wasn't her. But I was watching and it wasn't her but she got in trouble."

Miracle, when asked if she was bullied, said, "Not no more, sometimes. They, like, call me names. Like any kind of names, like cuss words, but they do it on the side but teachers really can't hear it. It doesn't really be the girls no more it just really be the boys. I know every girl up in here, they are my friends but it's some of the boys." Miracle reports that she sees bullying at least once a week, but not every single day. When asked what teachers could do to make her feel more wanted at school, Miracle said, "They could like help me understand the words a little better just in case I don't know it and I ask em and they explain it a little bit easier."

In Miracle's interview, she seems to have identified herself as a victim of bullying, which is also how I see her. However, though she describes being bullied, she says she isn't being bullied anymore. She also cites, like Angel, that the adults in the building are what cause her to feel bad when other students get in trouble. She also, like Angel, says that teachers could make her feel more welcome at school by helping her with her academics. Reading these responses, it has made me realize, more than I have before, the powerful impact the adults in the building are having on these students, more-so than the students. It has also made me stop and look at how these two girls' academic troubles and success are also impacting not only their self-esteem, but also their feeling of comfort and belonging in the school.

In Miracle's final interview, given on April 15th, when asked, "Do you feel comfortable at school?" She says, "Yes. Because, um, nobody threatens me anymore or nothing." When I asked her if this is different from the beginning of the year, she says, "A bit, because like when I first got here everybody was mean and then they turned nice." Like Jarell, on the initial survey, when asked how she feels when other people get in trouble, she talked about students getting blamed for things they didn't do, "...if they get in trouble for something they didn't do, I'm gonna tell so they don't get in trouble so someone else can get in trouble cuz it wasn't even them." However, on her final interview, when asked how she feels when someone else gets in trouble, she says, "I don't feel nothing. I feel like that's their business if they get themselves in trouble so I don't feel nothing." Like the initial interview, she doesn't identify herself as a bully. However, like the initial interview, she still says she is sometimes bullied. She says, "...like they, some people, like be calling me out of my name and stuff. And I be going and telling the teacher and they say ok, and sometimes they do it [talk to the person] or sometimes they talk to the person at lunch or the end of the day." So while she identifies as still being bullied, she has learned a plan of action to take in order to not escalate the conflict. This is the same plan she said she did when she saw others being bullied in her initial interview (I go tell Ms. Sharp.) In her final interview, when asked how she

feels when she sees other people being bullied, she says, "I feel like, I feel, um, mad and kinda sad because if you know they are teasing you, why can't you just go to tell? But you are afraid that they are going to be mean to you or hurt you." This indicates that Miracle not only has come up with a plan to help herself as a victim of school bullying, but empathizes with students whom she sees being bullied but don't have the same plan of action.

When asked if her teachers like it when she comes to school, Miracle answers, "Yes, cuz they want to see you graduate and don't be like frustrated with your work." When asked how she knows her teachers want to see her graduate, she says, "Because they try to help you and teach you the stuff you need to know." When asked if she feels wanted at school, Miracle answered, "Yes, because like everybody knows my name and some people don't call me out anymore and everybody calls me by my first name." When asked if she feels like teachers want her at school and how she knows, she said, "Yes, because they get that happy look in they face when you finally get to school. Like you didn't want to come to school, but now you came cuz you needed to and they're happy." In her initial interview, Miracle also states that she feels wanted at school because, "Some people in my class liked me." However, in her final interview, she is able to give clear instances that indicate that people like her (not calling outside of her name).

### Conclusion

So, what did happen to my three students' self-esteem when I worked to reduce bullying in the classroom? All three of the students had their end of the year self-esteem scores improve. Though I believe that Jarell's 40/40 score from his end of the year self-esteem survey stems from the fact that he wants to please his teachers and thought that strongly disagreeing with the negative statements and strongly agreeing with the positive ones were what I wanted to hear, I do believe his self-esteem has improved. In the beginning of the sessions, as seen in the quote from March 5th, Jarell struggled to even say our greeting. However, by April he became more comfortable with the greeting and would participate. On April 20th he said,

"Hi, my name is Jarell and I like myself and I'm good at...uh...being a brother. Cuz like my [twin] brother be all wild and loud and stuff and then I just be like chilling and we are good together and we make it so my mama doesn't stress out."

I wrote previously that I thought Angel needed to develop skills to see herself more clearly and to take more ownership of her actions in order to improve her self-esteem. In the past months, through group, she has done this, including being able to identify herself as a bully. This, in particular, is why I think she changed her answer from strongly disagreeing to strongly agreeing that she wishes she could have more respect for herself, and also changing her answer from disagreeing to agreeing that, "At times, I think I am no good at all." Though her self-esteem has improved, next year, there is more work to be done with Angel's self-esteem. Particularly, it seems that she needs to work on forgiving herself and continuing to lessen her bullying behavior in order to keep raising her self-esteem. Interestingly, for Angel it seems cyclical; the less bullying she does, the higher her self-esteem is and the lower her self-esteem is, the more bullying behaviors she will display.

Miracle also reported that she wishes she could have more respect for herself. Next year, I would like to run an intervention group with Miracle, Angel and possibly another girl, around the topic of respecting yourself: what does it mean and look like and how do you actively practice having respect for yourself?

What happened to my three students' concern for others when I worked to reduce bullying in the classroom? Well, I believe that their concern for others increased, especially between the three children in the group. These were three students who constantly teased and bullied one another. As recorded in my journal, on March 12th, "...Angel and Miracle were working together on their Hunger Games Study Guide. Angel raised her hand and said to me, "Ms. Servais. Miracle isn't getting it. Like do you want me to, like, help her, or just give her the answers and have her copy them off my page?" On April 1st, I recorded in my journal that I had to redirect Angel and Miracle because Angel was braiding Miracle's hair when they were supposed to be reading along in a story. As the process of the weekly groups went on, they frequently inquired with interest about each other's lives, often very personal things. As recorded in my journal, in group on March 24th:

*Miracle: You have to call your mom's boyfriend stepdaddy?*

*Jarell: No but I do sometimes. I call him by his real name. He's cool. He's been taking care of us since we were a baby.*

*Miracle: I don't call him [my mom's boyfriend] daddy. He's not my daddy. Even if my mom gets married I'm not gonna call him daddy.*

*Jarell: I don't even like calling my real daddy, daddy.*

They also showed concern for each other. As recorded in my journal, during the beginning of group on March 3rd, when I asked where Angel was:

*Jarell: I don't know what Angel is in in-school for. She didn't do nothing.*

*Miracle: Mr. Banks put her in there for no reason.*

*Jarell: You playing in the game [staff vs. student basketball game]?...I'm gonna treat Mr. Banks, I'm gonna have that boy on skates. They're gonna have me sticking with Mr. Banks and he's not gonna get past me either.*

What did I learn? That in order to increase students' sense of concern for others, you have to build in time for students to connect emotionally to each other. This can be done in small groups, pull-out intervention time, or morning meeting.

What happened to my three students' sense of comfort and value in the classroom and their school when I work to reduce bullying in my classroom? Looking at what happened to their sense of comfort and value, what have I learned? I believe that my students' sense of comfort and value in the classroom increased. If only being able to articulate what they need in order to feel comfortable at school. Angel said that to feel wanted at school teachers could, "...Ask, how you doing today, and say I'm fine, and they could say, I'm glad that you're here." Jarell has said, that this is what gives him the feeling that he is wanted at school. He said that he knows he's wanted at school because, "When I'm gone, they'll say, 'Where were you yesterday?' or, 'I'm glad you're back, I missed you.'" These two quotes paint a very clear picture, and a very easy solution: in order to make students feel valued and comfortable at school, as educators we must remember to tell them they we are glad to see them, glad they are at school, and tell them that we value them. There were also things that were brought to my attention that didn't make students feel comfortable and valued at school. Take from my journal, on February 18th, during a discussion about what teachers and staff could do to make students feel more comfortable at school:

*Miracle: Teachers could pull us to the side to tell us what's wrong instead of yelling and pointing and telling us what to do like we're little kids.*

*Angel: Them being more respectful, instead of us taking it overboard and just yelling.*

*Jarell: Stop yelling. Some teachers need to start telling the truth and stop lying.*

This coincides with the answers they all gave in their initial interviews from early December about whether or not they feel comfortable at school. Jarell was asked if there were any classes he hated at school. He said, "Yeah. Like when the teachers start hollering at me when I didn't do nothing. When asked what makes him more mad at school, he said, "Nothing." Angel, in her initial interview from early December, when asked how she feels when her or other students get in trouble at school echoed a similar sentiment. She said, "Bad. Cuz how the teachers react. ESPs and stuff. Cuz they just be yelling and doing all that. They don't gotta yell. How they just be grabbing our arms and stuff like we're an adult or something?" From my research, there is another very clear solution about how to increase students' sense of comfort and value at school, besides telling them explicitly that you value them and are genuinely glad to see them: do not yell at them, do not lose your temper with them, do not point them out of a group in order to "shame" them, and absolutely, do not lay your hands on them in order to get them to comply.

And finally, what happens overall when I work to reduce bullying inside the classroom, and what have I learned from working to reduce bullying inside the classroom? The bullying between the three students reduced dramatically. Unfortunately, these three students have yet to generalize these new skills and behaviors and continue to bully or be bullied outside of my classroom. This is particularly true with Angel, who has spent the majority of the last month of school in "in-school suspension" which is really her "helping out" in the pre-K classrooms. Miracle has found it difficult to problem solve or ignore when she is without her special education teachers and is being bullied. In late April, she was suspended for a day from an incident in gym class where she tried to hit another (general education) student with a golf club for "picking on her."

Other limitations of this research are the time that it took away from the students' specials classes. These three students missed 30 minutes of art, physical education or music every three weeks. In the future, I would like to be able to run a group like this during student lunch, recess, or intervention time.

### Policy Recommendations

Based on the conclusions I have drawn from my research, I recommend the following:

During the 2015 - 2016 school year, all self-contained teachers should identify at least 3 - 4 students to pull for 30 minutes, 1 time a week, for a small group behavior intervention that consists a version of Morning Meeting/ Circle of Power and Respect and Second Step or other socio-emotional learning curriculum lessons.

In order to cultivate a sense of belonging among students at school, all staff shall be trained in de-escalation methods, such as Responsive Classroom, that don't involve yelling or physical contact.

All schools in Chicago Public Schools should be granted funds to purchase or develop a socio-emotional curriculum that is relevant to their student population and be given the resources to train their staff on the

implementation of this curriculum. Time should be written into the weekly instructional block in order to implement this curriculum with fidelity.

## Bibliography

- Carran, D., and Kellner, M. (2009). Characteristics of Bullies and Victims Among Students With Emotional Disturbance Attending Approved Private Special Education Schools. In *Behavioral Disorders*, 34 (3), pp. 151 - 163. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University.
- Christensen, L., Fraynt, R., Neece, C., and Baker, B. (2012). Bullying Adolescents With Intellectual Disability. In *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 5 (1), pp. 49 - 65. Los Angeles, CA: Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.
- Craig, W. M. (1998). The relationship among bullying, victimization, depression, anxiety, and aggression in elementary school children. In *Personality and Individual Differences*, 24, pp. 123-130. San Francisco, CA: Elsevier BV.
- Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? In *School Psychology Review*, 32, pp. 365–383. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Kuhne, M., & Wiener, J. (2000). Stability of social status of children with and without learning disabilities. In *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 23, pp. 64–75.
- Limber, S. P. (2002). Addressing youth bullying behaviors. In *Proceedings of the educational forum on adolescent health: Youth bullying*, pp. 5-16. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association.
- McLaughlin, C., Byers, R., & Vaughn, R. P. (2010). Responding to bullying among children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In *Exceptionality Education International*. London, England: Anti-Bullying Alliance.
- Moor, J., and Lang, R. (2009). Cyberbullying among students with intellectual and developmental disability in special education settings. In *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 12 (3), pp. 146 - 151. Nijmegen, The Netherlands: Radboud University.
- Nabuzoka, D. (2003). Teacher ratings and peer nominations of bullying and other behaviour of children with and without learning difficulties. *Educational Psychology*, 23, pp. 307–321.
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simon-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behavior among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. In *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, pp. 2094-2100.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2002). Bullying, victimization, and sexual harassment during the transition to middle school. In *Educational Psychologist*, 37, pp. 151-163. Los Angeles, CA: Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.
- Raskauskas J., and Modell, S. (2011). Modifying Anti-Bullying Programs to Include Students With Disabilities. In *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 44 (1), pp. 60 - 67. United States: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Robers, S., Zhang, J., Truman, J., & Snyder, T. D. (2010). Indicators of school crime and safety.

Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Rose, C., Espelage, D., Aragon, S., and Elliott, J. (2011). Bullying and Victimization among Students in Special Education and General Education Curricula. In *Exceptionality Education International*, 21 (3), pp. 2 - 14. Huntsville, TX: Sam Houston State University.

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sabornie, E. J. (1994). Social-affective characteristics in early adolescents identified as learning disabled and nondisabled. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 17, pp. 268–279.

Whitney, I., Smith, P. K., & Thompson, D. (1994). Bullying and children with special educational needs. In *School bullying: Insights and Perspectives*, pp. 213–240. London, UK: Routledge.