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# Developing a Competency-Based Framework to Guide Elementary School Teachers' Efforts in Helping Bullied Children

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Developing a Competency-Based Framework to Guide Elementary School Teachers' Efforts in  
Helping Bullied Children

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

by

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## Abstract

The current study aimed to develop a competency-based framework designed to assist elementary school teachers in their efforts to help bullied children. Drawing from extant research, Gregus and Cavell (2017) created an initial draft of the framework that contained 25 components representing a mix of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. In Study 1, I obtained input on the framework from practicing elementary school teachers ( $n = 26$ ) and researchers who study school bullying ( $n = 14$ ). Teacher input was gathered via a series of focus groups and researchers responded using an online survey. Both teachers and researchers viewed the framework positively and agreed it offers a potentially useful guide for practicing teachers. Thematic analysis of focus group content revealed themes related to knowledge and training about school bullying, beliefs about school bullying, strategies to help bullied children, and challenges teachers face in trying to help bullied children. In Study 2, I asked elementary school teachers ( $n = 115$ ) to rate the utility and practicality of the competencies as well as their own level of competence in four domains: knowledge, attitudes, foundational skills, and focused skills. Teachers viewed the competencies as essential and realistic. Teachers' self-ratings of knowledge, attitudes, and skills suggested a reasonably high level of perceived competence. Teachers with higher scores on a measure of self-efficacy in managing school bullying reported higher levels of knowledge, stronger anti-bullying attitudes, and more frequent use of foundational and focused skills. Teachers with more anti-bullying training reported stronger anti-bullying attitudes and more frequent use of focused skills. Teachers with stronger levels of school connectedness reported greater knowledge about bullying. I discuss implications of these findings and the potential for using the framework as a foundation for teacher training and evaluation.

*Keywords:* peer victimization, school bullying, children, teachers, competencies, training

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## **Developing a Competency-Based Framework to Guide Elementary School Teachers’ Efforts in Helping Bullied Children**

Teachers are considered socializing agents in children’s development (Wentzel, 2003). Teachers have the potential to alter classroom dynamics and peer processes that contribute to and maintain peer victimization (Bierman, 2011; Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011). However, in the absence of formal prevention programs, many teachers lack training and the ability to use their unique position to help chronically bullied children. In fact, evidence would suggest that children sometimes perceive teachers as unlikely to help and their efforts to help as making the situation worse (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Weiner, 2005). Recently, Gregus and Cavell (2017) developed a research-derived set of competencies to guide teachers’ efforts to help bullied children. The primary aim of the current study is to further develop and evaluate this framework, drawing on the expertise of practicing teachers and scholars who study school bullying.

### **Bullying and Peer Victimization**

*Bullying* is defined as an aggressive behavior that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance, repetition over time, and the intent to cause emotional or physical harm to a targeted individual (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014; Olweus, 1993). *Peer victimization* is a term that has been defined as repeated exposure to peer interactions that convey harmful intent, produce harmful effects, and are sanctioned—often implicitly—by peer groups in which non-intervention is the norm (Elledge, Cavell, Ogle, & Newgent, 2010; Salmivalli, 2010). *Bullying* focuses on the behavior of the perpetrator, while *peer victimization* reflects the victim’s experiences. Both terms differ from *peer conflict*, which is typically a single, unplanned event that does not intend to cause harm to an individual.

Heightened levels of peer victimization predict low school enjoyment and academic performance, school avoidance and absenteeism, and enrollment in special education classes (Card & Hodges, 2008; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Chronic victimization has been associated with low peer acceptance, high peer rejection, and fewer friendships (Card & Hodges, 2008; Craig & Pepler, 2003). Chronic victims are also more likely to experience depression, anxiety, psychosomatic complaints, and suicidal ideation and behaviors, and these problems can persist into adulthood (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015; Olweus, 1993).

### **Importance of Teachers in Bullying Prevention & Intervention**

Teachers play an important role in addressing problems of school bullying. They are the adults most likely to witness bullying, and they have the authority to respond to bullying in a variety of ways. Teachers can punish a bully's actions, support a victim, encourage bystander intervention, and sometimes reinforce bullying if no action is taken. Teacher strategies such as establishing rules against bullying and enforcing consequences, separating bullies and victims, having class-wide discussions about bullying, and increasing supervision of places where bullying is likely to occur have been linked to changes in bullying and victimization over time (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Olweus & Kallestad, 2010; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009).

According to social ecological theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), teachers are also in a unique position of social influence. They can be important socializing agents in a child's life, and they have the power to influence peer processes that may lead to or maintain bullying behaviors (Bierman, 2011). Their position allows them to understand how a child's social, behavioral, and academic competencies compare with those of the peers in a classroom (Farmer et al., 2011).

They can use such information to determine which students are experiencing social risk, and then

use their unique position to influence to peer processes. For example, teachers can strategically group and seat pro-social students with victims, or use information about a child's strengths to challenge negative attitudes of peers. The metaphor of an "invisible hand" has been used to describe teachers' potentially important but understudied role in guiding social dynamics and promoting positive peer relations in the classroom (Bierman, 2011; Farmer et al., 2011).

Teachers' position of authority and their management of classroom structures and peer processes might help to alter social dynamics that contribute to and maintain peer victimization (Farmer et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2003; Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Elementary school teachers, in particular, might be in the most advantageous position to influence peer processes. From a developmental perspective, social status tends to be more malleable during elementary school years compared to later years, when it becomes increasingly stable (Bierman, Torres, & Schofield, 2010). Elementary school students are also not completely autonomous and rely on teachers for support; thus, while seeking teacher support for peer difficulties might be accepted in elementary school, it might signal a weakness for adolescents and be associated with more harmful consequences and retribution in middle and high school (Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011). Additionally, elementary school teachers might be more likely to understand the peer ecology and social structure of their classrooms, given teachers typically have greater exposure to the same children throughout the day. These developmental and structural advantages might allow elementary school teachers to more effectively challenge negative biases of bullied students and use classroom structures and organizational strategies to alter peer relations.

### **Anti-bullying Prevention Programs**

Given teachers' position of authority, proximity to children, and potential ability to



influence peer processes, teacher-facilitated interventions are crucial in the prevention of bullying and peer victimization. Not surprisingly, evidence-based programs such as the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)* (Olweus, 1993), *KiVa* (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005), and *Steps to Respect* (Frey et al., 2005) rely heavily on teachers to deliver components of the interventions, either in the form of curriculum-based lessons aimed to increase social-emotional skills or more broadly in terms of general classroom management strategies. Such programs typically ask teachers to adopt and enforce class rules against bullying, lead class discussions related to bullying, and use literature, media, or role-plays to explain concepts related to bullying. These teacher-led programs also emphasize the importance of intervening and meeting with students involved in bullying. Table 1 provides an overview of the recommended strategies for teachers to use in three evidence-based anti-bullying programs. Effective and faithful implementation of these programs has been associated with reductions in overall levels of victimization and bullying (Frey et al., 2005; Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 2005).

Despite encouraging findings from published randomized trials (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009), the impact of evidence-based anti-bullying prevention programs has been limited by several factors. First, few evidence-based programs are routinely implemented in elementary schools in the United States (S. P. Limber, personal communication, January 8, 2015; Olweus & Limber, 2010). For example, in 2010, Olweus and Limber estimated the *OBPP* was being used in only approximately 4% of schools in the United States, compared to approximately 25% of schools in Norway. This has been attributed to reasons such as states not legally requiring prevention programs, relatively passive attitudes of adult stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff, school administrators), competing demands placed on teachers, and the availability of resources to implement such programs (Han & Weiss, 2005; Kueny & Zirkel, 2012; Olweus & Limber, 2010;

Salmivalli et al., 2005; Vernberg & Gamm, 2003).

Second, universal anti-bullying programs can be limited in their ability to help children who are experiencing significant risk or maladjustment and need more focused support. Although bullying is relatively minor and temporary for most children, a small percentage of children (e.g., 5-10%) experience more severe, chronic victimization (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Craig, Pepler, Murphy, & McCuaig-Edge, 2010). Children who are chronically bullied are more likely to show signs of maladjustment and require tailored, intensive interventions (Copeland et al., 2013; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). In fact, estimates suggest 15% of bullied children will need support beyond primary prevention strategies (Bradshaw, 2015; Espelage & Swearer, 2008). Further, most outcomes from universal prevention programs have been analyzed using a variable-centered approach rather than a person-centered approach. This analytical limitation is compounded by the fact that these studies typically rely on anonymous self-report outcome measures (Chan, Myron, & Crawshaw, 2005). Thus, the impact of universal programs on specific groups of students, such as those who are chronically bullied, is less clear.

Due to growing concerns about the plight of chronic victims, scholars have called for selective intervention programs that provide more focused support (Card, Isaacs, & Hodges, 2007; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Nation, 2007; Pepler, 2006). Research on programs such as peer mediation, social skills training, art therapy, and martial arts training show limited support for victims (for a review see Nation, 2007). There are also significant challenges in developing interventions that are more helpful than harmful, especially for victimized children, and some scholars suggest using strategies that are indirect and less stigmatizing (Galloway & Roland, 2004; Salmivalli et al., 2005). One program that uses this indirect approach and has shown

promise embeds college student mentors with bullied children in the school lunchroom in an effort to enhance children's peer relationships (Elledge et al., 2010; Gregus, Craig, Hernandez Rodriguez, Pastrana, & Cavell, 2015).

### **Teachers' Struggles to Manage Bullying**

Several studies have documented that many teachers struggle to help bullied students in the absence of formal prevention programs, clear training guidelines, and staff support (Espelage & Swearer, 2008; Haataja, Sainio, Turtonen, & Salmivalli, 2015; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; O'Brennan, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2014). For example, teachers have trouble identifying children who are victims of bullying, especially when cases involve more covert types of bullying such as social exclusion or rejection (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Haataja et al., 2015; Mishna et al., 2005; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Teachers also report low self-efficacy and a desire for more training on how to respond to individual cases of bullying (Boulton, 1997; Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Byers, Caltabiano, & Caltabiano, 2011; Mishna et al., 2005). In one study, approximately one-third of teachers and school counselors reported having received no bullying-specific training (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008), yet many school districts rely on teachers and school administrators to interpret and implement state-mandated anti-bullying policies (Limber & Small, 2003; Olweus & Limber, 2010).

There is also evidence that students view teachers as struggling to manage bullying. Students are often reluctant to disclose they are being bullied, and some have reported that teacher intervention makes matters worse (Fekkes et al., 2005; Smith & Shu, 2000). In one study, only 28% of children reported teacher intervention was helpful, 20% of children reported no effect, 10% reported that bullying got worse, and 8% reported that the teacher did not intervene at all (Fekkes et al., 2005).

## Efforts to Help Teachers Manage Bullying

Scholars have developed several programs to help teachers manage bullying. Psychoeducational training programs such as *I DECIDE* (Boulton, 2014) and *Bully Busters* (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004) have been used to increase elementary and middle school teachers' awareness of bullying, skills for managing cases of bullying, and self-efficacy in using acquired knowledge and skills. *I DECIDE* is a teacher-led intervention designed for children who are involved in bullying perpetration, and it is based on cognitive-behavioral principles. Teachers attend a workshop to learn the skills needed to help bullies identify triggers for bullying and generate alternative behaviors they can use instead. Training in *I DECIDE* led to positive effects on teachers' perceived effectiveness and self-efficacy beliefs, as well as an increase in teacher-reported use of cognitive-behavioral techniques in handling cases of bullying (Boulton, 2014). *Bully Busters* comprises a variety of class-wide prevention strategies as well as techniques to use with individual bullies, victims, and bystanders. Teachers attend a training workshop and are provided a resource manual that includes classroom activities and teacher instructions. Teacher training in *Bully Busters* has been associated with improvements in teacher-rated knowledge and self-efficacy, and reductions in disciplinary referrals (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004) but not classroom levels of victimization (Newgent, Higgins, Lounsbery, Nickens Behrend, & Keller, 2011). In one study, *Bully Busters* training was one component of a more comprehensive, school-wide violence intervention in a large, public elementary school. Results of the intervention indicated reductions in child-reported aggression and victimization one year later, but the contribution of individual components of the intervention was not examined (Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003).

In addition to specific training programs, two models have been offered to help identify

more explicitly teachers' roles in school bullying. Capel (2013) offered a framework that suggests teachers can be effective in bullying prevention if they promote social-emotional learning in classrooms and build positive teacher relationships with their students. Indeed, some evidence-based programs such as *Steps to Respect* include social-emotional learning modules (Frey et al., 2005), and research has found support for a buffering effect of a positive teacher-student relationships on level of peer victimization for students at social risk (Elledge, Elledge, Newgent & Cavell, 2016). Troop-Gordon (2015) has also offered a rather comprehensive framework that considers how teachers, classrooms, peers, bullies, and victims are interrelated when it comes to the phenomenon of bullying. Troop-Gordon (2015) suggested that teachers' own history of victimization/aggression, their beliefs and knowledge about school bullying, and their self-efficacy for responding to bullying can influence the classroom environment and the future risk of individual bullies and victims. Based on her thorough review, Troop-Gordon (2015) called for the identification of "concrete steps" (p. 58) to help teachers in their efforts to address school bullying and peer victimization.

### **A Competency-Based Framework to Guide Teachers' Efforts to Help Bullied Children**

Competency-based learning is prominent in many professions (e.g., nursing, medicine, psychology, education, industry), and designed to ensure that individuals are effective in the workplace (Frank et al., 2010; Kaslow et al., 2009; Voorhees, 2001). Drawing from various definitions available in the literature (Frank et al., 2000; Rodolfa et al., 2005; US Department of Education, 2002), I define competencies as measurable targets that identify a core set of knowledge, attitudes, and skills for a given profession. A competency-based framework to helping bullied children could be used to identify specific training objectives for both pre-service and in-service teachers. A clearly articulated set of competencies could also be used to evaluate

the range and depth of teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in helping chronically bullied children. Further, such an approach could promote self-reflection in teachers' growth and development from novice to expert in their abilities to help chronically bullied children.

Gregus and Cavell (2017) reviewed available research and theory on school bullying, peer victimization, and teachers' roles in promoting positive peer relations in an effort to develop a heuristic framework to guide teachers' in their support of children who are chronically bullied or at risk of being chronically bullied. Gregus and Cavell drew from research that has examined a) various processes that maintain or contribute to peer victimization and bullying, b) teacher characteristics and behaviors that have been linked to rates of peer victimization or bullying (within and outside of a formal prevention program) and c) potential strategies by which teachers can alter peer dynamics that influence children's risk for victimization and other peer-related difficulties. Focusing primarily on studies involving students and teachers in the elementary and middle school grades, Gregus and Cavell identified 25 competencies representing a range of knowledge, attitudes, and skills or strategies elementary teachers could use when seeking to help bullied children (see Table 2). Examples of knowledge-based competencies included: "Knows how to define bullying (i.e., what it is and what it is not)" and "Knows that bullying can be harmful and has been linked to academic, social, physical, and mental health problems." Attitude-based competencies included: "Believes bullying is harmful and not normal, and that teachers have a responsibility to protect children from being victimized" and "Does not believe in blaming the victim." Skill-based competencies fell into four distinct areas: 1) class-wide strategies teachers can use to prevent bullying, 2) strategies specific to protecting and supporting victims, 3) strategies teachers can use to affect peer processes leading to or maintaining bullying and victimization, and 4) strategies for seeking additional support or guidance when teachers feel

it is needed. See Gregus & Cavell (2017) for further detail on each competency identified.

### **The Current Paper**

This paper reports on two studies designed to further our understanding of teachers' competencies specific to supporting elementary school student who are chronically bullied or at risk of being chronically bullied. The primary aim of Study 1 was to gather feedback on and refine Gregus and Cavell's (2017) initial competency-based framework from practicing elementary school teachers and expert researchers who study school bullying. Importantly, this aim was pursued in a manner that reflects the importance of using both the science and practice surrounding teachers' efforts to help bullied children. Integrating research and theory with practice knowledge and expertise ensures that the needs of end-users, those familiar with the contextual demands of intervening, are incorporated throughout the development and evaluation of an intervention (Mitchell, 2011). This approach increases the likelihood that interventions will be sustained and implemented with fidelity (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Orpinas et al., 1996). In Study 2, I gathered teachers' general impressions about the practicality and usability of the competencies as well as their own self-ratings of the identified competencies. The aim was to begin to examine presumed correlates of teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to school bullying and peer victimization.

### **Study 1**

The primary goal of Study 1 was to refine the competency-based framework developed by Gregus and Cavell (2017). In keeping with best practices for conducting community-based research (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003), I gathered feedback from practicing elementary school teachers and from researchers who study school bullying and peer victimization. My goal was to enhance the degree to which the framework is clear, practical, and

relevant for practicing teachers and also sufficiently grounded in the available research. Focus groups with practicing teachers were used to promote discourse surrounding the draft competency framework and a sharing of ideas that would allow for general themes to emerge from teachers' experiences working with bullied students. Researchers with expertise in school bullying and peer relationships were surveyed in an effort to gauge how well the proposed competency framework aligned with extant literature. Also, impressions and recommendations on how to improve the competency framework were gathered from both practicing teachers and researchers. Because the primary aim of Study 1 was descriptive in nature, no a priori hypotheses were generated.

## Method

### Participants

**Teachers.** Participating in the focus groups were 27 staff from 4 elementary schools. All were from schools serving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Archival data indicated that during the 2015-2016 school year, 82.1-97.5% of students from the participating schools qualified for free and reduced lunch. Teachers were recruited with assistance from school counselors at each school who provided interested teachers with information about the topic, the time commitment, and compensation for participating. The number of focus groups was limited to four due to saturation occurring by the fourth group and because of a limit on available incentives. Participating were 26 classroom teachers and 1 former teacher/school counselor. Most identified as female (96.3%,  $n = 26$ ) and Caucasian (88.9%,  $n = 24$ ). Participants had a range of teaching experience (range = 2-26 years;  $M = 11.25$  years,  $SD = 6.07$ ) but rather limited training specific to school bullying ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .71$ , 1 = none at all, 7 = quite a lot). When asked specifically about what types of training they received, the modal response was



attending an in-service training at school (84.6%,  $n = 22$ ). Two teachers reported taking a pre-service course that addressed issues related to bullying, and one attended a conference that provided training about school bullying. Each focus group included five to nine teachers, consistent with recommendations (Eliot et al., 2005; Krueger & Casey, 2015), and the total sample size of 27 was comparable to other published studies involving teachers (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein & Espelage, 2013; Shea, Wang, Shi, Gonzalez, and Espelage, 2016).

**Researchers.** A total of 14 researchers with expertise in school bullying, peer victimization, or peer relationships completed the researcher survey. Initial attempts to recruit researchers were through the Bullying Researcher Network listserv, an international network of 159 bullying and peer victimization researchers. I posted an announcement in the April 2016 e-newsletter that contained a link to the study's consent form and survey. Because there were no survey responses after three weeks, personal emails using the same announcement and request to participate were sent to 30 researchers known to study school bullying, peer victimization, or peer relationships. Researchers reported a range (10-30 years) of experience conducting relevant research, with a mean of 20.77 years ( $SD = 8.05$ ). Eight (61.5%) respondents were women and one did not indicate a gender. Eight (61.5%) researchers were from the United States, four (20.8%) lived in Canada, one lived in Italy, and one lived in the Netherlands.

## Measures

**Demographic questions.** Teachers completed a brief demographic questionnaire, which included questions about gender, ethnicity, years of experience teaching, and previous anti-bullying training. Researchers also completed a brief demographic measure, which included questions about gender, where they resided, and years of experience they had conducting bullying or victimization-related research. See appendix A for the forms used to obtain consent

and a copy of all measures used in Study 1.

**Focus group questions.** A series of semi-structured, open-ended questions were presented to each group (see Appendix A). Teachers were first asked about training specific to school bullying and then to identify teacher characteristics and behaviors they thought were related to the effective management of school bullying and victimization. Next, they were presented with a copy of the competency-based framework, with competencies grouped by domain (e.g., knowledge, attitudes), and asked to provide feedback on the comprehensiveness and practicality of the competencies. Teachers were also asked open-ended questions about their understanding of the competencies and the potential that using them could harm students. Finally, teachers provided general feedback on the usability of the framework and brainstormed ideas for how they would disseminate this information to practicing teachers.

**Post-focus group ratings.** Following the focus group, teachers were asked to complete a 6-item questionnaire assessing the usability of the competency-based framework. Items were adapted from the System Usability Scale (Brooke, 1996) and example items included “I feel very confident I could use this framework” and “I feel the framework would be very cumbersome to use.” Items were rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and were averaged to form a single score. Higher scores indicate greater ease of use. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.65.

**Researcher survey.** Researchers were presented with the competencies grouped into three domains—knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Based on feedback from teachers in the focus groups, minor wording changes were made to the framework to clarify attitude-based competencies. Researchers were asked to rate on a seven-point scale (1 = *extremely poorly*, 7 = *extremely well*) the degree to which each domain adequately covered extant research on

knowledge, attitudes, and skills teachers need to support elementary school students who are repeatedly bullied. Open-ended questions asked what might be missing from each domain. Researchers also used seven-point scales to rate their overall impression of the framework (1 = *very negative*, 7 = *very positive*) and how well the framework offered a foundation for teacher training specific to helping bullied children (1 = *extremely weak foundation*, 7 = *extremely strong foundation*). A final open-ended question asked researchers to provide any recommendations they had for improving the framework.

## **Procedures**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas approved all study procedures and measures.

Teacher focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes and were held in a library or conference room. Groups began with a review of informed consent, confidentiality, and group rules, and then teachers completed a brief demographic questionnaire. Focus groups followed a semi-structured format, and open-ended questions were used to learn what teachers believed were effective characteristics and behaviors for helping bullied students. Teachers were then presented with a list of the competencies, grouped by domain, and asked to provide feedback on the competencies and the draft framework. All focus groups were audio recorded and an undergraduate research assistant helped manage paperwork, audio recording, and backup note-taking. Teachers were provided bottled water and small snacks, and each received a \$30 gift card for participating.

The online researcher survey began with informed consent. Researchers were then presented a list of the competencies grouped into the domains of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. At the end of the survey, researchers had the option of entering an email address to receive a \$10

e-gift card for their participation.

## **Data Analysis**

Audio recordings of focus group discussions were transcribed by Rev.com and checked against the original recordings by the undergraduate research assistant who was present and took notes. Edits were made to correct errors, but minimal errors were identified. QSR International's N-Vivo 11 Software was used to code and organize the qualitative data into themes. Thematic analysis followed procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Each discrete data point (i.e., each comment that reflected a unique idea) was reviewed and assigned a code (or codes) that reflected its content. The decision was made not to segment coding based on the focus group task or questions as additional information related to earlier tasks and questions emerged throughout the group discussion. Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed and coded by the primary author. In total, 85 distinct codes were identified from focus group content. Codes that overlapped or that could be subsumed under a similar theme were combined. Codes that lacked sufficient data (e.g., infrequent, specific to one school) to exist as a theme were discarded.

## **Results**

Results from the teacher focus groups and researcher survey are presented sequentially below. Focus group data include teachers' overall impressions of the framework, themes that emerged from focus groups, and teachers' ideas about disseminating the framework. Data from the researcher survey include researchers' general impressions of the framework, ratings of domain comprehensiveness, and recommendations for improvement.

### **Teacher Feedback**

**General impressions.** Teachers generally viewed the framework as comprehensive, offering few suggestions when asked if anything was missing. When probed, teachers most often

provided suggestions that were elaborations or examples of how to implement various competencies. As a whole, teachers recommended that more emphasis be placed on knowledge about or skills to help children who bully others. Teachers reported that knowledge- and skill-based competencies were presented clearly, but some teachers asked for clarification regarding attitude-based competencies, noting that a few were double-barreled in their content and overly lengthy as written. On the adapted Usability Questionnaire, teachers tended to report moderate agreement that they could easily use the framework when helping bullied children ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = .74$ ,  $range = 3.83-6.33$ ). All teachers agreed that the competencies had little or no potential for harm.

**Thematic analysis.** Themes that emerged from focus group discussions were organized into four overarching categories: teachers' training and knowledge about bullying, their beliefs about bullying, strategies they use to help bullied children, and challenges teachers face when helping bullied children.

***How teachers learn about school bullying and what they know.*** A common theme that emerged related to teachers' limited training specific to school bullying. Teachers reported receiving very little formal training about bullying in pre-service courses, and most indicated the training they did acquire was provided by their school's counselor during in-service trainings or classroom presentations intended for students. Teachers stated they were familiar with the definition of bullying, its subtypes, and where it is most likely to occur. However, teachers also reported that teachers, administrators, counselors, students, and parents lacked a shared definition of bullying. Comments revealed that both teachers and students struggled to discern the differences between bullying and peer conflict. Teachers were also unclear about the differences between verbal, relational, and cyber bullying and frequently asked clarifying

questions about bullying throughout the focus groups.

***What teachers believe.*** Across all focus groups, teachers endorsed most often beliefs supporting the importance of social-emotional development of their students. Specifically, teachers identified with the need to attend to the growth of the “whole” child, including students’ social skills and peer relations, as opposed to only focusing on academics. Teachers also commonly endorsed the belief that they should intervene when bullying occurs. I also found a tendency for some teachers to endorse victim-blaming attitudes, both implicitly and explicitly. Teachers gave examples of students who they viewed as contributing to their own victimization because of their looks or personality, suggesting that victims should change those things to avoid being bullied.

***What teachers do.*** Teachers identified common strategies they use to help students who are bullied. Most commonly, teachers identified building a positive classroom environment as a foundation for promoting learning and prosocial interactions for all students. For example, some teachers reported calling their class a “family” to instill prosocial values and a sense of belonging in their students. Other techniques included offering emotional support and using class rules and consequences to promote a positive climate. Another commonly discussed strategy involved coaching students who struggle in their ability to manage peer conflict and assert their needs. Teachers reported having taught communication or problem-solving skills to these students. Teachers also described indirect strategies to help bullied students, including use of prosocial peers or the school counselor/administration. For example, teachers reported asking prosocial students to spend time with students who appeared to be left out or were bullied. Teachers noted that this specific type of intervention was rarely sustained. Teachers also described trying to manage peer conflict in the moment, but referring those students to the counselor once a pattern

of bullying was suspected. Indeed, some teachers stated that referring students to the counselor was the primary strategy used to manage ongoing bullying in the classroom with little consideration of doing more. Teachers stated they communicated with parents any concerns about their child's peer interactions, noting that the effectiveness of this strategy varied greatly. Additionally, teachers reported efforts to build relationships with bullied students as a way to help them. Specifically, teachers reported taking the time to check-in with students or ask them to assist with tasks such as passing out papers as a way to create opportunities to connect.

***Challenges teachers face.*** Teachers identified several contextual challenges that can impede their ability to help students generally, as well as their ability to help bullied students more specifically. The most common challenge identified was having limited time to address issues related to school bullying or children's peer relationships. Although teachers commonly endorsed the belief that teachers should attend to the social-emotional development of students, teachers also described feeling pressure to focus on academics. Teachers stated that school administrators did not consider social emotional development a priority relative to academics and higher test scores. Similarly, teachers reported that administrative support and school resources (e.g., extra personnel, prevention programs) to address issues related to school bullying were limited. Teachers also noted that some resources they did have were of limited use (e.g., unclear anti-bullying policies, ineffective staff). Many teachers also reported that a significant challenge to helping was their limited awareness about incidents of bullying. Teachers noted being unable to know about bullying that happens outside their classroom and is not disclosed by students. Finally, teachers reported challenges related to working in a school with mostly low-income, disadvantaged families. Teachers voiced concerns about students' lack of supervision at home, especially around their use of the internet and cell phone, which provide more opportunities for

cyber-bullying. Finally, some teachers noted challenges due language barriers when communicating with linguistic minority parents.

**Teachers' recommendations for using the competency framework.** Teachers agreed that a guide is necessary to help practicing teachers manage bullying in their classrooms. They stated the content should be practical and give sufficient detail on how to use recommended skills. Teachers also suggested the use of realistic scenarios. Additionally, teachers expressed a desire for tangible resources they could use in their classrooms. Examples include an assessment tool for easily identifying problematic peer relationships and a list of developmentally appropriate books related to school bullying that could be incorporated into class material. Teachers also suggested formatting any potential guide as an online resource or as a physical flip chart that could be referenced whenever needed. Teachers indicated that a single training experience specific to the competencies would likely be insufficient and ineffective, but they also noted that creating more training opportunities would be difficult practically. Teachers voiced a preference for brief, repeated exposure to specific competencies and made various suggestions for how to do this. Examples included emailing a weekly newsletter, leading a brief discussion at weekly staff meetings, and watching five-minute video tutorials that highlight a single competency.

### **Researcher Feedback**

Presented below is a summary of researchers' overall impressions of the competency framework, their ratings of the comprehensiveness of each domain (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, skills), and their recommendations on how the framework could better reflect the state of the science on teachers' roles in bullying prevention.

**General impressions.** Researchers generally reported positive overall impressions of the



framework ( $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = .58$ , range 5-7). They thought the framework provided a strong foundation for teacher anti-bullying trainings ( $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = .83$ , range 4-7). Qualitatively, researchers offered descriptions such as “comprehensive”, “clear”, “valuable”, and “a needed resource”. The most common response for improving the framework related to its focus on supporting victims; several researchers recommended adding knowledge-, attitude-, and skill-based competencies specific to students who bully others. Other comments pertained to the framework’s structure. For example, researchers noted that the domain involving teacher attitudes was substantially smaller than domains related to teacher knowledge and skills. Like teachers, researchers noted that some attitude-based competencies had double-barreled content. Researchers also cautioned against use of the term *victim* due to its negative connotations, and suggested using alternative terms or dropping it completely.

**Knowledge domain rating and recommendations.** Researchers tended to rate the knowledge domain as covering well what teachers needed to know to support bullied students ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ , range 3-7). Researchers’ open-ended responses identified additional knowledge competencies that should be considered. These included factors that predict children’s risk for peer victimization, consequences associated with children’s involvement in bullying and victimization, and knowledge about students who are bullies.

**Attitudes domain rating and recommendations.** Ratings by researchers indicated a perception that the framework covered well the attitudes teachers should have when helping bullied students ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ , range 5-7). In their open-ended responses, researchers also suggested ways to improve the attitude domain. Recommendations included adding attitudes about the role of peers, bystanders, and bullies, as well as suggestions to increase the clarity of this particular set of competencies.

**Skills domain rating and recommendations.** Researchers perceived that the framework covered well the kinds of skills teachers needed to support bullied students ( $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = .86$ , range 5-7). Researchers also suggested a few additional skills that should be considered, including skills relevant to working with students who are bullies. Additional skills suggested by researchers related to gauging students' risk for suicide, evaluating the degree to which available interventions are evidence-based, and promoting social-emotional learning more broadly.

### **Discussion**

An important goal of Study 1 was to gather feedback on a preliminary version of a competency framework designed to guide teachers in their efforts to support bullied students in the elementary grades. Teacher competencies were drawn initially from research examining teachers' role in addressing school bullying and peer victimization (Gregus & Cavell, 2017). Feedback on research-derived competencies was obtained from practicing elementary school teachers and scholars who study school bullying. Modifications to the initial version of the framework were based on the degree to which the feedback was supported by research evidence, emerged as a core theme, and remained within the scope and purpose of the framework.

In general, both teachers and researchers viewed the framework positively and agreed that it offers a fairly comprehensive, clear, and useful guide for practicing teachers. Both teachers and researchers also offered suggestions for minor changes in wording and structure to increase the framework's clarity. I also obtained qualitative data from elementary school teachers during focus group discussions of their experiences attempting to manage school bullying and peer victimization. Analysis of focus group data revealed four overarching themes: a) how teachers learn about bullying and what they know, b) what teachers believe about bullying c) what teachers do about school bullying and d) challenges teachers face when seeking to help

bullied students.

### **Focus Group Themes**

Themes that emerged from teacher focus groups were generally consistent with findings from previous studies that used focus groups and interviews with teachers (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Migiliaccio, 2015; Shea et al., 2016). The first theme revealed that teachers had limited knowledge about school bullying and peer victimization and felt they lacked adequate training to deal with these issues. This theme is consistent with previous findings suggesting teachers are underprepared to manage the challenges associated with school bullying (Bauman et al., 2008; Boulton, 1997; Charmaraman et al., 2013; Mishna et al., 2005). Interestingly, teachers expressed some confidence in knowing about bullying but also made statements that contradicted this assertion. For example, teachers offered examples of “bullying” in their classrooms, but described interactions that did not meet accepted definitions of bullying (Gladden et al., 2014; Olweus, 1993). Described were instances involving conflict between students or students using poor social skills. Teachers also conceded the lack of a shared definition of bullying across administration, staff, and students. Findings emerging in this first theme are consistent with reports that teachers have difficulty identifying victims of bullying (Haataja et al., 2015), lack knowledge about criteria included in standard definitions of bullying (Compton, Campbell, & Mergler, 2014; Migiliaccio, 2015), and have difficulty discriminating bullying from other behaviors (Mishna et al., 2005).

The second theme related to teachers’ beliefs about bullying. Teachers endorsed a range of beliefs, some which are supported by the literature and others that are not. Teachers strongly endorsed the belief that they should intervene when bullying occurs, which is consistent with findings from a nationwide study examining teachers’ perspectives on bullying (Bradshaw,

Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2014). That study found over 98% of teachers believed they should intervene when they witness bullying. Teachers in the current study also endorsed the belief that it is a part of their job to support the social-emotional development of students. This is perhaps not surprising, given current movements to promote social and emotional learning in schools (e.g., CASEL, 2005). Researchers have suggested that social emotional learning programs could help reduce bullying in the classroom (Capel, 2013; Smith & Low, 2013), and some evidence-based bullying prevention programs include components designed to increase students' emotional awareness, emotional management, empathy, and social skills (Brown, Low, Smith, & Haggerty, 2011).

In contrast to attitudes that research would suggest are associated with decreased peer victimization, teachers in this study also showed a tendency at times to endorse victim-blaming attitudes. Examples included statements such as victims need to “stop letting others walk over them,” change something about their selves that others find unpleasant (e.g., appearance), or simply avoid being bullied. A tendency for teachers to hold such beliefs is not a novel finding. Migiliaccio (2015) also found that elementary school teachers participating in focus groups placed responsibility on victims for being bullied. Victim-blaming attitudes, along with low empathy for victims and normative beliefs about bullying have been found to contribute to teachers' failure to intervene or to responses that are more harmful than helpful (Byers et al., 2011; Mishna et al., 2005; Sarrento, Boulton, & Salmivalli, 2015).

The next theme pertained to what teachers do when trying to support bullied students. Teachers primarily reported using class-wide strategies as a way to limit the likelihood of bullying and peer victimization. Examples were rules/consequences against bullying, building a positive classroom environment, and holding class meetings. These are consistent with strategies

teachers identified in other studies (Marshall, Varjas, Meyers, Graybill, & Skoczylas, 2009; Migiliaccio, 2015) as well as with recommendations common to evidence-based bully prevention programs (e.g., Frey et al., 2005; Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 2005). Teachers also endorsed various student-specific strategies as a way to help bullied children. Most common was coaching students to assert themselves to bothersome peers. Shea and colleagues (2016) found that teachers reported teaching victimized students emotion regulation, perspective taking, and self-empowerment skills. These are more advanced skills than those identified in the current study, but the findings are nonetheless in line with the overall goal of helping students through improved social and emotional skills.

Teachers also shared a tendency to rely on the support of others to help individual students who might be struggling with peer victimization. This included asking prosocial peers to play with bullied or disliked peers, inviting support from parents, and referring bullied students to the school counselor or principal, who were viewed by teachers as better able to manage the concerns. These strategies are relatively indirect in that teacher assistance is not delivered firsthand but are essentially handed off to another adult. Marshall (2009) found that teachers often referred bullied students to the school counselor because teachers did not feel they were able to effectively address the issue, and they believed the counselor was more appropriately trained to manage bullying and its related consequences. Finally, teachers reported using their relationship with vulnerable students to foster a sense of protection, trust, and care. A positive teacher-student relationship has been found to moderate the relation between rejected status and peer victimization (Elledge et al., 2016) and has been recommended as a useful component of bullying prevention (Capel, 2013; Troop-Gordon, 2015). Overall, findings are encouraging in that many of the skills teachers endorsed using are supported by the research evidence.

The final theme to emerge from focus group data was related to challenges teachers face when trying to help bullied students. In addition to a lack of training, teachers in the current study reported having limited time and competing job demands that impede efforts to help students at-risk for victimization and bullying. Teachers also voiced concerns about a lack of resources for addressing issues related to bullying: Some teachers identified a lack of personnel support, while others stated they felt pressure to focus on more important issues such as academic performance and standardized test scores. Comments related to this theme are in accord with other studies. For example, Charmaraman and colleagues (2013) found that many teachers described having a full schedule and a lack of administrative support for helping bullied students. Unique to the current study were teachers' concerns about a lack of parental monitoring of bullying behavior outside of school and language barriers that made it hard to communicate with parents about bullying concerns. The latter finding is perhaps not surprising given the rather high percentage of students in this district who identify as Latino/a or Pacific Islander.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. The number of teachers participating in the focus groups was small ( $n = 27$ ), all were from a single school district, and that district was located in a small city in south central U. S. Therefore, the findings are limited in their generalizability. It is possible teachers from other geographical locations and school districts have very different experiences from those who participated in the current study. Additionally, the voluntary nature of the study could influence the findings, as those who volunteered could have a greater investment in issues related to school bullying. I did not assess teachers' own histories of victimization, so it is unclear to what extent personal experience influenced teachers' responding. I should also note that in one focus group, the school counselor

participated, which could have affected how freely teachers discussed their usual responses to bullying and peer victimization. The counselor was a former teacher and helped schedule the focus group, but her wish to be a participant was unexpected. Teachers in that group might have been hesitant to reveal limitations in knowledge and prone to responding in socially desirable ways. Finally, a reliability analysis of the qualitative data was not conducted, as the primary author coded and analyzed all data. As such, the possibility exists that qualitative findings were affected by personal bias.

There were also difficulties that arose in the recruitment of researchers. The approach that appeared to be successful (i.e., personal emails) could have led to potential bias and socially desirable responding among the participants. The sample of researchers was diverse but the number of participants was very small ( $n = 14$ ). As such, the current findings are merely suggestions of how researchers might view the competency framework and its potential to guide teachers in their efforts to support chronically bullied students.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Data collected from teachers and researchers generally support the continued development and evaluation of the competency-based framework. As research examining teachers' roles in bullying prevention continues to emerge, it will be necessary to regularly incorporate into any competency-based framework findings from newer studies. Also needed are efforts to replicate the current findings with a larger and more diverse sample. Future research should also continue to seek input from key stakeholders as a way to increase the likelihood that anti-bullying programs will be implemented faithfully and sustained over time (Orpinas et al., 1996). Because feedback from both teachers and researchers suggested adding competencies related to students who bully others, future research should consider the merits of a broader

framework, one that can guide teachers as they try to support both bullies and victims.

Ultimately, of course, evaluating the utility of a teacher competency framework will require gathering data on the extent to which teachers actually apply these competencies and whether use of the competencies is associated with reductions in classroom levels of victimization and bullying. To the degree research supports that linkage, a competency framework can also serve to guide efforts to assess teachers' abilities to tackle this challenging problem.

### **Implications for Practice**

The current findings suggest a need to provide teachers with training that will lead to greater knowledge about school bullying, practical and effective skills they can use, and stronger anti-bullying attitudes. Also needed, it seems, is greater support and resources from school administrators (Han & Weiss, 2005; Olweus & Limber, 2010). Addressing these concerns is not an easy task, and highlights the fact that bullying is a social-ecological phenomenon that needs to be addressed at multiple levels to effectively prevent and manage it (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Yoon & Bauman, 2014). The topic of school bullying is commonly addressed in the mass media, which likely contributes to confusion and inaccuracies among school staff and students. State laws about bullying are often unclear and do not provide sufficient detail on what schools need to do to prevent bullying (Limber & Small, 2003). Also needed are more informed and fully developed approaches to preparing pre-service teachers on what bullying is and how to intervene (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). A competency-based framework might be particularly useful for school staff who lack anti-bullying resources, training, or support. If disseminated, the framework could provide teachers with greater knowledge about what bullying is and is not, as well as its risk and maintenance factors. Moreover, this information could be useful in shifting teachers away from victim-blaming attitudes. Such a guide could also provide teachers with



strategies that are more helpful than harmful, which is important given research that suggests teacher intervention is often nonexistent or iatrogenic (Fekkes et al., 2005). A competency framework could also equip teachers with strategies they can use, perhaps reducing the overused strategy of referring involved students to the principal or school counselor. In fact, given the strong contribution of peer factors to the maintenance of school bullying (Salmivalli, 2010), it might be more effective to intervene at the classroom level with peers, as opposed to school counselors or administrators using more individualized approaches. Adopting a competency-based framework could also increase teachers' awareness of skills that could be implemented even when there is considerable emphasis on academics relative to social-emotional functioning. For example, the framework includes skills that allow teachers to capitalize on everyday interactions (e.g., group work, seating arrangements, public praise) as a way to support chronically bullied students or those at risk for chronic victimization.

## **Conclusion**

Teachers can play an important role in bullying prevention if provided the necessary knowledge and tools. However, effective strategies for guiding teachers in their efforts to help bullied children are needed, particularly given the apparent lack of training that is currently provided to teachers. Findings from Study 1 offer preliminary support for the proposed framework and for its continued development and evaluation. Findings from Study 1 were also used to revise the framework in an attempt to increase its utility for practicing teachers while retaining its linkages to the empirical research on bullying prevention.

## **Study 2**

Data collected from teachers and researchers in Study 1 were used to modify a draft framework describing teacher competencies specific to supporting students who are chronically bullied or at risk for being chronically bullied. Feedback from teachers and researchers led to

slight changes in language designed to reduce potential biases (e.g., changing ‘victim’ to ‘bullied child’) and to increase clarity of the competencies (e.g., removing double-barreled statements). Specific recommendations to include additional competencies in the framework were followed when supported by current research, when the competencies emerged as a prominent theme, and when the competencies fit the overall aim of the framework (e.g., teachers supporting bullied students). The most common recommendation from teachers and researchers was to add competencies related to helping students who bully others. Although outside the primary scope of the framework, some existing competencies were broadened to include a focus on children who are bullied as well as those who bully others. In contrast, for example, the recommendation to add skills specific to teachers’ assessment of students’ suicidal risk was not added: It was identified by a single respondent, is not a concern specific to bullied students, and is likely to be more appropriate for middle and high school teachers.

The revised framework is presented in Table 3 and includes a total of 30 competencies. These are divided into six domains based on content: knowledge about bullying, anti-bullying attitudes, skills to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization, skills to support victims of bullying, skills to influence peer processes that maintain victimization, and skills to seek additional support and resources.

## **Purpose of Study 2**

The primary goals of Study 2 were to a) assess teachers’ general perceptions of the importance and feasibility of using the anti-bullying competencies, b) understand how teachers rate their own knowledge about bullying, attitudes against bullying, and skills they use to help bullied children, and c) explore individual differences in teachers’ self-rated competencies by examining their potential correlates.

## **Aim 1: Understanding Teachers' General Perceptions of the Competencies**

The first aim of Study 2 was to understand the degree to which teachers viewed the competencies as essential to helping bullied students and practical to use in the classroom environment. It is known that teachers have limited time and resources to help bullied students (Charmaraman et al., 2013). Data from this study could be used to assess whether the framework is viewed as realistic and palatable to a practicing teachers. Although previous findings from the literature suggested teachers desire additional anti-bullying training (Boulton, 1997; Byers et al., 2005; Mishna, Pepler, & Weiner, 2006), it is unclear how much and what content they need. In exploring teachers' general perception of the competencies, I was interested in learning how much additional training teachers thought they would need to be competent in each content domain of the framework. These data could help make decisions about the length and content of future anti-bullying trainings.

I predicted most teachers would view the competencies as essential, given results from Study 1 and prior research suggesting teachers are underprepared to manage school bullying and desire more resources and training (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Mishna et al., 2006). Because teachers in Study 1 supported the feasibility of using the competencies, I expected teachers would generally view knowledge-, attitude-, and skill-based competencies as realistic for practicing teachers. I predicted teachers would view skills that are most commonly recommended (e.g., rules, classroom seating, working with parents, positive classroom environment) as more important than those that are less commonly recommended. Finally, I hypothesized teachers would want the most training in skills less commonly discussed in existing bullying prevention programs. Examples include how to identify victims of bullying and how to increase peers' acceptance of bullied children.

## **Aim 2: Exploring Teachers' Self-Rated Competencies**

For the second aim of the study, I wanted to learn how teachers would rate their own knowledge, attitudes, and skills specific to school bullying and support of bullied students. I also wanted to understand whether ratings of different competencies were interrelated. In previous studies, teachers reported having limited knowledge about bullying and were unsure how to intervene (e.g., Mishna et al., 2005; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Research has also shown that teachers have difficulty identifying victims of bullying (Haataja et al., 2015), struggle with identifying and intervening in covert bullying situations (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Yoon & Kerber, 2003), and sometimes use strategies that are ineffective or iatrogenic (Fekkes et al., 2005). Teachers' beliefs about bullying have ranged from viewing bullying as serious to seeing it as a normative experience that benefits children (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Further, teachers' beliefs about bullying have been found to predict the strategies they use (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2013). Specifically, a lack of empathy toward victims and normative beliefs about bullying is negatively associated with their likelihood of intervening and using effective intervention strategies (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2014).

Given interrelations reported in the literature, I predicted that teachers' endorsement of their knowledge, attitudes, and skills would be positively associated with one another. I expected that teachers would reported having limited knowledge about bullying, but a wider range of attitudes and skills. When considering skill domains, I expected teachers to report using skills that are commonly recommended in the literature with which they may be more familiar (e.g., classroom strategies to prevent bullying, skills to support the victim; Frey et al., 2005; Olweus, 1993).

### **Aim 3: Examining Individual Differences in Teachers' Self-Rated Competencies**

Research has suggested that individual differences in teachers' characteristics and behaviors likely predict their abilities to manage bullying effectively. Using the extant literature, I identified variables that correlated with other assessments of teachers' knowledge, attitudes, or strategies used to help bullied students. Four primary variables emerged from the literature, including teachers' training and access to anti-bullying resources, school connectedness, self-efficacy in their management of classroom bullying, and teachers' own history of victimization.

Teacher training specific to school bullying is typically a positive predictor of teachers' knowledge, use of recommended strategies, and beliefs that they should intervene (Boulton, 2014; Byers et al., 2011; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). Access to availability of anti-bullying resources has also been found to predict teachers' knowledge about bullying, comfort in intervening (Boulton, 2014; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; O'Brennan et al., 2014) and use of evidence-based strategies (Bauman et al., 2008; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Thus, I predicted that anti-bullying training and access to resources would positively predict teachers' self-rated knowledge, attitudes, and use of skills to help bullied children.

Teachers' school connectedness, or their relationships among individuals in school, has been an area targeted more recently in the development of youth violence prevention programs to increase teachers' buy-in and implementation of a program and shift school norms related to violence (Beets et al., 2008; Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). O'Brennan and colleagues (2014) found that teachers with greater personal, student, and peer staff connectedness reported greater comfort intervening with bullying. Greater connection to students has been found to increase teachers' awareness of bullying, sympathy for victims, and effectiveness of helping bullied children (Boulton et al., 2013; Hamm, Farmer, Dadisman,

Gravelle, & Murray, 2011; Troop-Gordon, 2015). Greater connection to administration and staff has been associated with teachers' willingness to seek out support or consultation (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Sun, Shek, & Siu, 2008). Consequently, I predicted that teachers with a strong level of school connectedness would endorse more knowledge about bullying, strong anti-bullying attitudes, and more frequent use of skills to help bullied children.

Teachers' self-efficacy, or their confidence in their ability to perform well in situations, is thought to play an important role in the implementation of classroom-based programs targeting children's social and emotional functioning (Han & Weiss, 2005). Most research posits a bi-directional relation between teachers' self-efficacy and their effectiveness in managing bullying (Hawley & Williford, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Yoon & Bauman, 2014). Teachers' with more training and knowledge about bullying are more likely to feel efficacious when managing bullying and report using effective interventions (Boulton, 2014). At the same time, experiencing success in managing bullying situations is likely to increase teachers' knowledge about what works and self-efficacy in their ability to intervene successfully. Additionally, teacher self-efficacy has been found to positively predict teachers' intentions to intervene in bullying and subsequent classroom levels of peer victimization (Gregus et al., in press). Thus, I predicted teachers with greater self-efficacy in their management of bullying would report greater knowledge, stronger anti-bullying attitudes, and more frequent use of skills to manage bullying.

Researchers have theorized that teachers who have a history of victimization are more likely to have stronger attitudes against bullying (Oldenburg et al., 2015). Mishna and colleagues (2005) found that teachers with a prior history of victimization were more sensitive and motivated to prevent and respond to bullying. Further, teachers' history of victimization has been

positively related to their use of classroom interventions (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Kokko and Porhola (2009) found that teachers who had a greater history of victimization were more likely to have empathy for victims and report greater competence in their ability to use effective communication skills to manage bullying. It is also plausible that teachers with a history of victimization might have more personal knowledge about the types of victimization or effects of bullying. Therefore, I hypothesized that teachers with a greater history of victimization would report more knowledge about bullying, stronger attitudes against bullying, and endorse using skills more frequently.

**Covariates.** Further, I tested these hypotheses controlling for teachers' years of experience and schools' total percentage of free/reduced lunches. Evidence is mixed on how teachers' experience and school factors (i.e., a more disadvantaged student population) is related to teacher competencies. For example, at least one study (Boulton, 1997) revealed a negative relation between teachers' years of experience and anti-bullying attitudes, suggesting teachers might become desensitized to bullying over time or that a cohort effect might exist in relation to teachers' attitudes toward bullying. However, teaching experience has not been associated with teachers' attempts or intentions to intervene in school bullying (Oldenburg et al., 2015; Yoon, 2004). Therefore, teachers' years of experience might be negatively related to teachers' attitudes but unrelated to teachers' use of skills. Although a recent meta-analysis suggested that students' socioeconomic status is generally a poor indicator for which schools are at a greatest risk of bullying (Tippett & Wolke, 2014), schools within neighborhoods with a high concentration of disadvantaged families have been linked to greater violence (Haynie, Silver, & Teasdale, 2006; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Thus, a more disadvantaged school population might mean fewer resources and supports for teachers or more accepting school norms about violence,

which could negatively predict teachers' self-rated knowledge, attitudes, or skills used to support bullied students.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 333 teachers were invited to participate in the study via email by the primary investigator. A total of 156 provided their consent to participate in the survey, a response rate of 46.8%. However, 25 were disqualified for reporting they participated in earlier focus groups. An additional participant stopped immediately after consenting. The remaining 130 went on to answer survey questions. Of these, 115 reported having taught grade two or above and met qualifications for data analysis; the 15 who did not report previous experience teaching grades two or above were excluded from data analysis.

Of the 115 teachers who met survey qualifications, the overwhelming majority identified as female (94.8%,  $n = 109$ ) and Caucasian (95.6%,  $n = 109$ ). Participants reported a range of teaching experience (range = 1-37 years;  $M = 11.76$ ,  $SD = 8.27$ ). Teachers were from one of 12 schools in a single school district. Publicly available data from the school district for the 2015-2016 school year indicated that 23.5 to 97.5% ( $M = 77.40$ ,  $SD = 20.67$ ) of students in participating schools qualified for free/reduced cost school lunches.

### Measures

All measures as well as the form used to obtain consent for Study 2 can be found in Appendix B.

**Anti-bullying training and resources.** Teachers estimated the total amount of time they spent receiving formal anti-bullying training using a seven-point scale (1 = *none*, 4 = *3-5 hours*, 7 = *more than two full days*). Teachers were also asked to identify resources their school uses to



prevent and manage bullying. Teachers could endorse multiple response options, such as school administration, school committee, grade-level teams, and formal programming.

**Personal history of victimization.** Teachers completed a three-item questionnaire assessing the frequency in which they were bullied as children. Teachers rated how often they were a) hit, pushed, or kicked, b) left out of activities or not talked to by other students, and c) called mean names, threatened, or teased. Items were rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*) and averaged. Higher scores indicated teachers experienced more bullying as a child. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .74.

**Self-efficacy regarding the management of school bullying and peer victimization.** The Teacher Efficacy for Anti-bullying Scale (TEAS; Gregus et al., in press) is a 17-item measure designed to assess teachers' confidence in managing and responding effectively to problems related to school bullying, peer victimization, peer conflict, and classroom misbehavior. Gregus and colleagues (in press) found evidence the TEAS positively predicted teachers' years of experience, anti-bullying training, and intentions to use recommended practices. Example items include, "I feel confident that I will be able to deal with peer bullying in the classroom," and "If I saw a student being intentionally left out of activities, I would know what to do." Items were rated on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) and were averaged. Higher scores indicated greater self-efficacy. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .97.

**Connectedness and support.** Teachers completed a 21-item measure designed to assess connectedness to and support from their school. The measure was adapted from one used by O'Brennan and colleagues (2014). The authors from that study used a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the fit of the items, and results supported a four-factor solution, including

connectedness with school, staff, students, and principal. Teachers rated the extent to which they agreed with items such as “People care about me at this school,” “Staff are friendly to each other,” “The principal looks out for staff,” and “Staff really care about the students” on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Items were averaged and higher scores indicated greater connectedness and support. Cronbach’s alphas ranged from .84 to .94 for the subscales in the current study.

**Self-rated competencies.** Teachers were asked to rate the degree to which they were competent on each of the 30 competencies in the proposed framework (see Table 3). Teachers rated the extent of their knowledge for knowledge-based items, the extent to which they believed attitude-based items, and the extent to which they used skill-based items. Items were rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *none/strongly disbelieve/not at all*, respectively; 7 = *extensive/strongly believe/always*, respectively) and higher values indicated greater perceived knowledge, stronger anti-bullying attitudes, or more frequent use of specific anti-bullying skills. Sample items included, “I know what bullying is and how it differs from other peer interactions (e.g., conflict, play),” “I believe bullying is not a natural or acceptable part of growing up,” and “I model and convey strong anti-bullying attitudes.”

Exploratory factor analyses were used to examine the internal structure of the 30-item competency scale. Based on principal axis factor analysis, the Kaiser Meyer Olkin test ( $KMO = .83$ ) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 1954.67$ ,  $df = 435$ ,  $p < .001$ ) suggested the data set was factorable, and there was no concern about multicollinearity or singularity of the data. Scree plot inspection (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006) and Monte Carlo Parallel Analysis (Watkins, 2006) were used to determine the optimal number of factors to extract. Scree plot inspection suggested four factors should be retained. The Monte Carlo Parallel analysis

compares randomly generated eigenvalues with eigenvalues extracted from the correlation matrix; when a randomly generated eigenvalue is less than the obtained eigenvalue, the recommendation is to retain that factor. Four initial eigenvalues (9.83, 3.39, 3.23, 2.15) exceeded the corresponding randomly generated eigenvalues (2.22, 2.02, 1.88, 1.77), suggesting a four-factor solution was most appropriate.

An oblique rotation with four factors was run due to high intercorrelations ( $r$ 's > .32) among factors. The four-factor solution explained 63.54% of the total variance. Eigenvalues, percent of variance explained, and loadings of the 30 items are presented in Table 4. Factor loadings were strong for all four factors: Each factor had  $\geq 4$  marker variables with loadings > .50. Conceptually, the factors appear to represent teacher's knowledge, their attitudes about bullying, their use of skills that are foundational to managing school bullying, and their use of more focused skills to help chronically bullied students. Internal consistency for scales based on the four factors—knowledge, attitudes, foundational skills, and focused skills—were .96, .76, .77, and .86, respectively.

**Essentialness of the competencies.** Teachers also rated each competency in terms of its perceived essentialness to helping bullied children. All 30 competencies were rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *not at all essential*, 7 = *very essential*) with higher values indicating greater perceived essentialness. Cronbach's alpha was .91 across all 30 items.

**Competency domain ratings of feasibility and additional training needed.** Teachers were also presented with competency items grouped by six conceptual domains: knowledge, attitudes, skills to identify and prevent bullying/peer victimization, skills for supporting victims of bullying, skills that influence peer processes that maintain victimization, and skills for seeking additional support and resources. Teachers were asked to rate on a seven-point scale (1 = *very*

*unrealistic*, 7 = *very realistic*) how realistic it was to expect teachers would be competent in each domain. Higher values indicated it was realistic to expect teachers to be competent in these domains. Teachers were also asked to rate on a seven-point scale (1 = *no additional training*, 7 = *more than two full days*) how much additional training they would need to be competent in each domain. Higher values indicated a greater need for training.

**Domain rankings of importance.** Teachers were also asked to rank-order the six domains in terms of their importance for supporting student who are repeatedly bullied (1 = *most important*, 6 = *least important*).

### **Procedure**

All study questions and procedures were approved by the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board. Counselors and principals from the Springdale school district in Northwest Arkansas were notified via email that our research team would be contacting elementary school teachers directly and inviting them to participate in the study. Emails were then sent to a total of 333 classroom teachers in grades 2-5 and contained a link to access the survey. The first page of the survey contained informed consent and details about who was eligible to participate in the study. Participants were eligible to participate if they had experience teaching in grades 2-5 and if they did not participate in our earlier focus groups. Disqualified participants were routed to a disqualification page, and eligible participants went on to complete the survey. The order of the questions was randomized, with exception of demographic questions and questions seeking feedback on the competency domains pages, which were always presented first and last, respectively. Reminder emails were sent every two weeks until all available incentives were claimed. Participants who provided their email address were emailed a \$15 e-gift card.

## Data Analytic Method

### Assumptions

SPSS 19 (IBM, 2010) was first used to analyze descriptive findings (range, mean, *SD*) and to check assumptions related to multivariate analyses. Z-scores were calculated for independent and dependent variables. Seven cases were identified with z-scores  $\pm 3.00$ , and these scores were replaced with the next closest value from the remaining scores. After accounting for outliers, there were no concerns with significant skewness or kurtosis of the variables. There was also no evidence of multicollinearity, as no variables were correlated  $\geq .80$ . Visual analysis of scatterplots was used to assess linearity among variables. It appeared as if one covariate (years of teaching experience) was quadratically related to teachers' use of skills, and will be tested as such in the analyses.

### Missing Data

Multiple imputation and missing values analyses in SPSS were used to assess the pattern of missing data. In total, 15.63% of all data points were missing, which is consistent with average percentages in other social science studies (Enders, 2003). Missing value analyses revealed that responses to questions about the overall framework and individual domains were most commonly missing. These questions (e.g., rankings of domain importance, how much additional training was needed in each domain, and whether these domains were realistic to implement) were placed at the end of the survey, after participants completed ratings about individual competencies. Thus, it appears participants might have stopped the survey early due to fatigue and/or interruption while taking the survey. Little's MCAR test (Little, 1988) was conducted using SPSS and was non-significant ( $\chi^2 = 1137.56$ ,  $df = 1067$ ,  $p = .06$ ), suggesting missing-ness was unrelated to another variable in the study. Given concerns related to adequate

power to run multivariate analyses, multiple imputation was used to account for missing data. Five iterations of imputations were conducted and the pooled estimates were used in analyses.

## **Analyses**

A series of hierarchical linear regressions were used to examine relations between teachers' self-rated competency scores and their prior anti-bullying training, access to anti-bullying resources, level of school connectedness and support, self-efficacy, and previous victimization history. These analyses controlled for teachers' years of experience and schools' percentage of free and reduced lunches.

## **Results**

### **Aim 1: Teachers' Perceptions of Competencies and Competency Domains**

Table 5 presents teachers' average ratings of each competency domain in terms of how essential it is to supporting bullied students, how realistic it is to expect of teachers, and how much additional training teachers need in it to be competent. Also included in Table 5 are teachers' average rankings of the perceived importance of each domain.

**How essential are these competencies?** Mean scores for teachers' ratings of the degree to which a competency is essential ranged from 6.22- 6.97, indicating that teachers generally perceived each competency to be "essential" or "very essential." On average, skills needed to support victims were rated the most essential ( $M = 6.91$ ,  $SD = .21$ , range = 6.00- 7.00), and skills needed to seek additional support/resources were rated the least essential ( $M = 6.56$ ,  $SD = .61$ , range = 4.67-7.00).

**How realistic is it to expect teachers to have the competencies in each domain?** Mean scores for teachers' ratings of the realistic nature of each domain ranged from 5.86 to 6.31, indicating, on average, that teachers saw it as "realistic" for them to be competent in each

domain. Skills needed to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization were rated the most realistic ( $M = 6.31$ ,  $SD = .79$ , range = 5.00- 7.00), and skills needed to seek additional support/resources were rated the least realistic ( $M = 5.86$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ , range = 1.33- 7.00).

### **How much additional training do teachers need to be competent in each domain?**

Mean scores for teachers' ratings of additional training suggested that teachers would need 1-2 hours of additional training to be competent in each domain. On average, teachers reported needing the most additional training in knowledge about bullying ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ , range = 1- 7) and the least in skills to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ , range = 1-7).

**Domain rankings of perceived importance.** Teachers were asked to rank order competency domains by perceived importance to helping bullied children. Teachers ranked as most important skills needed to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization; ranked least important were skills needed to seek additional support/resources.

### **Aim 2: Teachers' Competency Ratings**

The second aim of Study 2 is to understand how teachers generally view themselves in terms of their own competencies. I also wanted to examine whether their domain ratings would correlate with one another.

**Self-ratings.** Mean scores for individual items ranged from 4.15-6.79, which is above the mid-point of the scale. The two items with the lowest average scores were skills: "I access and use only evidence-based resources" ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ , range = 1-7), and "I periodically assess or monitor students' peer relationships as a way to track who is being bullied" ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ , range = 1-7). The two items with the highest average scores were "I believe teachers have a responsibility to support students' social and emotional learning" ( $M = 6.78$ ,  $SD = .42$ ,

range = 6-7) and “I am positive and supportive toward students who are being bullied or at-risk for being bullied” ( $M = 6.77$ ,  $SD = .49$ , range = 5-7).

Average domain ratings are presented in Table 5. Teachers reported, on average, that they “believed” in anti-bullying attitudes ( $M = 6.41$ ,  $SD = .69$ , range = 4.33 – 6.41) and “usually” used skills needed to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization ( $M = 6.33$ ,  $SD = .51$ , range = 5-7), support victims ( $M = 6.26$ ,  $SD = .65$ , range = 4.25-7.00), and influence peer processes ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ , range = 3.33- 7.00). Teachers reported having a “good deal of knowledge” about bullying ( $M = 5.58$ ,  $SD = .80$ , range = 3.00-7.00), and “frequently” using skills to seek additional support/resources to help bullied students ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ , range = 1.67-7.00).

**Correlations among domains.** Correlations among domains are presented in Table 6. The correlation between knowledge about bullying and anti-bullying attitudes was small but positive ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Knowledge was positively related with each skill domain ( $r$ 's = .32 to .46,  $p < .01$ ). Attitudes were positively related to skills to identify and prevent bullying ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ), support victims ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and influence peer processes ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but unrelated to skills to seek additional support and resources. Skill domains were also positively associated with one another ( $r$ 's = .44 to .71,  $p < .001$ ).

### **Aim 3: Correlates of Individual Differences in Teachers' Self-Rated Competencies**

The third aim of Study 2 was to examine the correlates of teachers' self-rated competencies and identify whether individual differences in teachers' training and resources, self-efficacy, school connectedness, and history of victimization could predict teachers' competency ratings. Descriptives ( $M$ ,  $SD$ , and range) of these variables are presented in Table 7.

Correlations among the four factors that emerged from the EFA, predictor variables, and



covariates were examined (see Table 8). Correlations among knowledge, attitudes, and skills were positive and ranged from .22 to .60. As expected, access to anti-bullying resources, total training time, school connectedness, and teacher self-efficacy were positively associated with ratings of knowledge, attitudes, foundational skills, and focused skills. Unexpectedly, history of victimization was unrelated to teachers' self-rated competencies, but negatively associated with school connectedness.

**Hierarchical linear regressions.** I ran a series of multiple regressions predicting each factor score: teachers' self-rated knowledge, attitudes, foundational skills, and focused skills. A summary of results from the regression analyses are presented in Table 9.

**Teachers' self-rated knowledge.** The first model predicting teachers' self-rated knowledge was significant at Step 1 ( $F = 3.95, \Delta R^2 = .07, p < .05$ ), indicating that teachers from schools with a greater percentage of free/reduced lunches were likely to report lower scores on self-rated knowledge ( $\beta = -.23, t = -2.42, p < .05$ ). Step 2 was also significant ( $F = 9.26, \Delta R^2 = .31, p < .001$ ). Specifically, teachers' self-efficacy ( $\beta = .41, t = 4.90, p < .001$ ) and total school connectedness ( $\beta = .23, t = 2.73, p < .01$ ) were positively related to teachers' self-rated knowledge about bullying.

**Teachers' self-rated anti-bullying attitudes.** The second model predicting teachers' self-rated attitudes about bullying was not significant at Step 1, but was significant at Step 2 ( $F = 3.43, \Delta R^2 = .18, p < .01$ ). Teachers' self-efficacy ( $\beta = .27, t = 2.82, p < .01$ ) and total training time ( $\beta = .25, t = 2.40, p < .05$ ) were positively related to teachers' self-rated anti-bullying attitudes.

**Teachers' self-rated foundational skills.** The third model predicting teachers' self-rated foundational skills was not significant at Step 1, but was significant at Step 2 ( $F = 4.46, \Delta R^2 =$

.18,  $p < .001$ ). Teachers' self-efficacy ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $t = 3.05$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was positively related to teachers' self-rated foundational skills. Given scatterplots suggesting a curvilinear relation between years of experience and skills endorsed, the quadratic term of years of teaching experience was added to the model at Step 3; however, it did not add significantly to the model.

***Teachers' self-rated focused skills.*** The fourth model predicting teachers' self-rated focused skills to help bullied children was significant at Step 1 ( $F = 3.21$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that teachers from schools with a greater percentage of free/reduced lunches were more likely to report using focused skills to help bullied children ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $t = 2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Step 2 was also significant ( $F = 12.14$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Teachers' self-efficacy ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $t = 5.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and total training time ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $t = 3.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were positively related to teachers' self-rated focused skills. As before, the quadratic term for years of teaching experience was added to the model at Step 3 and was significant ( $F = 12.66$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The quadratic term was positively associated with teachers' self-rated focused skills ( $\beta = .75$ ,  $t = 3.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Results from scatterplots suggested that teachers with the most years of experience and those with the least years of experience tended to report using more focused skills compared to those with moderate years of experience.

## Discussion

This study gathered teachers' impressions of a competency framework designed to guide efforts to support bullied students; it also examined correlates of teachers' self-rated competencies. Results suggested teachers viewed the competencies as essential to helping bullied students. Teachers' ratings also indicated that it was realistic to expect practicing teachers to have these competencies. In general, teachers' ratings of knowledge, attitudes, and skills suggested a reasonably high level of self-perceived competence. Teachers who scored high on a

measure of self-efficacy in managing bullying and peer victimization tended to also report greater knowledge, stronger anti-bullying attitudes, and more frequent use of foundational and focused skills to manage bullying. Teachers who reported more extensive anti-bullying training tended to report stronger anti-bullying attitudes and more frequent use of focused skills. Teachers with a stronger overall school connectedness reported greater knowledge about bullying.

Teachers' overall impressions of the framework suggested the competencies are palatable for practicing teachers. Mean scores across the six content domains were above the mid-point of each scale, indicating teachers uniformly agreed that all competencies were essential, realistic, and important. Notably, teachers tended to rank "skills to identify and prevent victimization" as the most important group of competencies, consistent with hypotheses. Teachers also rated these skills as "very essential" and the most realistic of all domains to expect teachers to have. Further, teachers reported needing the least amount of additional training in this domain. Collectively, these findings are not surprising given that "skills to identify and prevent victimization" focus primarily on class-wide, behavioral management principles (e.g., setting rules and rewards, providing supervision, promoting a positive classroom environment). Skills in this domain have been widely recommended in the bullying prevention literature (e.g., Frey et al., 2005; Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 2005) and are commonly included in classroom management practices more broadly (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). Because classroom management skills are often a focus of pre-service education curricula, teachers' previous exposure to and experience with these skills might have resulted in their more favorable impressions of this set of competencies (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Zajonc, 2001).

In contrast, teachers consistently rated as less realistic, essential, and important "skills to seek additional support and resources". This is perhaps not surprising given that skills associated

with seeking support and additional resources are not commonly identified as strategies in evidence-based bullying prevention programs. It is also plausible that teachers viewed this set of strategies as supplemental or secondary to having knowledge, attitudes, or other skills to intervene. It is also possible teachers viewed this set of competencies as simply less relevant or rather obvious in comparison to other domains. Seeking additional support and resources might also be perceived as requiring time and effort teachers cannot spare (Byers et al., 2011; Charmaraman et al, 2013).

### **Teachers' Self-Rated Competencies**

Internal structure of the 30-item measure assessing teachers' ratings on each competency was examined via exploratory factor analysis. A four-factor solution representing teachers' self-rated knowledge, attitudes about bullying, use of foundational skills, and use of focused skills to help bullied students was fairly consistent with the conceptual organization of the domains. These factors were positively associated with one another, as expected. Self-rated skills formed two factors (as opposed to four), separating skills perceived to be more foundational from those that are more focused on supporting chronically bullied children. The former set of skills is consistent with recommendations from popular anti-bullying programs such as the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* (Olweus, 1993) as well as best practice guidelines for classroom management (Simonsen et al., 2008). These skills include behavioral principles designed to prevent peer victimization and promote more positive social interactions broadly. The latter skills focus more specifically on strategies teachers need to help students who are being chronically bullied (e.g., teaching peers how to defend chronically bullied students, promoting their peer acceptance, assessing the quality of their peer relationships). These skills likely require more specialized knowledge and skill than what is typically provided in pre-service courses or

existing evidence-based bullying prevention programs that aim to shift school norms to prevent peer victimization (Smith, Schneider, Smith & Ananiadou, 2004). The framework's inclusion of skills that provide more focused support for students who are chronically bullied or at risk of being chronically bullied is in accord with recommendations from the literature (e.g., Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Nation, 2007) and helps identify components of selective interventions that are more helpful than harmful (Troop-Gordon, 2015).

Teachers in the current study were consistent in having rather high scores (i.e., above the mid-point of the scale) when rating their own competencies. This was a surprising finding given extant literature suggests teachers lack knowledge about bullying and often do not intervene in helpful ways (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Fekkes et al., 2005; Mishna et al., 2005). Perhaps current teachers have more informal exposure to information about bullying and anti-bullying strategies due to anti-bullying campaigns such as *The Bully Project*, *Stomp Out Bullying*, and *It Gets Better Project* that have operated during the past decade.

Alternatively, it is also possible that teachers' high self-ratings are overestimations of their actual competencies. Previous research would suggest it is not unusual for individuals to overestimate their self-rated competencies compared to more objective measures (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Maderick, Zhang, Hartley, & Marchand, 2016). Interestingly, teachers in the current study had highest scores on self-rated anti-bullying attitudes. This was somewhat unexpected given findings from Study 1 and previous focus groups (Migiliaccio, 2015) that suggested a tendency for some teachers to report victim-blaming attitudes. However, it is not uncommon to have low reliability between self-reported attitudes and indirectly assessed attitudes (Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001), and this may be particularly true for teachers who are well-intentioned and motivated to help bullied children (Akrami & Ekehammar, 2005).

Thus, it is possible teachers responded in a socially desirable way to the survey questions, or, that teachers, more generally, lack awareness of their implicit attitudes about bullying.

### **Correlations of Teachers' Self-Rated Competencies**

Teachers with higher scores of self-rated knowledge, anti-bullying attitudes, and use of foundational and focused skills also reported higher levels of self-efficacy related to school bullying. This was in line with hypotheses and previous literature that has documented associations between teachers' self-efficacy and their intentions to intervene, use effective intervention strategies, and corresponding levels of classroom victimization (Boulton, 2014; Gregus et al., in press; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). Teachers' self-efficacy might also increase as a result of experiencing success in their management of bullying (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Teacher self-efficacy was uniformly the strongest predictor of teachers' self-rated competencies, further supporting its importance in teacher-led anti-bullying programs such as *I DECIDE* and *Bully Busters*, which specifically aim to increase teacher self-efficacy in using evidence-based interventions (Boulton, 2014; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004).

Another explanation for strong associations between self-efficacy and teachers' self-ratings might be more methodological in nature. Inspection of individual items from the TEAS revealed some overlapping content with teacher-rated competencies. For example, items from the TEAS included: "I feel confident in my abilities to know which students are "at risk" to be repeatedly harassed by other students" and "I feel confident I will be able to consistently enforce classroom rules and consequences." These items closely paralleled the following competencies: "I periodically assess or monitor students' peer relationships as a way to track who is being bullied or at risk for being bullied" and "I establish clear rules and consequences designed to reduce bullying and promote positive behavior." Thus, it is not surprising for there to be

significant associations given teachers likely responded similarly to these items.

Consistent with hypotheses, teachers who reported more training specific to school bullying also reported stronger anti-bullying attitudes and more frequent use of focused skills to help bullied students. The positive association between training and attitudes is in line with studies that suggest anti-bullying interventions are effective partially because they can help shift teacher and student attitudes about bullying (Sarrento et al., 2015). Exposure to new information could help teachers develop more accurate interpretations about bullying and increase their affective empathy toward victims (Sarrento et al., 2015). Practice opportunities could help teachers feel more efficacious in their ability to manage bullying and increase their comfort intervening (Bell, Raczynski, & Horne, 2010; Boulton, 2014). Given data were collected at one time point, another explanation for the findings might be that teachers with strong anti-bullying attitudes are more motivated to seek out additional training related to bullying.

Interestingly, training was positively related to teachers' use of focused skills to help chronically bullied students, but unrelated to teachers' use of foundational skills. As noted earlier, foundational skills appear to relate to classroom management techniques more broadly, and teachers should be familiar with these core components of teacher education (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children, 1998; Emmer & Stough, 2001). Most likely, teachers with more anti-bullying training have been exposed to strategies specific to helping bullied students. Thus, anti-bullying training might discriminate teachers who are competent in using skills, above and beyond basic behavior management, to help chronically bullied students.

Unexpectedly, access to school resources (e.g., school committees, grade-level teams, anti-bullying curriculum) was not associated with teachers' self-rated competencies. This finding is discrepant from previous literature, which found teachers who had access to anti-bullying

programming reported greater knowledge, comfort intervening, and use of anti-bullying strategies (Boulton, 2014; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; O'Brennan et al., 2014). Notably, few teachers in the current study reported having a formal prevention program in their school ( $n = 10, < 8\%$ ). It is unknown to what extent other resources, such as school-wide committees and grade level teams, were routinely used and perceived to be effective. Alternatively, teachers could have relied almost exclusively on school resources to address bullying concerns opposed to managing concerns on their own; however, it is unknown to what degree teachers accessed these resources.

Teachers with a strong overall school connectedness reported greater self-rated knowledge about bullying. This was consistent with hypotheses and previous research that found teachers with a greater connection to students were more aware of bullying incidents in the classroom (Hamm et al., 2011). Teachers who cultivate a strong connection with students might create an environment where students feel safe to disclose bullying concerns (Boulton et al., 2013; Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). Further, teachers who are more connected to staff and administrators might be more open to learning from one another to increase their own professional development and effectiveness in responding to bullying (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011).

Unexpectedly, overall school connectedness was unrelated to teachers' self-rated attitudes about bullying, foundational skills, and focused skills. This was surprising given results of other studies that found teachers' relationships with students and staff to be associated with greater comfort intervening with bullying (O'Brennan et al., 2014), greater sympathy for victims (Boulton et al., 2013), increased willingness to consult with other staff (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003), and reductions in children's peer victimization (Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011). Teachers'



attitudes about bullying are likely shaped long before developing relationships with school staff, administrators, and students with whom they work. These attitudes might be resistant to change, regardless of the degree to which teachers feel connected to others in the school (Visser & Krosnick, 1998). Additionally, although well-connected teachers might be more comfortable intervening (O'Brennan et al., 2014), they might not be skilled at using anti-bullying strategies effectively. Indeed, research has documented that well-intentioned teachers struggle to manage bullying (Mishna et al., 2005) and have used strategies that have made matters worse (Fekkes et al., 2005).

Teachers' history of experiencing peer victimization as a child was unrelated to their self-rated competencies. This was inconsistent with my hypotheses and previous literature that suggested teachers with a history of victimization have stronger empathy toward victims and were more likely to use evidence-based classroom interventions (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Kokko & Porhola, 2009; Mishna et al., 2005). However, at least one study has reported null findings in regard to teachers' personal history of victimization and classroom levels of peer victimization (Oldenburg et al., 2015). The authors from that study suggested that teachers might be motivated to intervene, but, as a result of being victimized, lack the social-emotional skills needed to effectively intervene. Cognitive dissonance theory (e.g., Festinger, 1957) should also be considered as an alternative explanation. It might be that teachers who experienced peer victimization as children are more likely to hold normative beliefs about bullying to justify their experiences. Weak associations between teachers' history of victimization and their self-rated competencies might be more simply explained by the lapse of time. Perhaps teachers' experiences with victimization as a child are too distal to have a meaningful impact on their current competencies.

Notably, primary analyses controlled for teachers' years of experience and schools' percentage of free and reduced lunches. Years of experience had a curvilinear relation with teachers' use of focused skills, such that teachers with relatively few years of experience and those with many years of experience reported the most frequent use of focused skills to help chronically bullied students. It is possible that teachers with more years of experience have accumulated a host of skills to help bullied children over the course of their career. It is less clear why teachers with few years of experience would report using focused skills to help chronically bullied students. Perhaps a younger cohort of teachers is more motivated to reduce bullying due to an increase in media attention given to bullying or more informal training opportunities. Teachers with limited experience might also be more naively optimistic in their abilities to manage bullying and more eager to use skills to help bullied children as a result of having limited opportunities to experience the challenges presented by peer dynamics that maintain peer victimization and bullying (Gregus et al., in press; Oldenburg et al., 2015; Salmivalli, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Teachers from schools with a greater percentage of free and reduced lunches reported significantly less knowledge about bullying but more use of focused skills to help bullied students. It is possible that teachers from schools with greater poverty have less access to resources and in-service trainings to provide them knowledge about bullying. Similarly, if teachers lack school resources, it is possible they might use more focused skills themselves, as opposed to outsourcing the concerns to administration, counseling, or school-committees. Although Tippett & Wolke (2014) suggested household socioeconomic status is generally a poor indicator for schools at risk of bullying, research has documented that broader neighborhood and community influences can be predictive of students' victimization and bullying experiences

(Hong & Espelage, 2012; Jansen et al., 2012). Thus, it is possible that schools within neighborhoods that have a higher concentration of disadvantaged families could have a higher incidence of bullying (Haynie et al., 2006; Sampson et al., 1997). Therefore, teachers from these schools might have simply more opportunities to use focused skills to help bullied students.

### **Limitations**

The findings should be viewed in light of several limitations in the methodology and sample used in the study. Teachers' competencies to support bullied children were assessed by self-ratings alone. Self-assessments have the potential for biased responding and tend to have limited validity and reliability (Kaslow et al., 2009). The lack of complete anonymity could have increased the potential for socially desirable responding. Because no other informant ratings or objective assessments were gathered, the accuracy of teachers' ratings cannot be determined. Further, the rating scales that were used to assess teachers' competencies were designed to allow a wide range of responses to encourage accurate responding. Unfortunately, this approach limited the number of anchors that represented the presence of each competency, which could have contributed to a ceiling effect. For example, the 7-point scale used to assess teachers' attitudes about bullying ranged from 1 = *strongly disbelieve* to 7 = *strongly believe*, which only allowed three response options indicating the presence of each attitude.

Because the data were collected at one time point, the directionality of the relations is unclear. Unknown is whether teachers' anti-bullying training, school connectedness, or self-efficacy contribute to teachers' self-rated competencies or vice versa. It is certainly plausible, for example, that teachers who are more skilled and experience greater success managing bullying would report greater self-efficacy and school connectedness as a result.

Limitations are also apparent in the study's sample. The sample was limited in size and

restricted to teachers from a single school district. It is possible that teachers' ratings from this school district vary in some systematic way compared to teachers from other school districts. Further, the sample was relatively homogenous, with the large majority of participating teachers identifying as Caucasian women. Unknown is whether individuals with different demographic characteristics would have a different pattern of responding. Given limitations in methodology and generalizability, the findings should be viewed as preliminary assessments of teachers' competencies to help bullied children.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings suggest that future research examining the competency-based framework is warranted. To address concerns related to potential ceiling effects that emerged in this study, future studies could use alternative rating scales that are further operationalized. Rubrics could be used to increase the description of each anchor used in the measure. Alternatively, measures could contain items that are filler or reverse scored to reduce acquiescence bias.

Findings identifying positive associations between teachers' self-rated competencies and self-efficacy, training, and school connectedness, offer preliminary support for the convergent validity of the measure of self-rated competencies. However, further research is necessary to evaluate the validity and reliability of teachers' self-rated competencies. It will be important to examine the degree to which teacher ratings are concordant with other informants or direct observation. For example, principals could be asked to provide ratings of teachers' abilities and these scores could be compared to teachers' self-ratings. Pairing self-ratings with more objective assessments (e.g., a test measuring teachers' knowledge about bullying) could also help measure the degree to which teacher ratings are accurate representations of their own abilities. Predictive validity could be assessed by prospective studies that examine whether competencies predict

relevant variables, such as changes in students' levels of bullying and victimization. Finally, a larger, more diverse sample from various school districts across multiple geographic locations is needed to increase the generalizability of the results and rule-out systematic error that could affect the measurement of teachers' competencies from a single school district.

Findings also support the continued examination of teacher- and school- level variables that might influence teacher competencies in helping chronically bullied students and students' levels of peer victimization. Findings from the current study align with previous research suggesting that teacher self-efficacy is an important variable to target in the development and evaluation of anti-bullying prevention programs (Boulton, 2014; Gregus et al., in press; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). Future studies should also consider the role of anti-bullying training and school connectedness in influencing teacher behaviors. Finally, the competency-based framework should be viewed as a moving target: Newer research will be used to continuously evaluate the empirical support for the existing competencies and identify other potential competencies that should be included in future iterations.

### **Implications for Practice**

Despite the study's limitations, the findings have several important practical implications. This study is one of the first attempts to evaluate a concrete set of competencies that teachers should have when helping bullied children. Findings suggest that teachers uniformly viewed the competency-based framework as a palatable guide for bullying prevention. To the extent that future research supports the use of these competencies, the competency-based framework could serve as a foundation for teacher evaluation and training. Teacher competencies could be evaluated by educators in pre-service courses, by principals or school counselors, or by teachers themselves to promote self-reflection of their knowledge, attitudes, and skills specific to helping

chronically bullied children.

The competencies also provide benchmarks for training. Pre-service teachers could benefit from courses that provide more focused training on bullying. This could be easily incorporated into courses covering classroom management techniques or behavioral interventions. The findings suggest that in-service teachers could also benefit from one to two hours of additional training in each of the content domains to increase their competence. Administrators should consider devoting time on professional development days for in-service trainings by local experts in an effort to increase teachers' knowledge about bullying, strengthen their anti-bullying attitudes, and provide them with more tools to help children who are being bullied. Further, considering the strength of the association between teachers' self-efficacy and their anti-bullying competencies, training that offers repeated opportunities for practice, vicarious learning, and feedback would be recommended to help increase teachers' self-efficacy in managing bullying and increase the accuracy of their perceived competencies (Bell et al., 2010; Boulton, 2014; Noell et al., 2005).

In addition to facilitating training opportunities, school administrators should consider other efforts they can make to support teachers' efforts to help bullied children. Examples include evaluating how well their school fosters a sense of personal safety for teachers, uses strategies to build supportive relationships among school staff and administrators, and promotes classroom- specific activities to facilitate teacher-student relationships (O'Brennan et al, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

This study revealed that teachers have favorable impressions of the competencies identified in the framework. Additionally, individual differences in teachers' training, self-efficacy, and school connectedness significantly predicted their self-rated competencies in

expected directions: Teachers had higher self-rated competence when they reported high self-efficacy in their management of bullying, more exposure to anti-bullying training, and greater overall school connectedness. Future research is needed to examine whether teachers can be accurately and reliably evaluated on this set of competencies. To the extent that future research supports the competency-based framework, the competencies could also serve as targets for teacher training.

### **General Discussion**

Elementary school teachers are often the individuals most likely to witness and intervene in school bullying. In fact, they may be in the best position to alter classroom norms and peer dynamics that contribute to and maintain peer victimization (Farmer et al., 2011; Salmivalli, 2010; Troop-Gordon, 2015; Veenstra et al., 2014). However, research suggests they are not always trained in how to respond effectively (Fekkes et al., 2005; Mishna et al., 2005). Recent research has begun to examine individual differences in teachers' characteristics and behaviors that predict their intervention efforts and effectiveness (Oldenburg et al., 2015; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2013; Veenstra et al., 2014), prompting researchers to call for the identification of specific steps that teachers can take to help prevent and manage school bullying (Troop-Gordon, 2015).

The two studies reported here represent an effort to identify and evaluate a core list of competencies that could guide teachers' efforts in a more concrete and uniform way. In Study 1, I gathered feedback from elementary school teachers and researchers on the clarity and comprehensiveness of Gregus and Cavell's (2017) competency-based framework. Data generated from Study 1 were used to modify the framework. In Study 2, a separate group of elementary school teachers rated the utility and practicality of the revised competencies as well as their own knowledge, attitudes, and skills. I also examined the correlates of teachers' self-

rated competencies.

The methodology used in this paper allowed relevant stakeholders to be involved in the development of the competencies, consistent with recommendations for developing competency-based learning models and conducting community-based research (Strand et al., 2003; Voorhees, 2001). The iterative process used to develop and refine the competency framework was as follows: extract specific competencies from extant research, draft an initial competency framework, gather feedback from practicing teachers, analyze qualitative data, further refine the framework, gather expert researcher feedback, analyze data, and further refine the framework. This approach is consistent with methods used in the development of other bullying prevention programs (Orpinas et al., 2003), as well as community-based programs more broadly (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Such methods typically involve collaborations with community partners from the development to implementation phase to help translate research and theory into a useable and sustainable practice (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Minkler, 2005). In this study, the iterative process allowed teachers the opportunity to voice concerns about the practicality, clarity, utility, and comprehensiveness of the competencies in the beginning phases of the framework's development. Researcher feedback ensured changes to the competencies remained consistent with empirical findings. These steps allowed for a thorough examination of the framework and kept relevant stakeholders involved throughout its development.

Findings from the two studies converged in important ways. Practicing teachers and research experts viewed the competency-based framework as useful, practical, and comprehensive. These results were consistent across raters at three different points of data collection and support the reliability of these findings. It is likely the competencies were perceived favorably, in part, due to teachers' participation in the development of the



competencies. These findings support the continued use and examination of the framework in future research and practice. Additionally, results from both studies suggested teachers use many skills that are supported by research, including developing supportive classroom environments, contacting parents, and coaching students to communicate more effectively. This is a promising finding, despite evidence that suggests teachers have very limited anti-bullying training. It appears as if teachers, as a whole, are more prepared to use class-wide skills that focus on preventing bullying and victimization than skills to support students who are chronically bullied, which is likely the result of having more exposure to similar practices in pre-service curricula (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Simonsen et al., 2008).

Divergent findings also emerged from the data. Teachers participating in focus groups reported a range of attitudes about bullying, including beliefs that support teacher intervention in bullying and beliefs that blame victims for their being bullied. In contrast, teachers identified having strong attitudes against bullying in survey form. Similarly, teachers in both studies were likely to report they were competent in knowledge about bullying. However, the focus groups provided a forum to reveal the depth of teachers' knowledge, including that teachers did not share a standard definition of bullying, were unclear about the differences between bullying and conflict, and were unaware of different types of bullying. These parallel findings indicate the assessment of teachers' competencies is not straightforward, and discrepancies in reports might be influenced by a variety of factors, including social desirability, a lack of awareness of implicit attitudes, and measurement error.

Together, the findings have important implications for future research assessing the competency-based framework. Results suggest that teachers' self-rated competencies may be an overestimation of their actual knowledge, attitudes, or skills when compared to more indirect

assessments, such as data gathered qualitatively when more implicit attitudes and explicit demonstrations of knowledge were able to emerge. Thus, future research is needed to identify a valid and reliable way to measure teachers' competencies in helping bullied children. Future studies should consider using multi-informant, multi-method approaches when evaluating teacher competencies. Multi-informant approaches would help assess the reliability of teachers' self-ratings. Observational or objective measures would help determine the degree to which teacher ratings are accurate representations of their own abilities. A rubric that further operationalizes each competency would assist in objective scoring and assessment. Finally, the results support the continued use of mixed-method designs when evaluating teacher characteristics and behaviors that might encourage socially desirable responding; these designs can be used to assess the degree to which data collected from two distinct approaches converge.

The findings also support the use of the competency-based framework as a foundation for teacher training. The competencies could be used to identify specific training objectives for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Although teachers reported relatively high levels of competence in Study 2, results from Study 1 suggest that teachers could benefit from greater depth of knowledge about bullying, stronger anti-bullying attitudes, and a wider range of skills to help students who are chronically bullied or at risk of being chronically bullied. If the framework were to be disseminated publicly, it could help guide teachers with limited training and access to school resources/support.

In conclusion, the competency-based framework helps advance the field in efforts to identify specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills teachers need to prevent peer victimization and help chronically bullied students. This framework provides a heuristic guide to support practicing teachers who are on the frontlines of managing school bullying. Findings from the two

studies support the continued use and evaluation of the competency-based framework for elementary school teachers. Future research is needed to identify reliable and valid methods of assessing these competencies. Ultimately, the competency-based model could be used to identify targets for anti-bullying training and evaluate the degree to which teachers effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to help bullied children.

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Table 1.

*Recommended Strategies for Teachers in Evidence-Based Anti-Bullying Programs*

<b>Class-wide Strategies</b>	<i>OBPP</i>	<i>KiVa</i>	<i>Steps to Respect</i>
Adopt and enforce class or school rules against bullying	✓	✓	✓
Hold weekly class meetings to discuss issues related to bullying, peer relations, and other related topics	✓	✓	*
Use literature, media, role-plays to explain concepts related to bullying	✓	✓	✓
Hold class meetings with parents to discuss issues related to bullying	✓		
Supervise students' activities in places bullying is suspected	✓		✓
Deliver specific program curriculum/use program manuals		✓	✓
Teach social-emotional skills			✓
<b>Student-specific Strategies</b>			
Intervene immediately when bullying is observed and investigate all reported cases of bullying	✓	*	✓
Enforce negative consequences for students who do not follow class rules	✓		
Reward students who follow class rules	✓		
Meet with students involved in bullying	✓	✓	✓
Meet with parents of students involved in bullying as needed	✓		✓
Meet with other teachers to discuss the incident		✓	
Provide individual support, safety plans and/or coaching for victims	✓	*	✓
Provide individual coaching to help bullies			✓
Increase empathy in the bully		✓	
Encourage uninvolved, pro-social peers to support victims		✓	*

*Note.* ✓ denotes the program clearly states this is a specific strategy or goal; \* denotes the program appears to include this as a specific strategy or goal.



Table 2.

*Teacher Competencies for Supporting Chronically Bullied Children*

---

Knowledge about bullying:

1. Knows how to define bullying (i.e., what it is and what it is not)
2. Knows about the different forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, cyber)
3. Knows that many children are bullied at some point, but that only a few are chronically bullied
4. Knows that bullying can be harmful and has been linked to academic, social, physical, and mental health problems
5. Knows that bullying usually occurs in peer groups that involve both bullies and bystanders
6. Knows that bullying is more likely to occur in less structured settings such as the playground, lunchroom, and hallways
7. Knows about strategies teachers can use to influence the peer processes associated with bullying and peer victimization

Attitudes toward bullying:

8. Believes bullying is harmful and not normal, and that teachers have a responsibility to protect children from being victimized
9. Does not believe in blaming the victim
10. Has realistic beliefs about teachers' ability to intervene in bullying (i.e., teachers can help, but helping can at times be difficult)

Skills:

Class-wide strategies to prevent bullying:

11. Provides an emotionally supportive classroom environment
12. Models and promotes clear anti-bullying attitudes and beliefs
13. Establishes and enforces clear rules designed to prevent bullying and promote pro-social behaviors
14. Closely supervises settings in which bullying is likely to occur
15. Reliably uses a system for identifying students who are having recurring problems with bullying

Strategies to protect and support victims:

16. Recognizes when student disclosure or student action signals bullying vs. non-bullying behaviors
17. Protects victims by altering the settings or specific accommodations.
18. Involves parents as needed to help protect and support victims
19. Coaches victims in adaptive interpersonal skills and ways to cope with bullying
20. Maintains a positive and supportive relationship with children who are chronically bullied or at-risk for being chronically bullied
21. Refers bullied children for further evaluation and intervention as needed

Strategies designed to affect peer processes that lead to or maintain bullying:

22. Encourages and coaches students to defend victims of bullying
23. Uses classroom structures and strategies to promote peer acceptance of children who are socially isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied
24. Uses teacher-student interactions with children who are socially isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied as a way to counter peers' negative attitudes



Table 2 (Cont.)

*Teacher Competencies for Supporting Chronically Bullied Children*

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Strategies to seek additional support when necessary:

25. Recognizes the need for and seeks out additional training, consultation, and support as needed
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Table 3.

*Revised Teacher Competencies for Supporting Chronically Bullied Children*

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Knowledge about bullying:

1. Knows what bullying is and how it differs from other peer interactions (e.g., conflict, play)
2. Knows the different forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying)
3. Knows that many students are bullied at some point but that only a few are chronically bullied
4. Knows that some bullies lack social skills and are unpopular but that others are socially skillful and popular
5. Knows that some bullied students are purely victims, but others are both victims and bullies
6. Knows that bullying can be harmful and is predictive of problems (e.g., academic, social, physical, emotional) that can be long lasting
7. Knows that bullying often involves groups of peers that include both bullies and bystanders
8. Knows that bullying is more likely to occur in less structured settings (e.g., playground, hallways)
9. Knows that students who are rejected or not accepted by peers are at risk of being bullied

Attitudes toward bullying:

1. Believes bullying is not a natural or acceptable part of growing up
2. Believes that bullied students should not have to manage bullying on their own
3. Believes teachers have a responsibility to intervene when bullying occurs
4. Believes that it is harmful to blame bullied students for being bullied
5. Believes helping bullied students is important even though it can be difficult and challenging
6. Believes teachers have a responsibility to support students' social and emotional learning

Skills:

Skills to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization:

1. Periodically assesses or monitors students' peer relationships as a way to track who is being bullied or at risk for being bullied
2. Creates and maintains a safe and emotionally supportive classroom environment
3. Models and conveys strong anti-bullying attitudes
4. Establishes clear rules and consequences designed to reduce bullying and promote positive behavior
5. Closely supervises settings (e.g., hallways, playground) where school bullying is likely to occur

Skills for supporting victims of bullying:

6. Uses seating arrangements and other strategies to separate bullies from those who they bully
7. Is positive and supportive toward students who are being bullied or at-risk for being bullied

Table 3 (Cont.)

*Revised Teacher Competencies for Supporting Chronically Bullied Children*

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Skills for supporting victims of bullying (cont.)

8. Works collaboratively with parents of bullies as well as with parents of students being bullied
9. Teaches bullied students adaptive ways to manage conflict and cope with bullying

Skills that influence peer processes that maintain victimization:

10. Encourages and coaches students on how to defend classmates who are being bullied
11. Uses classroom activities that promote peers' acceptance of students who are isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied
12. Interacts in positive, observable ways with students who are being bullied or at risk of being bullied as a way to counteract negative peer attitudes

Skills for seeking additional support and resources:

13. Accesses and uses only evidence-based anti-bullying resources (e.g., books, videos)
  14. When it's needed, will seek anti-bullying training, support, or consultation (in or out of school)
  15. When it's needed, will refer bullied children for further evaluation or intervention
-

Table 4.

*Item Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues, and Variance Explained for the Teacher Anti-Bullying Competencies*

Item	Factor Loadings			
	Knowledge about Bullying	Attitudes about Bullying	Foundational Skills	Focused Skills
I know the different forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying).	<b>.91</b>	.05	-.12	-.07
I know that bullying can be harmful and is predictive of problems (e.g., academic, social, physical, emotional) that can be long lasting	<b>.88</b>	-.09	.05	.01
I know what bullying is and how it differs from other peer interactions (e.g., conflict, play)	<b>.86</b>	.07	.02	-.01
I know that many students are bullied at some point but that only a few are chronically bullied	<b>.86</b>	.07	-.13	-.06
I know that students who are rejected or not accepted by peers are at risk of being bullied	<b>.84</b>	-.13	.07	.06
I know that some bullied students are purely victims, but others are both victims and bullies	<b>.83</b>	.07	.04	.04
I know that bullying often involves groups of peers that include both bullies and bystanders	<b>.83</b>	-.04	.03	-.14
I know that some bullies lack social skills and are unpopular but that others are socially skillful and popular	<b>.81</b>	.03	-.00	-.01
I know that bullying is more likely to occur in less structured settings (e.g., playground, hallways)	<b>.79</b>	-.09	.17	.15
I believe helping bullied students is important even though it can be difficult and challenging	-.03	<b>.92</b>	.06	.07
I believe teachers have a responsibility to intervene when bullying occurs	.02	<b>.85</b>	.01	.05
I believe teachers have a responsibility to support students' social and emotional learning	-.05	<b>.83</b>	.15	.15

Table 4 (Cont.)

*Item Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues, and Variance Explained for the Teacher Anti-Bullying Competencies*

Item	Factor Loadings			
	Knowledge about Bullying	Attitudes	Item	Knowledge about Bullying
I believe that bullied students should not have to manage bullying on their own	.01	<b>.79</b>	.03	.02
I believe that it is harmful to blame bullied students for being bullied	-.24	<b>.55</b>	.10	.06
I believe bullying is not a natural or acceptable part of growing up	.03	<b>.45</b>	-.04	-.20
I establish clear rules and consequences designed to reduce bullying and promote positive behavior	.02	.11	<b>.87</b>	.09
I am positive and supportive toward students who are being bullied or at-risk for being bullied	-.02	-.04	<b>.74</b>	-.11
I model and convey strong anti-bullying attitudes	-.06	-.08	<b>.70</b>	.02
I use seating arrangements and other strategies to separate bullies from those who they bully	-.14	.01	<b>.58</b>	-.01
I work collaboratively with parents of bullies as well as with parents of students being bullied	.09	.16	<b>.46</b>	-.25
I closely supervise settings (e.g., hallways, playground) where school bullying is likely to occur	.03	-.01	<b>.43</b>	-.26
I create and maintain a safe and emotionally supportive classroom environment	.01	-.13	<b>.36</b>	-.07
I access and use only evidence-based anti-bullying resources (e.g., books, videos)	-.03	.12	-.09	<b>.89</b>
I teach bullied students adaptive ways to manage conflict and cope with bullying	.90	-.12	.02	<b>.69</b>
When it's needed, I will seek anti-bullying training, support, or consultation (in or out of school)	.01	-.04	.02	<b>.68</b>
I encourage and coach students on how to defend classmates who are being bullied	.03	-.23	.10	<b>.59</b>

Table 4 (Cont.)

*Item Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues, and Variance Explained for the Teacher Anti-Bullying Competencies*

Item	Factor Loadings			
	Knowledge about Bullying	Attitudes	Item	Knowledge about Bullying
I use classroom activities that promote peers' acceptance of students who are isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied	.04	-.21	.14	<b>.56</b>
When it's needed, I will refer bullied children for further evaluation or intervention	.02	.08	.15	<b>.52</b>
I interact in positive, observable ways with students who are being bullied or at risk of being bullied as a way to counteract negative peer attitudes	.05	-.08	<b>.33</b>	<b>.45</b>
I periodically assess or monitor students' peer relationships as a way to track who is being bullied or at risk for being bullied	-.30	-.04	-.10	<b>.33</b>
Eigenvalues	10.19	3.27	1.80	3.75
Total % of Variance	33.95%	10.89%	6.01%	12.50%

Note. Factor loadings above .32 appear in bold.

Table 5.

*Teachers' Domain Ratings and Importance Rankings*

Domain	Self-Ratings <i>M</i> (SD)	How Essential? <i>M</i> (SD)	How Realistic? <i>M</i> (SD)	Additional Training Needed <i>M</i> (SD)	Importance Ranking
1. Knowledge about bullying	5.58 (.80)	6.73 (.52)	5.93 (1.00)	3.35 (1.42)	2
2. Anti-bullying attitudes	6.41 (.69)	6.73 (.57)	6.20 (.75)	2.97 (1.34)	4
3. Skills to identify and prevent bullying	6.33 (.51)	6.89 (.22)	6.31 (.79)	2.82 (1.43)	1
4. Skills for supporting victims	6.26 (.65)	6.91 (.21)	6.26 (.75)	2.89 (1.31)	3
5. Skills that influence peer processes	5.77 (1.07)	6.80 (.41)	6.22 (.74)	2.99 (1.31)	5
6. Skills to seek additional support and resources	5.22 (1.33)	6.56 (.61)	5.86 (1.04)	2.84 (1.32)	6

*Note.* Self-ratings of competency endorsement were rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater knowledge, stronger beliefs, or more use of the skills; ratings to the degree to which a competency is essential to helping bullied students was rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all essential*) to 7 (*very essential*); ratings of the realistic nature of each domain were rated on a scale of 1 (*very unrealistic*) to 7 (*very realistic*); additional training needed to be competent in each domain was rated on a scale 1 (*no additional training needed*) to 7 (*more than 2 days of training needed*); the perceived importance of each domain were rank-ordered from 1 (*most important*) to 6 (*least important*).

Table 6.

*Bivariate Correlations Among Competency Domains*

Domain	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Knowledge about bullying	--	.26*	.45***	.46***	.37***	.32**
2. Anti-bullying attitudes		--	.22*	.25*	.35**	.16
3. Skills to identify and prevent bullying			--	.71***	.61***	.44***
4. Skills for supporting victims				--	.67***	.66***
5. Skills that influence peer processes					--	.62***
6. Skills to seek additional support and resources						--

*Note.*  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$



Table 7.

*Descriptives of Correlates*

Domain	M (SD)	range
Anti-bullying resources	1.48 (1.26)	0.00 – 6.00
Total training time	4.28 (1.58)	1.00 - 7.00
History of victimization	2.42 (1.02)	1.00 - 5.33
Staff connectedness	4.08 (.64)	2.20 - 5.00
Principal connectedness	4.09 (.71)	2.00 - 5.00
Student connectedness	4.51 (.48)	3.00 - 5.00
Personal connectedness	4.32 (.58)	2.75 - 5.00
Total school connectedness	4.25 (.52)	3.00 - 5.00
Teacher self-efficacy	4.26 (.61)	1.00 – 5.00

Table 8.

*Bivariate Correlations among Model Covariates, Independent Variables, and Dependent Variables*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Knowledge	--	.26*	.37***	.44***	.24*	.13	.12	.29**	.09	.38***	.29**	.30**	.39***	.54***
2. Attitudes		--	.22*	.31**	-.01	.05	.02	.11	.28**	.23*	.19*	.20*	.25**	.33***
3. Foundational Skills			--	.60***	-.16	.18	.08	.27**	.20*	.14	.20*	.21*	.33***	.38***
4. Focused Skills				--	.17	.12	.13	.32***	.46***	.19*	.33**	.17	.22**	.48***
5. Free/Reduced Lunches (%)					--	.22*	.09	-.12	.21*	-.07	.01	.03	-.22*	-.18
6. Years of experience						--	.09	.07	.27**	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.03	.16
7. History of Vic							--	-.03	.15	-.22*	-.07	-.10	-.02	-.12
8. Anti-Bullying Resources								--	.28**	.23**	.34***	.20*	.25**	.26**
9. Total Training									--	.15	.30***	.11	.08	.18
10. Personal Connectedness										--	.78***	.64***	.64***	.32***
11. Principal Connectedness											--	.57***	.59***	.27***
12. Staff Connectedness												--	.67***	.16
13. Student Connectedness													--	.32***
14. Self-Efficacy														--

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

Table 9.

*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Teachers' Self-Rated Knowledge, Attitudes, Foundational Skills, and Focused Skills for Supporting Bullied Children*

Predictor	Knowledge		Attitudes		Foundational Skills		Focused Skills	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Step 1	.07*		.00		.05		.05*	
Free/reduced lunches (%)		-.23*		.01		-.13		.21*
Years of Experience		.08		.05		.15		.16
Step 2	.31***		.18***		.18***		.39***	
History of Vic Training Time		-.03		.00		.12		.13 <sup>+</sup>
Anti-bullying Resources		-.05		.25*		.07		.27**
Self-Efficacy		.11		-.07		.13		.14 <sup>+</sup>
Mean School Connectedness		.41***		.27**		.29**		.45***
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.61		.43		.48		.67	

Note. Standardized beta coefficients are presented. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , <sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$

## Appendix A

### IRB Approval



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board

February 20, 2017

#### MEMORANDUM

TO: Samantha Gregus  
Timothy Cavell

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT CONTINUATION

IRB Protocol #: 15-12-410

Protocol Title: *Developing a Competency-Based Framework for Teachers to Help Chronically Bullied Children*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Previous Approval Period: Start Date: 12/15/2015 Expiration Date: 12/14/2016

New Expiration Date: 12/14/2017

Your request to extend the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. If at the end of this period you wish to continue the project, you must submit a request using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation on or prior to this new expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

**This protocol is closed to enrollment.** If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent and Measures for Study 1

#### **Informed Consent for Focus Group Participants**

*Title:* Development of a Competency-Based Framework for Teachers to Help Chronically Bullied Children

*Description:* You have been asked to participate in a focus group study approved by the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board. The purpose of the study is to gather feedback on the kinds of competencies teachers need to help children who are bullied or at risk of being bullied at school. In the first part of the focus group, we ask for your impressions about the role of teachers in helping chronically bullied children. We will next get your impressions about specific competencies for teachers that were derived from recent scientific research. We are hoping that your feedback can make our framework of research-derived competencies more relevant to practicing teachers.

There is no right or wrong answer to the focus group questions. We want to hear different viewpoints and hope to hear from everyone. We ask that you speak freely even if your views are distinct from rest of the group. When responding to questions, you're not required to share your personal experiences with bullying in the classroom, but you can do so if you feel comfortable. As a way to make the experience feel safe and comfortable, participants will be given these two ground rules: a) only one individual should speak at a time, and b) all comments made in the focus group should be kept confidential.

*Risks and benefits:* There are no known risks to participation. A benefit is that you will receive a \$30 Walmart gift card in exchange for your participation. In addition, you will be contributing to a framework to guide teachers' efforts in supporting bullied children that could be used to improve teacher training and bullying prevention efforts. As a result of participating, you may also acquire new knowledge related to how to help children who are chronically bullied.

*Voluntary Participation:* Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and you are free to not answer a question if you are uncomfortable doing so.

*Confidentiality:* Confidentiality of your data will be maintained to the fullest extent allowed by university policy and the law. Discussions from the focus group will be audio recorded, but your responses will remain anonymous. Once audio recordings are transcribed, they will be erased. Transcribed group discussions will be kept in a password protected computer file. We will ask brief demographic questions for the purposes of reporting who participated in the focus groups. Your data may contribute to publications or presentations in a conference, but such data will be reported in aggregate form. All focus group demographic questionnaires will be secured and locked in a file cabinet in our research lab at the University of Arkansas.

*Right to discontinue:* You have the right to discontinue participating in the focus group at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Choosing to discontinue your participation will not prevent

you from receiving any incentives promised to you as a participant of this study.

*What do I do if I have questions about the research study?* You have the right to contact the Principal Investigator or Faculty Mentor as listed below for any concerns that you may have. You can also contact the University of Arkansas office of Research Compliance (see contact information below) if you have questions about your rights as a participant or to discuss any concerns about or problems with the research.

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*Informed Consent:* I have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and benefits, the confidentiality, as well as the option to discontinue participation in the focus group at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigators. The investigators have answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. By signing below, I indicate that I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Focus Group Interview Protocol

### Pre-Interview Procedures [10 minutes]

- Thank participants for attending and brief introductions
- Our overall goal for the focus group
  - We are conducting focus groups with elementary school teachers to gather feedback on the kinds of competencies teachers need to help children who are bullied or at risk of being bullied at school. In our experience talking with teachers, we are learning that it can be really difficult for teachers to help children who are truly being bullied and there are things [about that child/teachers' work loads/lack of time] that make it challenging. If it were easy, we probably wouldn't be here.
- Review what is being asked of participants and **obtain informed consent**
  - In the first part of the focus group, we ask for your impressions about the role of teachers in helping chronically bullied children. We want to learn from you about what types of things predict whether teachers are helpful or not. We will then get your impressions about specific competencies for teachers that were derived from scientific research. We are hoping that your feedback can make our framework of research-derived competencies more relevant to practicing teachers. We are hoping that you will collaborate with us in our journey of learning and discovery.
- Discuss confidentiality and its limits for the focus group and for research
  - Please note that we will be audio recording the group's discussion so we can accurately capture all that is said. We won't identify anyone when we use the feedback from these groups; your comments will remain anonymous.
  - We ask that what is said in the focus group remains confidential, we want folks to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up
- Address any questions or concerns
- Discuss focus group format:
  - We ask that you do the talking
  - Hope all will participate, but ask that only one person speak at a time
  - There is no right or wrong answer to our questions
  - We welcome different opinions and beliefs, and it is ok to respectfully disagree
  - We will likely ask questions to learn more about what you shared with us.
- Complete **Brief Demographic Questions**

### **START AUDIO RECORDING NOW.**

#### **Generative Discussion [20 minutes]:**

First, I'd like to start off by asking generally about the role of teachers in helping bullied children.

- 1) What kinds and types of anti-bullying training do teachers get exposure to?
- 2) I assume there is a range of approaches that teachers take to helping children who are bullied. My guess is some teachers are better at this than others. Do you guys agree?
- 3) For teachers who handle bullying well, what sets them apart? What's different or unique about them? (e.g., training [knowledge], personality [attitude], practice [behaviors])
  - a. Information or knowledge that they have that other teachers don't?
  - b. Attitudes or beliefs they hold that other teachers don't?

- c. Skills they use that other teachers don't use or can't use?

**Reactive Discussion [50 minutes]: (Gaps, concerns about feasibility, practicality)**

**A) Knowledge OR Attitudes [15-20 minutes]-**

- a. Now, I am going to share with you a list of things that research would suggest are useful (things for teachers to know about/attitudes for teachers to have), and I'd like to get your reactions [read through list].
  - i. **General:** What do you think?
    1. Is the list clear? Is anything missing?
    2. Do teachers already (know/believe) these things?
    3. Would teachers need training for these?
    4. Do these things matter in helping bullied children?
      - a. If teachers (knew about/believed) these things, would it help bullied children? Could it be harmful?
    5. Is this information useful for teachers? What would need to change for it to be helpful/useful for practicing teachers?

**B) Skills [30-35 minutes]-**

- a. Now, I am going to share with you a list of competencies that research would suggest are useful skills/strategies for teachers to use, and I'd like to get your reactions [read through list].
  - i. **General:** What do you think?
    1. How clear are these? Is anything missing?
    2. Do teachers generally use these strategies?
    3. Would teachers need training to learn how to use these skills?
    4. If teachers used these strategies, would it help bullied children?
      - a. Could these strategies be harmful?
    5. Is this information useful for teachers? What would need to change for it to be (more) helpful/useful for practicing teachers?

**C) Framework [5-10 minutes]-**

- a. Imagine that these competencies go together as a larger framework that makes up knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Do you think there's value in providing this information to teachers as a resource or tool?
- b. If so, what would be an effective way to share this information with other teachers (in-service, manual/resources)?
- c. Do you have any other recommendations for the overall framework to make it more relevant or user friendly for teachers?

**Wrap-Up [5 minutes]:**

- 1) Ask participants to complete **Framework Questionnaire**
- 2) Thanks for participating; pass out **gift cards** and get **signature on gift card form**



## Focus Group Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Prefer not to say
  
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
  - Caucasian
  - African American
  - Pacific Islander/Asian
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - Prefer not to say
  
3. How many years of experience do you have teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What grade do you teach?
  - Pre-K
  - First
  - Second
  - Third
  - Fourth
  - Fifth
  - Sixth or above
  
5. How much training have you had that deals specifically with school bullying?

<i>None at all</i>			<i>Some</i>			<i>Quite a lot</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
  
6. What anti-bullying training have you had? (Check all that apply)
  - No training
  - Took a pre-service class or seminar that addressed issues related to bullying
  - Attended an in-service training at school
  - Attended an anti-bullying workshop or conference
  - Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

## Framework Questionnaire

**Instructions:** Please circle the number that best corresponds with how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements that ask about using the framework as a whole.

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Somewhat disagree
- 4 = Neutral
- 5 = Somewhat agree
- 6 = Agree
- 7 = Strong Agree

1. I feel very confident I could use this framework.
2. I imagine that other teachers would use this framework.
3. I found this framework of teacher competencies unnecessarily complex.
4. I feel the framework would be very cumbersome to use.
5. I think that I would need a lot of additional support when using this framework.
6. I need to learn a lot of things before I could actually use this framework.

## **Informed Consent for Researcher Participants**

IRB Protocol #: 15-12-410

Approved: 12/15/16

Expires: 12/14/16

**Title:** Development of a Competency-Based Framework for Teachers to Help Chronically Bullied Children

**Description:** The purpose of this study is to gather bullying researchers' feedback on a competency-based framework to guide teachers' efforts to help children who are chronically bullied or at risk of being chronically bullied. In addition to providing brief demographic information, you will be asked to review the competencies that make up knowledge, attitudes, and skills teachers can use when helping bullied children. You will be asked to provide ratings about your general impressions of the framework. Open-ended questions will be used to gather recommendations on how to improve the framework to better reflect the state of the science on bullying prevention.

**Risks and benefits:** There are no known risks to participation. A benefit is that the first 25 participants will receive a \$10 Amazon.com e-gift card for participating in the study. Additionally, you will be contributing to a framework to guide teachers' efforts in supporting chronically bullied children, which could be used to improve teacher training and bullying prevention efforts.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation at any time, for any reason, without penalty.

**Confidentiality:** Your data will be maintained confidential to the fullest extent allowed by university policy and the law. Once we have emailed your gift card for reimbursement, your email address will be removed from the database so that your responses will be rendered anonymous. Your data may contribute to publications or presentations in a conference, but such data will be reported in aggregate form.

**Right to discontinue:** You have the right to discontinue participating in this study at any time, for any reason. Choosing to discontinue your participation will not prevent you from receiving any incentives promised to you as a participant of this study.

**What do I do if I have questions about the research study?:** You have the right to contact the Principal Investigator or Faculty Mentor as listed below for any concerns that you may have. You can also contact the University of Arkansas office of Research Compliance (see contact information below) if you have questions about your rights as a participant or to discuss any concerns about or problems with the research.

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**Informed Consent:** I have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and benefits, the confidentiality, as well as the option to discontinue participation in the study at any time. The investigators have answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. By clicking on the “**Next**” button below, I indicate that I freely agree to participate in this study.

## Researcher Survey Questions

**Instructions:** Please answer the following demographic questions.

- 1) What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Prefer not to say
  
- 2) In what country do you reside?
  - United States
  - Canada
  - Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
  
- 3) How many years of experience do you have conducting bullying- and/or victimization-related research?
  - \_\_\_\_\_

### **Introduction to Framework & Purpose of Study:**

We are interested in developing a competency-based framework to guide teachers' efforts to support elementary school students who are repeatedly bullied (or at serious risk for being repeatedly bullied). Currently, we identified a tentative list of 25 competencies drawn from research on teachers' role in school bullying, peer victimization, and peer dynamics. With this brief survey, we hope to learn how researchers with expertise in these areas view this developing framework. The competency framework is broken into three sections: knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Below are questions about each section and the framework as a whole.

### **Knowledge-Based Competencies & Questions**

#### **Knowledge about Bullying:**

1. Knows how to define bullying (i.e., what it is and what it is not)
2. Knows about the different forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, cyber)
3. Knows that many children experience peer victimization at some point, but that only a few are chronically bullied
4. Knows that bullying can be harmful and has been linked to academic, social, physical, and mental health problems
5. Knows that bullying usually occurs in peer groups that involve both bullies and bystanders
6. Knows that bullying is more likely to occur in less structured settings such as the playground, lunchroom, and hallways
7. Knows that teachers can influence peer group processes as a way to reduce bullying and peer victimization
- 4) To what degree does this list of competencies cover the knowledge teachers should have when trying to help elementary school students who are repeatedly bullied?
  - 1 = Extremely poorly
  - 2 = Poorly
  - 3 = Somewhat poorly

- 4 = Adequately
- 5 = Somewhat well
- 6 = Well
- 7 = Extremely well

5) What might be missing? [open-ended]

### **Attitude-Based Competencies & Questions**

#### **Attitudes toward Bullying:**

1. Believes bullying is neither normal nor something that students should manage on their own
  2. Believes that it is harmful to blame victims for being bullied
  3. Believes helping victims requires teachers who are caring and willing to face the challenges
- 6) To what degree does this list of competencies cover the attitudes teachers should have when helping elementary school students who are repeatedly bullied?

- 1 = Extremely poorly
- 2 = Poorly
- 3 = Somewhat poorly
- 4 = Adequately
- 5 = Somewhat well
- 6 = Well
- 7 = Extremely well

1) What might be missing? [open-ended]

### **Skill-Based Competencies & Questions**

#### **Skills:**

##### **Skills to prevent and limit bullying:**

1. Provides an emotionally supportive classroom environment
2. Models and conveys clear anti-bullying attitudes
3. Establishes and enforces clear rules designed to prevent bullying and promote pro-social behaviors
4. Closely supervises school settings in which bullying is likely to occur

##### **Skills to assess and respond to bullying:**

5. Regularly assesses children's involvement in bullying and peer victimization as a way to identify students who are at risk for chronic victimization
6. Distinguishes bullying incidents from other types of student misbehavior
7. Encourages and coaches students to defend victims of bullying
8. Separates bullies and victims using seating arrangements and other accommodations

##### **Skills to support the victim:**

9. Involves parents as needed to protect and support victims
10. Teaches victims more adaptive ways to interact with peers and cope with bullying
11. Uses classroom structures and activities to promote peer acceptance of children who are socially isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied
12. Engages in positive and observable interactions with children who are socially isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied as a way to counter peers' negative attitudes

13. Provides children who are chronically bullied or at-risk for being chronically bullied with a consistently positive and supportive teacher-student relationship

**Skills to seek additional help:**

14. Refers chronically bullied children for further evaluation and intervention as needed

15. Recognizes the need for and seeks out additional training, consultation, and support as needed

2) To what degree does this list of competencies adequately cover the skills teachers should use to help elementary school students who are repeatedly bullied?

1 = Extremely poorly

2 = Poorly

3 = Somewhat poorly

4 = Adequately

5 = Somewhat well

6 = Well

7 = Extremely well

3) What might be missing? [open-ended]

**Final Overview and Recommendations**

4) What is your impression of this newly developed framework as currently drafted?

1 = Very negative

2 = Negative

3 = Somewhat negative

4 = Neutral

5 = Somewhat positive

6 = Positive

7 = Very positive

5) Please explain your rating. [open-ended]

6) What recommendations might you have for improving the framework? [open-ended]

7) Imagine that a school district asked you to train teachers to help elementary school students who were repeatedly bullied. To what degree would the competencies presented here provide a foundation for such a training?

7 = Extremely strong foundation

6 = Strong

5 = Somewhat strong

4 = Neutral

3 = Somewhat weak

2 = Weak

1 = Extremely Weak foundation

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent and Measures for Study 2

#### **Informed Consent for the Teacher Survey**

IRB Approval #: 15-12-410

Date approved: 12/15/15-12/15/16

**Title:** Assessing Teachers' Competencies in Helping Bullied Children

**Description:** The purpose of this study is to assess classroom teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in supporting children who are repeatedly bullied or at-risk for being repeatedly bullied. The study will also assess teachers' confidence in managing school bullying, their own experiences with bullying, and how supported they feel at school. In addition, teachers will be asked questions about how lunchroom seating is determined for the students in their classroom.

**Risks and benefits:** There are no known risks to participation. All participants will be compensated with a \$15 e-gift card for their time. Additionally, you will be helping our effort to develop a guide for teachers to support children who are repeatedly bullied.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to skip questions and you can discontinue at any time, for any reason, without penalty.

**Confidentiality:** Your data will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by university policy and the law. Once we have emailed your gift card for reimbursement, your email address will be removed from the database so that your responses will be rendered anonymous. If the information you provide is used in a scientific publication or presentation, it will be reported in aggregate form only with no identifying information.

**Right to discontinue:** You have the right to discontinue participating in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Choosing to discontinue your participation will not prevent you from receiving any incentives promised to you as a participant of this study.

**What do I do if I have questions about the research study?** You have the right to contact the Research Team members listed below for any concerns that you may have. You can also contact the University of Arkansas Office of Research Compliance (see contact information below) if you have questions about your rights as a participant or to discuss any concerns about or problems with the research.

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**Informed Consent:** I have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and benefits, the confidentiality, as well as the option to discontinue participation in the study at any time. The investigators have answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. By clicking on the “Next” button below, I indicate that I freely agree to participate in this study.

**NEXT**

## Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?
  - Female
  - Male
  - Prefer not to say
  
2. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
  - American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - Asian / Pacific Islander
  - Black or African American
  - Hispanic / Latino/a
  - White / Caucasian
  - Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)
  
3. What is the name of the elementary school where you teach?
  - Jones Elementary
  - T.G. Smith Elementary
  - Bernice Young Elementary
  - Walker Elementary
  - Turnbow Elementary
  - Bayyari Elementary
  - Monitor Elementary
  - Elmdale Elementary
  - George Elementary
  - Parson Hills Elementary
  - Sonora Elementary
  - Other (please specify):
  
4. How many total years of experience do you have teaching? [Open-ended]
  
5. What grade(s) do you currently teach? Check all that apply.
  - Pre-K
  - Kindergarten
  - First
  - Second
  - Third
  - Fourth
  - Fifth

- Sixth or above

6. What grade(s) have you taught? Check all that apply.

- Pre-K
- Kindergarten
- First
- Second
- Third
- Fourth
- Fifth
- Sixth or above

## Experience with School Bullying

7. Which of the following has shaped how you respond to school bullying? Check all that apply.
- College coursework (e.g., pre-service class or training)
  - In-service training at my school
  - Anti-bullying workshop or conference outside of school
  - Conversations with and observations of other school staff
  - My own research and reading (e.g., books, articles online)
  - My own experience of being bullied as a child
  - Other (please describe) [open-ended]
8. Which of the following does your school use to prevent and manage school bullying? Check all that apply.
- Teacher in-service
  - An administrative team
  - A school-wide committee
  - Grade-level teams
  - A formal (published) prevention program
  - Other (please describe) [open-ended]
  - I'm not sure
  - My school does not have any formal anti-bullying program or policy
9. Please estimate the total amount of time spent receiving formal anti-bullying training (e.g., seminar, workshop) over the course of your training and professional career.
- None
  - < 1 hour
  - 1-2 hours
  - 3-5 hours
  - 6-8 hours
  - More than one full day
  - More than two full days
10. In any given year, on average, please estimate the number of children in your class who are...
1. At-risk for being repeatedly bullied: [open-ended]
  2. Repeatedly bullied: [open-ended]
  3. Suffering from the negative consequences of being repeatedly bullied: [open-ended]
11. Please use the following scale to rate your own experiences with bullying as a child.

Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Sometimes      Frequently      Usually  
Always

When you were young, how much were you...

1. Hit, pushed, or kicked by another student
2. Left out of activities or not talked to by other students
3. Called names, threatened, or teased by another student

## Self-Efficacy

Please use the scale below to say how confident you are about what to do when students are being bullied.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neural    Agree    Strongly Agree  
I feel confident....

1. ...that I will be able to deal with peer bullying in the classroom.
2. ...in my abilities to know which students are “at risk” to be repeatedly harassed by other students.
3. ...that I am as prepared as other teachers in my classroom management skills
4. ...that I will know what to do when a child comes to me for help with being bullied by other students.
5. ...that if two students were fighting, I would know what to do.
6. ...about how to handle incidents of verbal teasing in the classroom.
7. ...that if I saw a student picking on another student, I would know what to do.
8. ...in my abilities to create a nonviolent classroom.
9. ...that if I saw a student being intentionally left out of activities, I would know what to do.
10. ...that if I overheard students talking about another student being the target of peer bullying, I would know what to do.
11. ...that I know how to deal with peer bullying at school.
12. ...in my abilities to help students learn to handle conflicts that come up in the classroom.
13. ...I will be good at classroom management.
14. ...that peer bullying in the classroom will not be a problem for me.
15. ...that I will be able to consistently enforce classroom rules and consequences.
16. ...in my abilities to develop and communicate clear and specific rules.
17. ...in my abilities to solve conflicts between students.

## Connectedness & Support

The following questions ask about how connected you feel to your school. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale below:

- Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree
1. I like to work at this school.
  2. My ideas are listened to.
  3. I am someone to count on.
  4. People care about me at this school.
  5. I feel wanted and needed at this school.
  6. I feel safe at this school.
  7. I receive recognition for doing a good job at this school.
  8. I am inspired to do my best at this school.
  9. Staff like each other.
  10. Staff are friendly to each other.
  11. Staff trust and have confidence in each other.
  12. Staff help each other.
  13. Staff respect each other.
  14. The principal shows staff appreciation.
  15. The principal conveys what's expected of staff.
  16. The principal looks out for staff.
  17. The principal is friendly and approachable.
  18. Students feel staff are "on their side."
  19. Staff feel pride in the school and its students.
  20. Staff really care about the students.
  21. There are high expectations for students to achieve at this school.

## **What I Know, Believe, and Do about School Bullying**

Please use the following questions to tell us about what you know, believe, and do about school bullying.

### **What I Know about School Bullying**

- 1) I know what bullying is and how it differs from other peer interactions (e.g., conflict, play)
- 2) I know the different forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying)
- 3) I know that many students are bullied at some point but that only a few are chronically bullied
- 4) I know that some bullies lack social skills and are unpopular but that others are socially skillful and popular
- 5) I know that some bullied students are purely victims, but others are both victims and bullies
- 6) I know that bullying can be harmful and is predictive of problems (e.g., academic, social, physical, emotional) that can be long lasting
- 7) I know that bullying often involves groups of peers that include both bullies and bystanders
- 8) I know that bullying is more likely to occur in less structured settings (e.g., playground, hallways)
- 9) I know that students who are rejected or not accepted by peers are at risk of being bullied

*For each knowledge question, we ask the following 2 questions:*

1. What's the extent of your knowledge about this?
  - None
  - Minimal
  - Some
  - Moderate
  - Good
  - A lot
  - Extensive
2. How essential is this knowledge to helping children who are repeatedly bullied?
  - Not at all essential
  - Somewhat unessential
  - Slightly unessential
  - Neutral
  - Slightly essential
  - Somewhat essential
  - Very essential

### **What I Believe about School Bullying**

- 1) I believe bullying is not a natural or acceptable part of growing up
- 2) I believe that bullied students should not have to manage bullying on their own



- 3) I believe teachers have a responsibility to intervene when bullying occurs
- 4) I believe that it is harmful to blame bullied students for being bullied
- 5) I believe helping bullied students is important even though it can be difficult and challenging
- 6) I believe teachers have a responsibility to support students' social and emotional learning

***For each belief, we ask the following 2 questions:***

1. To what extent do you believe this?
  - Strongly disbelieve
  - Disbelieve
  - Somewhat disbelieve
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat believe
  - Believe
  - Strongly Believe
  
2. How essential is this attitude for helping children who are repeatedly bullied?
  - Not at all essential
  - Somewhat unessential
  - Slightly unessential
  - Neutral
  - Slightly essential
  - Somewhat essential
  - Very essential

**What I Do about School Bullying**

- 1) I periodically assess or monitor students' peer relationships as a way to track who is being bullied or at risk for being bullied
- 2) I create and maintain a safe and emotionally supportive classroom environment
- 3) I model and convey strong anti-bullying attitudes
- 4) I establish clear rules and consequences designed to reduce bullying and promote positive behavior
- 5) I closely supervise settings (e.g., hallways, playground) where school bullying is likely to occur
- 6) I use seating arrangements and other strategies to separate bullies from those who they bully
- 7) I am positive and supportive toward students who are being bullied or at-risk for being bullied
- 8) I work collaboratively with parents of bullies as well as with parents of students being bullied
- 9) I teach bullied students adaptive ways to manage conflict and cope with bullying
- 10) I encourage and coach students on how to defend classmates who are being bullied

- 11) I use classroom activities that promote peers' acceptance of students who are isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied
- 12) I interact in positive, observable ways with students who are being bullied or at risk of being bullied as a way to counteract negative peer attitudes
- 13) I access and use only evidence-based anti-bullying resources (e.g., books, videos)
- 14) When it's needed, I will seek anti-bullying training, support, or consultation (in or out of school)
- 15) When it's needed, I will refer bullied children for further evaluation or intervention

***For each skill, we ask the following 2 questions:***

1. To what extent do you do this?
  - Not at all
  - Rarely
  - Occasionally
  - Sometimes
  - Frequently
  - Usually
  - Always
  
2. How essential is this skill for helping children who are repeatedly bullied?
  - Not at all essential
  - Somewhat unessential
  - Slightly unessential
  - Neutral
  - Slightly essential
  - Somewhat essential
  - Very essential

## Teachers' Feedback on Competency Domains

We are trying to develop a framework to guide teachers as they support students who are repeatedly bullied or at-risk for being repeatedly bullied. For now, the framework has 30 components spread across 6 domains. We would like to get your feedback about each domain.

**Knowledge Components: Please look over the components in this domain and rate the domain on the following two questions.**

- 1) Teachers know what bullying is and how it differs from other peer interactions (e.g., conflict, play)
- 2) Teachers know the different forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying)
- 3) Teachers know that many students are bullied at some point but that only a few are chronically bullied
- 4) Teachers know that some bullies lack social skills and are unpopular but that others are socially skillful and popular
- 5) Teachers know that some bullied students are purely victims, but others are both victims and bullies
- 6) Teachers know that bullying can be harmful and is predictive of problems (e.g., academic, social, physical, emotional) that can be long lasting
- 7) Teachers know that bullying often involves groups of peers that include both bullies and bystanders
- 8) Teachers know that bullying is more likely to occur in less structured settings (e.g., playground, hallways)
- 9) Teachers know that students who are rejected or not accepted by peers are at risk of being bullied

1. How realistic is it to expect that you would have this knowledge?

- Very unrealistic
- Unrealistic
- Somewhat unrealistic
- Neutral
- Somewhat realistic
- Realistic
- Very realistic

2. To be competent in this domain, how much additional training would you need?

- No additional training
- < 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than one full day

- More than two full days

**Attitudinal Components: Please look over the components in this domain and rate the domain on the following two questions.**

- 1) Teachers believe that bullying is not a natural or acceptable part of growing up
- 2) Teachers believe that bullied students should not have to manage bullying on their own
- 3) Teachers believe that teachers have a responsibility to intervene when bullying occurs
- 4) Teachers believe that it is harmful to blame bullied students for being bullied
- 5) Teachers believe that helping bullied students is important even though it can be difficult and challenging
- 6) Teachers believe that teachers have a responsibility to support students' social and emotional learning

3. How realistic is it to expect that you would have these attitudes?

- Very unrealistic
- Unrealistic
- Somewhat unrealistic
- Neutral
- Somewhat realistic
- Realistic
- Very realistic

4. To be competent in this domain, how much additional training would you need?

- No additional training
- < 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than one full day
- More than two full days

**Skill Components: Please look over the components in the following domains and rate each domain on the following two questions.**

**Skills to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization:**

- 1) Teachers periodically assess or monitor students' peer relationships as a way to track who is being bullied or at risk for being bullied
- 2) Teachers create and maintain a safe and emotionally supportive classroom environment
- 3) Teachers model and convey strong anti-bullying attitudes
- 4) Teachers establish clear rules and consequences designed to reduce bullying and promote positive behavior
- 5) Teachers closely supervise settings (e.g., hallways, playground) where school bullying is likely to occur

5. How realistic is it to expect that you would have these skills?
- Very unrealistic
  - Unrealistic
  - Somewhat unrealistic
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat realistic
  - Realistic
  - Very realistic
6. To be competent in this domain, how much additional training would you need?
- No additional training
  - < 1 hour
  - 1-2 hours
  - 3-5 hours
  - 6-8 hours
  - More than one full day
  - More than two full days

**Skills for supporting victims of bullying:**

- 1) Teachers use seating arrangements and other strategies to separate bullies from those who they bully
- 2) Teachers are positive and supportive toward students who are being bullied or at-risk for being bullied
- 3) Teachers work collaboratively with parents of bullies as well as with parents of students being bullied
- 4) Teachers teach bullied students adaptive ways to manage conflict and cope with bullying

7. How realistic is it to expect that you would have these skills?
- Very unrealistic
  - Unrealistic
  - Somewhat unrealistic
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat realistic
  - Realistic
  - Very realistic
8. To be competent in this domain, how much additional training would you need?
- No additional training
  - < 1 hour

- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than one full day
- More than two full days

**Skills that influence peer processes that maintain victimization:**

- 1) Teachers encourage and coach students on how to defend classmates who are being bullied
- 2) Teachers use classroom activities that promote peers' acceptance of students who are isolated, rejected, and at-risk for being bullied
- 3) Teachers interact in positive, observable ways with students who are being bullied or at risk of being bullied as a way to counteract negative peer attitudes

9. How realistic is it to expect that you would have these skills?

- Very unrealistic
- Unrealistic
- Somewhat unrealistic
- Neutral
- Somewhat realistic
- Realistic
- Very realistic

10. To be competent in this domain, how much additional training would you need?

- No additional training
- < 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than one full day
- More than two full days

**Skills for seeking additional support and resources:**

- 1) Teachers access and use only evidence-based anti-bullying resources (e.g., books, videos)
- 2) When it's needed, teachers will seek anti-bullying training, support, or consultation (in or out of school)
- 3) When it's needed, teachers will refer bullied children for further evaluation or intervention

11. How realistic is it to expect that you would have these skills?

- Very unrealistic
- Unrealistic

- Somewhat unrealistic
- Neutral
- Somewhat realistic
- Realistic
- Very realistic

12. To be competent in this domain, how much additional training would you need?

- No additional training
- < 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than one full day
- More than two full days

## Rank Ordering of Competency Domains

Please rank these 6 domains in terms of their importance for supporting students who are repeatedly bullied (1 = *most important*; 6 = *least important*):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers' knowledge about bullying
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers' anti-bullying attitudes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers' skills to identify and prevent bullying and peer victimization
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers' skills for supporting victims of bullying
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers' skills that influence peer processes that maintain victimization
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers' skills for seeking additional support and resources