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THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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As school safety periodically takes center stage in the public arena because of media coverage of horrific events, there is often a predictable array of simplistic and sometimes sensational pronouncements on how to prevent school violence. Suggestions that may sound appealing on the surface but lack empirical support have included measures such as implementing zero tolerance policies with severe penalties, mandating gun-free zones, and arming teachers and other school staff members. This book focuses on more complex issues that inform possible solutions, drawing on a transdisciplinary research base and spanning topics including, but not limited to, educational administration, schoolwide prevention programming, classroom management, academic curriculum and instruction, social–emotional–behavioral issues, ecologies of the student, and transactional developmental processes (Sameroff, 2000).

This introductory chapter provides a background and framework for understanding subsequent chapters. It begins by highlighting the detrimental effects of school violence, including student outcomes associated with school violence, disruption, and bullying. It then argues that a transdisciplinary, data-driven approach is needed to effectively address school violence. In particular, prevention and intervention practices must use logic models and theories of change to target the contributing factors and foundational processes associated with school violence. Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners must collaborate to bridge the research-to-practice gap on this important issue. The chapter concludes with a brief road map of the book.

DATA ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND BULLYING

Schools are safe places, especially compared with many other community locations (Nekvasil, Cornell, & Huang, 2015). Although sensational media accounts may create an impression that schools are dangerous, there is a chance of a student shooting at a particular school about once every 6,000 years (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). Recent analysis of federal homicide data by Nekvasil and colleagues found that multiple-casualty homicides are more frequent in restaurants than in schools, and the authors raised concerns about public misperceptions of school violence, questioning why violence in restaurants has not come to national attention, as has school violence.

Multiple surveys provide data on U.S.-based and international school violence, bullying, and related behaviors, including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the School Crime Supplement survey, a subset of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS); and the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey, administered by the World Health Organization. Several other U.S.-based national surveys also inform these issues. Most data on U.S. school violence have demonstrated substantial declines in problem behaviors since the early 1990s; however, some indicators show fairly stable patterns of violence-related behaviors over the years. Overall, there have been significant declines in violent victimization at and away from school from 1992 to 2004, subsequent minor declines from 2004 to 2010, and fluctuations from 2010 to 2014 (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016). Rates of students reporting having carried a weapon in school at least 1 day in the past month showed declines from about 12% in 1993 to 6% in 2003, followed by a slight increase to 6.5% in 2005, with a subsequent decline to about 5% in 2013. However, percentages of high school students who reported having been in a fight in school and

threatened or injured with a weapon at school from 1993 to 2013 have not declined greatly.

Bullying victimization has been pervasive, but there have been recent fluctuations in victimization data, with rates of bullying victimization in U.S. schools varying across the three surveys previously mentioned, some of which do not allow for concurrent data comparisons. For example, 2013 YRBS data show that overall, about 21% of ninth- through 12th-grade students reported having been bullied at school during the previous 12 months, with about 24% of females and about 16% of males reporting bullying victimization. Similar gender differences in rates existed across race/ethnicity, with overall rates of 22%, 13%, and 18% for White, Black, and Hispanic students, respectively. By comparison, 12% to 15% of 11- to 13-year-olds reported having been bullied for the 2009–2010 school year, based on the HBSC survey (Currie et al., 2012), with boys having slightly higher levels of reporting being bullied at least twice in the past few months and younger students reporting higher levels of victimization compared with older students. Data from the United States were not included in the 2013–2014 administration of the HBSC survey. The percentage of students ages 12 to 18 reporting having been bullied at some time during the school year was 22% in 2013, compared with 28% in 2005, 2009, and 2011 and 32% in 2007 (Zhang et al., 2016). Depending on what is being measured, and how, the picture can change dramatically. Survey-question time frames vary across these data sources from reporting bullying experiences at school in the past 2 months to the past 12 months (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014).

Data on bullying and cyberbullying have varied over recent years. The NCVS included student reports of bullying victimization at school from 2005 to 2011, with approximately 35% to 40% of sixth graders reporting the highest levels compared with about 20% of 12th graders. Those figures dropped to an overall average of 22% in 2013, with 28% of sixth graders and 14% of 12th graders reporting having been bullied at school. The 2013 rates, taken from the School Crime Supplement to the NCVS, are fairly consistent with recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention YRBS.

The 2013 YRBS data show that overall, 15% of students reported that they were electronically bullied (cyberbullied) during the previous 12 months (school-related), with similar levels across grades and rates of 21% for females and 9% for males. White females reported the highest levels of being bullied electronically (25%), compared with 11% and 17% for Black and Hispanic females, respectively. Cyberbullying rates for Black and Hispanic males were 7% and 8%, respectively. By comparison, a meta-analysis (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014) reported on several studies that found close to 75% of youth having experienced some form of cyberbullying.

OUTCOMES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE, DISRUPTION, AND BULLYING

Students directly affected by school violence, disruption, and bullying have demonstrated short- and long-term harm, such as increased anxiety, difficulties maintaining positive friendships, social exclusion and loneliness, reduced self-esteem, greater risk for depression, attention problems, cognitive processing difficulty, reduced motivation, disengagement from learning activities, and school avoidance (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2010; Delaney-Black et al., 2002; Flannery, Wester, & Singer, 2004; Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Ladd, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005; Thomas, Bierman, & the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2006). These are not necessarily unidirectional outcomes reflecting isolated cause-and-effect linkages; rather, they are likely part of longer-term reciprocal, social–ecological, and transactional developments. These longer term processes are connected to complex transactional trajectories, involving a range of problems with behavior, emotional self-regulation, peer relationship skills, social problem solving, engagement at school, and academic success.

Media accounts of school violence have drawn public attention to more severe events, such as school shootings, but research has demonstrated serious harm from persistent low-level aggression and incivility in schools (Arseneault et al., 2006; Ladd, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). Students experiencing prolonged low-level aggression in school have been found to be more aggressive, have less positive future expectations, and perceive school as less safe, compared with students overall (Boxer, Edwards-Leeper, Goldstein, Musher-Eizenman, & Dubow, 2003; Thomas et al., 2006). Skiba and colleagues (2004) reported that students' perceptions of a safe school were influenced by their sense of connectedness and school climate as well as experiences with incivility at school (Skiba et al., 2004). Mayer (2010) reported on an analysis of the NCVS School Crime Supplement data sets from 2001 to 2005 using structural equation modeling (SEM). He found that incivility variables helped explain close to double the variance (31%–45% vs. 17%–25%) in respondent data on students' anxiety, fear, and avoidant behaviors as compared with a similar model omitting the incivility variable, representing a latent factor on school disorder with data on gang and drug activity, theft, and explicit personal harm. The findings from that SEM analysis, which were also supported by separate regression analysis on data from a subset of the model, further demonstrated the linkage between incivility experiences at school and harmful outcomes for students.

Bullies, victims of bullying, and combination bully–victims experience multiple types of psychological problems as a result of their experiences. Victims of bullying demonstrate elevated levels of depression, anxiety, social adjustment difficulties, and health problems compared with fellow students overall, with difficulties continuing into adult life for some (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Espelage, Low, & De La Rue, 2012; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011). Students who are victims of cyberbullying demonstrate problems similar to those of traditional victims of bullying, with added risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010). As a group, all of these students experience lower academic performance (grade point average, standardized test scores, graduation rates) and reduced engagement in school activities in high schools with elevated rates of bullying and teasing (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011). Bullies have a higher risk for adult transition problems and later involvement with criminal justice system than do nonbullies (Bender & Lösel, 2011; Cornell et al., 2013; Farrington & Ttofi, 2011). Taken together, these findings suggest an unmet need for effective prevention and promotion efforts to address violence and bullying at school.

A TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

We use the term *transdisciplinary* purposefully, as it can encompass a distinct and advantageous perspective and approach, compared with the terms *cross-disciplinary* and *interdisciplinary*. Although definitions and usage of these three terms can vary, and sometimes they have been used interchangeably, *cross-disciplinary* can refer to considering work from the viewpoint of another discipline, whereas *interdisciplinary* often implies some type of collaborative approach, with participants drawing from their respective disciplinary knowledge. In contrast, *transdisciplinary* suggests a higher level of synthesis across disciplines, transcending distinct discipline-specific views (Choi & Pak, 2006; Jensenius, 2012). Research across multiple allied disciplines can inform progress more broadly, and a transdisciplinary approach can yield benefits that may be unobtainable through more narrowly defined, singular theoretical orientations. The contents of this book highlight transdisciplinary knowledge that is relevant to understanding school violence and promoting school safety.

Frameworks and lenses for considering school safety and violence prevention include cognitive/social–ecological, developmental, behavioral, public health, multicultural, and life-course, with few distinct boundaries

separating these approaches as they address areas of common concern. Cognitive–behavioral interventions that address anger, aggression, anxiety, and related challenges span several of these theoretical frameworks. Developmental cascades bridging early aggression to later academic failure and dropout inform longer-term child and adolescent trajectories, including life-course perspectives. Many schoolwide prevention programs are deeply rooted in public health theory, yet critical ethnographic and related qualitative research has explicated important structures and processes that impact individual student, family, and community factors, many of which are culturally bound (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

School violence prevention and health promotion (e.g., positive youth development) is not the exclusive domain of education or psychology. Education and its allied fields address school safety issues, sharing a common professional heritage linked to research, policy, and practice. Disciplinary boundaries remain somewhat fluid, and tools for researching prevention and intervention programs as well as standards for what research is considered evidence-based, though varying, often overlap (Mayer, 2012). Allied disciplines such as juvenile justice; mental health; social welfare; school, clinical, counseling, and community psychology; and sociology pursue a variety of differing so-called mid-range theories, yet their individual lines of inquiry provide a confluence of research streams addressing how schools function; student engagement at school; school climate, including physical and emotional safety; collaboration among school community stakeholders; and structures and processes that help facilitate critical academic and social–behavioral goals (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Lessons learned across these disciplines inform progress in school safety promotion and violence prevention.

LOGIC MODELS AND THEORIES OF CHANGE

Logic models and theories of change play a critical role in the research-to-practice process. More generally, understanding and facilitating change is linked to using a model that bridges prior research to intervention goals, employing appropriate measurement and analytical tools, with a well-integrated approach. Logic models are useful as a descriptive tool for understanding the *what* of the intervention, providing information on components. Typically, they include data on intervention inputs, activities, outputs, and intermediate and long-term outcomes. Theories of change or action are often more detailed and nuanced, helping to explicate the *how* and *why* of change. They include information on prerequisite assumptions and related indicators that can help determine whether or not, and the degree to which, critical

components in a model are in play (and thus the likelihood of a successful intervention).

A transdisciplinary approach can leverage different theoretical models while using varying standards for the evidence base. Narrowly defined theoretical models that may be linked to specific disorders identified in psychology can result in highly focused outcomes but are generally limited in their usefulness to inform more broad-based, effective interventions (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000). Conversely, complex models may align well with an array of process factors and proximal and distal drivers of change, but such models often greatly increase the logistical and analytical challenges linked to school improvement efforts and related research (Slavin, 2008). Furthermore, research that lacks sufficient attention to known and suspected moderators and mediators can severely compromise prevention and related research efforts (Clingempeel & Henggeler, 2002).

BRIDGING RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

The larger process of beneficial change bridges research, policy, and practice, yet these systems tend to be loosely aligned and are often resistant to efforts toward integrative functioning. Research, policy, and practice each have their unique attributes and systemic facilitators and constraints. Although there are often opportunities for coordinated work across these three domains in advancing the human condition, leveraging beyond just research, their intersection can be bound by historical, political, financial, and institutional factors. University researchers often exist within distinct disciplinary silos that can inhibit transdisciplinary progress advancing the knowledge base, despite the fact that academicians across allied disciplines often address similar areas of human service needs (Mayer, 2012). These silos can simultaneously be both liberating and constraining, allowing for deep investigations into highly focused phenomena, while at the same time limiting application to more complex facets of the human condition. Policy at the federal, state, and local levels often falls in the province of political leaders and key public agency officials and leadership teams (e.g., state and local superintendents, boards of education). Federal and state educational policy is typically subject to formal review protocols, such as notices of proposed rule-making with statute-mandated opportunities for public comment, and although there are avenues for input by researchers and advocacy groups, channels for collaborative policy development are typically limited.

Because research, policy, and practice are so separated, there is a large research-to-practice gap. In fact, in 2001 the Institute of Medicine reported an average 17-year gap from initial findings to widespread use of methods

in medicine (Jensen & Foster, 2010). Teachers of students with disabilities often use practices that are known to be ineffective (Cook, Tankersley, & Landrum, 2009), and despite research indicating that zero tolerance policies are ineffective (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008), many school systems across the United States continue to employ such approaches. Glasgow and Emmons (2007) discussed the need for translational research, transporting evidence-based tools and methods to the real world of practice in naturally occurring settings, applied to authentic populations and local contextual factors. They identified multiple barriers to extending research to practice, including (a) intervention characteristics (e.g., cost, time requirements, necessary training, alignment with user needs, and resistance to sustainability as designed), (b) situation of intended target settings (e.g., competing program demands, program imposed from outside the target institution, financial/organizational instability, needs of clients, limited resources and time), and (c) research design (e.g., limited relevancy to clients and setting; limited evaluation of cost, implementation, and maintenance), and intersections across these three areas. These and related issues can inform our thinking about needs and solutions.

PREVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book is distinct from many other edited texts in that the book follows an intentional design in which chapter content is linked conceptually and practically to be complementary. Collectively, the chapters provide significant breadth and depth to address needs across research, policy, and practice with respect to school safety and violence prevention. Multiple chapter teams worked in collaboration with one another, sharing chapter outlines and early drafts to facilitate an effective integrated approach, efficient topic coverage with minimal unnecessary duplication, and effective transition between chapters. All chapters follow a detailed plan, with new approaches to the respective topics.

This text may be used as an advanced thinking and planning toolbox for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the school community. The book has high potential for use in a variety of courses across the fields of psychology, counseling, school administration, school social work, and allied areas of study. This text can be a valuable resource across the following professional sectors: school psychology, counseling, and school leadership teams; school administration at the local and state levels; human services agency administrators and staff at the local and state levels (including law enforcement, social services, and mental health); and executive, legislative, and judicial branch officials at the local and state levels.

The book has several key strands that span chapters:

- leveraging a transdisciplinary research base with a research-to-practice focus,
- framing key issues and challenges that have impact and relevance across stakeholder groups,
- stressing collaborative health promotion and prevention and/or intervention approaches,
- focusing mainly on school-related issues for preschool through Grade 12,
- emphasizing using data effectively, and
- understanding tensions and trade-offs and addressing structural and systemic barriers to success.

The central aims of this book are to identify and address intersecting challenges and solution paths to promote school safety and prevent violence at school and to enable a wide array of stakeholders to better understand areas of common interest and learn how to work together more collaboratively and effectively. To accomplish these aims, the book is organized in two parts.

Part I, Understanding Foundational Issues, features five chapters that establish a baseline of research-based knowledge while also supporting the reader in framing issues involving more complex challenges. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of existing and historical theories as well as an integrative framework for research, policy, and practice. Chapter 3 identifies various forms of school violence, prevalence rates, and theoretical approaches surrounding school violence, emphasizing how particular schools can assess the various domains of school climate. Chapter 4 articulates the importance of using evidence-based approaches to promote positive youth development and prevent engagement in health-risk behaviors. Chapter 5 discusses the schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports and social–emotional learning approaches, with an emphasis on their applications to school discipline and classroom management and how the integration of systems and strategies found in those two approaches provides the structure and support necessary to achieve the dual aims of school discipline. Chapter 6 focuses on promoting safety, school success, and positive social–emotional–behavioral development for all students, with particular emphasis on at-risk and marginalized students (students with disabilities; lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer students; and students with serious problem behaviors, school failure trajectories, and other forms of marginalization).

Part II, Working on Effective Change, builds on earlier chapters to effectively address real-world challenges. Chapter 7 discusses the importance of collecting and using school data to drive change and reviews strategies to further advance conceptually sound, reliable, and valid measures of school

climate. Chapter 8 argues that safety promotion and violence prevention require leadership teams to act strategically, using data to inform decisions. Chapter 9 provides a metaview of approaches to designing local programming and related promotion and prevention initiatives, as well as a corresponding practical strategy and skills-based toolkit for designing for change. Chapter 10 focuses on crisis prevention, response, and recovery, highlighting two comprehensive and collaborative models grounded in federal guidance and prevention science literature: the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines and the PREPaRE school crisis prevention and intervention model. Chapter 11 explores the roles of professionals in the larger context of school safety, in more general promotion and prevention approaches, and in working as part of a team to design and implement programming changes. Chapter 12 reviews literature on collaboration across policy and practice, including several key dimensions of collaboration for overall school operations, interagency collaborations, school–family–community partnerships, effective school safety programs, and efforts to change school programs for the better. Last, Chapter 13 provides an overview of key issues involved in evaluating school-based violence prevention programs.

CONCLUSION

This book provides a transdisciplinary perspective, featuring insights from teams of leading scholars to advance our understanding of (a) theoretical and empirical foundations of school safety; (b) multiple frameworks and models of promotion, prevention, and intervention; (c) ecological, transactional, systemic, and related methodological factors that drive measurement, problem analysis, and exploration of solution pathways; (d) cutting-edge developments across allied fields; and (e) issues and approaches in collaboration and evaluation.

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