

Anti-School Bullying Forum Theatre in Rural Boarding Middle School in China – Empirical Analysis Based on Programme Practice

Xiuqing Qiao

Department of Psychology, Shandong Normal University, Jinan

Yiou Wang

Shandong Communication and Media College, Jinan

Jing Zhao

Jinan Shidai Chunfeng Youth Public Welfare Development Center, Jinan

Abstract

In 2021, the revised *Law on the Protection of Minors* defined bullying for the first time in legislation in China and clearly stipulated that schools must establish mechanisms to prevent bullying. However, how to establish a working system still needs to be further formulated. This study implemented a semester-long anti-bullying Forum Theatre in a Chinese rural boarding middle school and conducted qualitative and quantitative analyses. Based on the actual conditions, the project introduced the social-emotional learning (SEL) framework as a tool for teaching and assessment. Results showed that bullying had significant negative correlations with SEL. Forum Theatre improved students' SEL, and can be seen as a bridge between learning and doing of SEL. Anti-bullying Forum Theatre is effective and feasible in Chinese education context and needs to be supported by the psychological and personality development of students.

Keywords: anti-bullying Forum Theatre, social-emotional learning (SEL), Chinese rural boarding schools, bullying prevention

Email: qiaoxiuqing1990@163.com

Introduction

Bullying is found in all societies, including modern cultures and ancient civilisations (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Nowadays, bullying is taken seriously worldwide, and has been seen as a significant risk factor and safeguarding issue in minor protection. Bullying prevention requires the joint efforts of science, society, government and more (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). Many campaigns and events are designated for bullying prevention throughout the world. For example, UNESCO decided the first Thursday in November as the International Day Against Violence and Bullying at School, including Cyberbullying¹. Childhood bullying has severe effects on health, resulting in substantial costs for individuals, the bully and bystanders (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) first conducted the international widespread bullying survey in 2015. The results showed that, in four provinces and cities from China (i.e. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Jiangsu), 22.5% of middle school students had experienced verbal, relational or physical bullying multiple times in the past month. This rate is 3.85% points higher than the average of 18.65% (Chen & Zhi, 2017). Some large-scale domestic surveys in China have shown that, compared to students in urban schools, students in rural schools are high-risk groups involved in various types of bullying (Zhu & Chan, 2015).

In recent years, the prevention and treatment of school bullying have aroused extensive discussion and research in China. For example, in 2019, China held the First International Conference on Prevention and Intervention of School Bullying². Many measures and approaches of preventing bullying were applied in schools and communities in China. However, the research on school bullying in China started relatively late (Lu et al., 2017). By reviewing the existing research, studies on the status of bullying have not been clearly explored, and the effect and mechanism of anti-bullying projects have been not fully explored (Yan et al., 2018). Though research is immature, intervention is urgently needed. In 2021, the newly revised *Law on the Protection of Minors* defined bullying for the first time in legislation,

and clearly stipulated that schools must establish mechanisms to prevent bullying³. However, establishing a system to avoid school bullying still needs more empirical evidence and further argumentation by the education administrative department. Therefore, it is essential and urgent to apply some well-developed and effective anti-bullying intervention projects that have been successfully implemented in other countries into Chinese schools, and use a variety of research methods to find out their effectiveness and feasibility in the local context (Mo et al., 2020; Chen & Zhi, 2017).

We selected *Cooling Conflict: A New Approach to Managing Bullying and Conflict in Schools* (O'Toole et al., 2004, shown as *Cooling Conflict* below) as the reference for our project. *Cooling Conflict* is a programme that aims to empower school students to manage their own conflicts and to become leaders in conflict management in their school communities. It achieves its purpose through two core elements of Forum Theatre and peer teaching. First, the programme encouraged students to explore, understand and manage a range of conflicts in a safe drama environment, where the conflicts are fictional or the students' own conflicts have been carefully distanced and dramatised. Second, for early adolescents, family's importance fades while school's influence grows: classmates and peers form the most important social groups. Peer-teaching is the best way to learn and practise conflict management and social skills. However, in the educational environment in mainland China, people generally rely on top-down guidance and supervision, while *Cooling Conflict* is bottom-up and empowers students. It is necessary to explore its effect and mechanism in China.

School Bullying Among Chinese Rural Boarding Schools

With the development of urbanisation in China, many rural boarding schools have been established to promote the healthy growth of students from various aspects such as management, education, nurturing, and entertainment (Zhang & Chen, 2016; Zhu et al., 2019). However, the reality was not entirely up to expectations, long periods of staying at school,

the lack of adequate supervision and social support, increased the risk of physical, mental well-being and educational problems, such as being bullied, attempting suicide, experiencing depressive symptoms and stress (Guang et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2018). As the main body of the compulsory education system in rural China, bullying is more severe than that in ordinary urban school and needs more exploration (Dong, 2012; Wu et al., 2016; Yan et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019).

Though the Chinese government has realised that school bullying in rural boarding school is an important problem that needs to be solved urgently (Lu et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2016), it is undeniable that studies focusing on this issue have been relatively unexplored (Zhang et al., 2019). The latest domestic interview study analysed the factors affecting school bullying in rural areas from a systematic perspective. First, at a family level, there are weak family guardianship, lack of care, low income, and incomplete family structure. Second, at the school level, the main factors include relatively close boarding environment, carelessness, insufficient punishment for bullying, and teachers' incompetence to intervene (Zhu et al., 2019).

School Bullying Prevention Programme in Chinese Rural Boarding Schools

In China, the prevention of school bullying mostly focuses on the macro perspectives of policies and systems and lacks specific ways and methods for bullying prevention. As many studies have suggested, bullying is not just an individual-level problem but requires intervention at the school level. Therefore, it is necessary to take overall measures. For example, the establishment of clear and powerful anti-bullying measures and strengthening the supervision of the premises should be implemented at the school level. At individual level, peer relationship and related mental well-being education should be improved (Wu et al., 2016). However, concrete and effective practices at school or higher levels are rarely carried out unless research requires it (Zhu & Chan, 2015; Zhang et al., 2019).

Although research confirms various factors influencing bullying, current prevention and interventions mainly focus on moral and mental health improvement at the individual level. Specifically, bullying is considered unethical and wrong, and individuals who have been bullied require counselling and social ability building. Some domestic scholars have criticised the current situation of anti-bullying strategies. For example, polarised treatments such as “ignore” or “punish” are common strategies for schools to deal with bullying, subsequent personalised intervention is generally deficient (Yan & Yao, 2017). Besides, active school-wide prevention measures are generally lacking. Limited by the current exam-oriented educational values, students have invested a lot of time in dealing with exams and knowledge learning (Zhifeng, 2019), so the education in moral, laws and psychological care is not enough (Zhang & Chen, 2016). Only some anti-bullying lectures or slogans are far from adequate.

Forum Theatre: The Bridge Between Children’s Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and School Bullying Prevention

Bullying behaviour is less related to an individual problem than impacted by multiple levels of the social-ecology of schools (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2016). Therefore, school-wide bullying prevention efforts have been acknowledged as feasible and practical. In previous bullying prevention programmes, social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes were used as a research-based approach to promoting positive individual and peer attitudes that can contribute to the prevention of bullying. The SEL framework involves “the systematic development of a core set of social and emotional skills that help children more effectively handle life challenges and thrive in both their learning and their social environment” (Ragozzino & O’Brien, 2009, p.3), including self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, social-competence and responsible decision-making (Smith & Low, 2013). SEL is argued to improve students’ resilience which may help reduce bullying involvement (Restad, 2020). However, meta-analyses also suggested that SEL programming is not

a best practice for bullying prevention but can be seen as a key evaluation index. The unsatisfactory effect may lie on that SEL learning focuses too much on cultivating appropriate social skills, rather than stopping the specific phenomenon of bullying (Rigby & Slee, 2008; Wurf, 2012). Therefore, explicit whole-school bullying-related policies and support strategies are needed (Nickerson et al., 2015; Rigby & Slee, 2008). There is considerable evidence to support the effectiveness of drama and theatre implementation in whole-school anti-bullying programmes (Goodwin et al., 2019; Lepp, 2011). A school-wide anti-bullying Forum Theatre is an appropriate strategy for responding to bullying directly, such as *Cooling Conflict* launched by John O'Toole (Burton & O'Toole, 2009; O'Toole et al., 2004).

The anti-bullying-themed Forum Theatre organises drama activities, including performances and audience interaction about bullying. This inquiry-based experiential learning engages students mentally, physically, and emotionally to think about bullying, and initiatively put forward ideas and opinions for improvement (Lyngstad et al., 2021). In this process, Forum Theatre can play a bridge role in students' SEL development and bullying prevention (Joronen et al., 2011). Specifically, first, the vivid plot of the bullying presented in the Forum Theatre can make students who are potential bullies temporarily “become” the bullied by absorbing watching, then improve their empathy ability and emotion management (Goodwin et al., 2019). Second, discussing bullying in public enables everyone to recognise that bullying is not irrelevant to them and enhances a sense of group identity and individual responsibility among potential bystanders (Lepp, 2011; Ross & Nelson, 2014). Third, the bullied are often unable to resist or have the courage to seek help from classmates and teachers when they are bullied, the spect-actors interactions and mediation attempts in Forum Theatre can provide potential bullying victims with more ways to improve their situation (Gourd & Gourd, 2017). These skills can all be assessed and researched through social-emotional learning, while targeted enhancement through anti-bullying themed Forum Theatre (Ross & Nelson, 2014). Therefore, the Forum Theatre has played a role as a bridge. However, fewer programmes combine SEL framework, Forum Theatre, and bullying prevention, especially in China

(Chen & Zhi, 2017).

This Study

Given the lack of systematic practice and evaluation of Forum Theatre programmes to address bullying among students in China, and the overlap with the weak status and high risk of being involved in bullying for left-behind children in rural boarding schools, this study sought to apply Forum Theatre programmes for reducing bullying and conflicts among this population of students. Meanwhile, we evaluated the effectiveness of Forum Theatre by applying SEL frame. The following hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1: Students' SEL were negatively correlated with bullying behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: Anti-bullying Forum Theatre inspired students to discuss conflicts and bullying, and enhanced their SEL instantly.

Hypothesis 3: Anti-Bullying Forum Theatre has a long-term effect in reducing bullying and conflict among students.

Methods

Procedures

A rural boarding school in Shandong Province, China, volunteered to participate in the programme. The programme began with a school-wide survey of the status quo about conflicts and bullying, and SEL in December 2018. Then we adopted the implementation suggestions in the *Cooling Conflict* (O'Toole et al., 2004), the principal recommended a class in the seventh grade as a key class. As mentioned above, a significant difficulty in implementing the programme is that Chinese students have no drama experience and rarely have social-emotional education. Therefore, to achieve peer teaching in anti-bullying Forum Theatre, students in the key class participated in a 9-day SEL learning and anti-bullying Forum Theatre training during the winter break following the end of their first semester. In March 2019, they finally

prepared an anti-bullying Forum Theatre where they wrote their own scripts, cast themselves in roles, rehearsed, and performed anti-bullying Forum Theatre and peer teaching were carried out among 7 classes in sixth grades and seventh grades, and feedback questionnaires and focus group interviews were collected from spect-actors after the end. Post-survey of conflicts, bullying, and SEL were collected from sixth and seventh graders after six months.

Participants

48 seventh-grade students (25 girls) in one class participated in the courses of SEL and Forum Theatre training. They completed 72 hours of learning and training in 9 days. They then held 7 Forum Theatre performances for sixth-grade and other seventh-grade classes, with 340 students attended as spect-actors. A total of 654 students in grades 6-9 participated in the pre-survey, and 388 students in grades 6-7 participated in the post-test.

Measures

Courses of SEL and Forum Theatre Training for the Key Class

This study selected teaching contents in the two books, i.e. *Cooling Conflict* (O'Toole et al., 2004) and *Activities for Building Character and Social-Emotional Learning Grades 6–8* (Petersen, 2012), mainly including self-awareness, team building, conflict management, drama activities, training, and rehearsing. The curriculum design was guided by Yi-man Au, one of the Chinese translators and practitioners of *Cooling Conflict* (O'Toole et al., 2004); the curriculum composed 72 hours of learning and training activities.

On the first day, the focus was primarily on ice-breaking, improvisational drama, and team building. Students were divided into seven groups, and most of the subsequent content was completed within these groups. The second-day course focused on understanding individual differences, emotional regulation, empathy, and communication. The content

of this part was drawn from *Activities for Building Character and Social-Emotional Learning Grades 6–8*, and group presentations were conducted for the preparation of Forum Theatre performance.

On the third and fourth days, students learned a complete process drama about bullying (this part of the course is based on *Cooling Conflict*). The fifth day practice focused on conflict development and bullying, as well as conflict-solving skills. On the sixth day, they collected and created their own stories in groups and wrote scripts. So far, the first half of the content was completed in the early part of the winter vacation, and the subsequent content was completed when the students arrived at school when the winter vacation was about to end.

From the seventh to the ninth day, they conducted the rehearsal of the Forum Theatre and the announcement of the performance. The first author and the corresponding author of this study implemented these courses as teachers, who majored in psychology and was trained on *Cooling Conflict*.

Bullying and Conflicts

The *Bullying and Conflicts Survey* used a student questionnaire adapted from *Cooling Conflict* (O'Toole et al., 2004) to gather data on students' general status, attitudes and perceptions of conflict and bullying in school. It contains 20 items. An example item was "In the face of conflict, you are 'a person who avoids conflict', 'a person who does not create conflict, but also does not deliberately avoid it', or 'like a conflict seeker sometimes'."

Social-emotional Learning (SEL)

The Chinese version of *Student SEL Questionnaire* (Mao et al., 2018) was used to measure participants' SEL containing 26 items. This scale measures the five dimensions of the SEL, namely, self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, social-competence, and responsible decision-making. An example item was "I feel sorry when I see others feeling hurt". Each

item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .88 and .82 for the pre- and post-surveys in this study, indicating that the reliability is good. We also collected demographic variables such as gender, age, monitor status, etc.

Forum Theatre Feedback

The self-compiled *Forum Theatre Feedback Questionnaire* was used to measure the effect of the Forum Theatre. The questionnaire comprised three parts: 8 items related to plot understanding, 10 items concerning SEL (two items from each dimension in the previous Chinese version of *Student SEL Questionnaire*, with example items such as "I know how to express objections without arguing or fighting" for self-awareness, "When I get angry, I can easily calm down" for self-management, "I feel sad when I see their emotionally hurt" for social-awareness, "I can join in the activities or conversations that other students have already initiated" for social-competence, "When I need help, I will ask the teacher or other students in the class for help" for responsible decision-making), and 5 items about the opinions for the Forum Theatre.

Focus Group Interview

After the Forum Theatre performance, the researchers conducted two group focus interviews, with 4-6 students from grade 6 and grade 7 respectively. The statements provided by the students were anonymised. The two interviews lasted 3 hours in total, and the interview questions outline as follows:

- Which part impresses you the most?
- Looking back on the Forum Theatre, what are your feelings?
- What do you think of the characters being bullied?
- What do you think of bullies?
- What do you think of the bystanders in bullying situations?
- What enlightenment does the Forum Theatre have for your school life?

Results

1. Quantitative Analysis: The Relationship Between Conflict, Bullying and SEL

The pre-survey collected 650 valid responses, revealing that the average age of all participants was 12.63 ± 1.88 years old, with 50.6% being boys. 64% students reported that they are left-behind children who live with their grandparents or other relatives (52%), or with one of their parents (12%). Regarding conflict experiences, 35.2% of students have experienced conflicts in the past six months, and 32.4% of them reported encountering conflicts that they cannot solve on their own. When it comes to bullying, more than half of students (54%) reported witnessing bullying in the past year, 20% of students explicitly reported having been bullied, and 5% of students reported that they pushed, mocked, tricked, or hit others deliberately more than 3 times in the past six months. Additionally, 5% of students reported being too afraid to go to school within six months for fear of being harmed.

Combining the above findings, the results are consistent with previous research. In the rural boarding school where we implemented our project, about two-thirds of the students are left-behind children who lack parental support, and a significant number of the students faced unresolved conflicts. The lack of parental support and the exam-oriented school management leaves them vulnerable to conflict and bullying. Bullying is often witnessed by bystanders, making it necessary to publicly discuss how to intervene conflict and bullying, as is done in the Forum Theatre.

Table 1 illustrates the relationships between SEL and bullying or being bullied behaviours. Some inappropriate behaviours were used to measure possible bullying (i.e. pushing, mocking, tricking, or hitting others deliberately) and being bullied (i.e. being pushed, mocked, tricked, or hit in the corridor, classroom, bathroom, or playground). Self-management ($r = -.18, p < .01$), social-awareness ($r = -.14, p < .05$), social-competence ($r = -.21, p < .01$), and responsible decision-making ($r = -.15, p < .01$) were significantly

negatively correlated with bullying behaviour. Additionally, self-awareness ($r=-.29$, $p<.001$), self-management ($r=-.28$, $p<.001$), social-competence ($r=-.40$, $p<.001$) and responsible decision-making ($r=-.21$, $p<.01$) were negatively correlated with being bullied behaviour. For now, Hypothesis 1 of this study, stating that students' SEL were negatively correlated with bullying behaviour, was tested.

Table 1

Correlations Between Bullying/Being Bullied and SEL (N=650)

	Self-awareness	Self-management	Social-awareness	Social-competence	Responsible Decision-making
Bullying	-.09	-.18**	-.14*	-.21**	-.15**
Being bullied	-.29***	-.28***	-.07	-.40***	-.21**

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

2. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis: Feedback Questionnaire and Focus Group Interview From Spect-actors

A total of 340 self-compiled *Forum Theatre Feedback Questionnaire* were collected from the spect-actors. In the plot understanding part, all students correctly recognised and named the roles (bullies, bullied, and bystanders) in bullying situations and demonstrated a clear understanding of the story. They also reported understanding the purpose of hot-seating, thought tracking, freeze, and the improvement strategy. Regarding their opinion of the Forum Theatre, 45.6% of students thought they creatively and critically discussed why bullying occurs. When the students were asked if they like to discuss bullying by Forum Theatre, 49.5% of students reported that they "like it very much", and 25.7% of students also responded that they "like" to do that. Their well-understanding of the stories and positive attitudes towards Forum Theatre indicated that Forum Theatre can enhance their recognition of bullying.

Independent t-test analysis was conducted to compare the changes in SEL scores before and after the Forum Theatre, Table 2 shows the result as below. The SEL scores of the spect-actors increased significantly after the Forum Theatre ($F=3.86$, $p<.01$).

Table 2

SEL Comparison Pre- And Post- Forum Theatre

	N	Mean	SD	F	t	95%CI
Pre-	388	24.47	3.76	3.86**	-8.05	[-4.04, -2.46]
Post-	340	27.72	3.34			

**p<.01.

The focus group interviews began by encouraging students to express their feelings, learning, and reflections on the roles (bullies, bullied, and bystanders) in the Forum Theatre. Subsequently, we discussed the relations between the story and their own lives. Finally, we talked about their potential future actions inspired by the Forum Theatre.

First, the students expressed a genuine connection to the situations faced by the characters. In one of the stories featuring a "bullied-bullies" character, students keenly observed his hardships and no longer simply define the character as a bully. The dialectical view of "bullies" is precious even for most adults.

Sometimes, the person who appears to be bullying is a follower of the real boss, and he may also be being bullied, so he knows how to bully others. (Statement from a seventh-grade boy, dated 25 March 2019)

Another finding is that, although we used labels to differentiate roles, the students did not get into arguments about people being good or bad, or overly focus on judging behaviours to overlook the individual as a whole. For instance:

Ansong (a boy character being bullied) wanted to join the conversation of his classmates but deliberately caused trouble. He found out that others violated discipline but he informed the monitor. He also bragged, etc. These contradictory behaviours can be understood from the perspective of his desire to gain friendship. That's his strategy. He probably didn't even realise it, and in the end, everyone hated him. (Statement from a sixth-grade boy, dated 25 March 2019)

I understand why Li Xian (a girl character being bullied) didn't tell her parents that she was bullied, because her parents are far away and can only communicate by telephone. She does not want them to worry about her, and in this case, they cannot offer help. (Statement from a sixth-grade girl, dated 25 March 2019)

Part of the reason for Zhao Yang's bullying behaviours comes from his family. During the hot-seating, he exposed that his mother had passed away, and his father was working outside. Apart from providing him regular living expenses, his father could not give him enough love, and his father always criticised Zhao for his poor grades, so Zhao hated others showing off their grades. Therefore, he bullied the classmate who got good grades through cheating. (Statement from a seventh-grade girl, dated 25 March 2019)

The plots of the Forum Theatre reminded the students of some conflicts that happened in their classrooms, and inspired their intention to act:

The monitor has good prestige in the class, but he chose to stay out of the way. I'm also the monitor, and I realise that I need to take such responsibility. (Statement from a seventh-grade girl, dated 25 March 2019)

Sometimes, you can determine the true intention from one's expression and tone of voice. The bully's apology is unreal (in this plot), and he wanted to trick the victim instead. (Statement from a sixth-grade girl, dated 25 March 2019)

Violence doesn't solve any problems. In the Forum Theatre I watched, Qiao (a defenders) launched a fierce fight with the bullies in order to protect his friend who was being bullied, which was not a good choice. (Statement from a seventh-grade boy, dated 25 March 2019)

We can try to make things clear to the person in the conflict after they

have calmed down. (Statement from a seventh-grade girl, dated 25 March 2019)

In these two interviews with students, they were obsessed with discussing the characters' personalities, needs, and motivations, and were able to fully appreciate the complexities and dilemmas of each character, instead of getting entangled in the blame. Furthermore, they recognised the necessity of alleviating bullying because they saw parallels in their own lives through the Forum Theatre. In fact, these stories were adapted from real stories that happened in their school. In summary, our anti-bully Forum Theatre allowed the spect-actors to think about the situations of the characters from various perspective, and briefly enhanced their social-emotional ability. For now, Hypothesis 2 were partly tested.

3. Quantitative Analysis: Pre- and Post-test Comparisons of Conflict, Bullying, and SEL

In comparison to the pre-survey on conflict, bullying and SEL, the six-month follow-up post-survey revealed a decrease in self-reported conflicts among students, dropping from 35.2% in the pre-test to 28%. The proportion of conflicts that students reported being unable to resolve by their own dropped from 35.4% to 19%. The incidence and severity of conflict also decreased. However, the ratio of being bullied has not changed and remains around 20%. There were also no significant changes in the SEL.

Considering that the storylines presented in the Forum Theatre originated from the students' own school experiences, the bullying in the stories gradually developed from conflicts. Through scenario simulation and mediation exercises by role-playing (details reference to *Cooling Conflict*), the spect-actors gained some training and practice in conflict resolution, such as standing in others' shoes and promptly clarifying misunderstandings. This may be one possible explanation for the decrease in self-reported conflicts. Moreover, the steady ratio of bullying may be attributed to the increased awareness of anti-bullying among students. Previous studies have reported

that interventions in bullying increase students' awareness of bullying, making them more willing to report instances of bullying (Stevens et al., 2001).

In addition, students' SEL is indeed essential and it also requires more effort to be promoted effectively, more educational drama, conflict management, and psychological support courses are needed. For now, Hypothesis 3 has not been verified. The long-term effectiveness of the anti-bullying Forum Theatre is not significantly effective. However, we remain optimistic about the results, the interventions for conflict and bullying will require long-term persistence. If Forum Theatre continues to be carried out in school as suggested by *Cooling Conflict* (O'Toole et al., 2004), better results are expected.

Discussion

Referenced by the *Cooling Conflict*, this study conducted a school bullying improvement practice in a rural boarding middle school in China. Considering the general absence of conditions for educational drama courses in China, this research is pioneering. Not only that, the research adopts the SEL framework to explain the effects and mechanisms of Forum Theatre.

The results showed that bullying (both a bully and a victim) had significant negative correlations with SEL. A stereotype of pure bullies is that they are strong, popular, and have good social and emotional understanding. Therefore, when a bullying incident occurs, schools and teachers pay more attention to the care for the victims, and are more likely to criticise and punish the bully, while overlooking the dilemma the bully may stick in. For example, the negative relationship between four dimensions of SEL (i.e. self-management, social-awareness, social-competence, responsible decision-making) and bullying behaviour reflects that those bullies also had difficulty maintaining stable friendships. On the other hand, the stereotype of bullying victims typically portrays them as helpless, silent, and stunted. Though we cannot blame victims, the SEL perspective suggests that being bullied

is associated with their weaker SEL compared to classmates not involved in bullying. For example, being bullied may face exclusion or isolation due to their weak self-management skills (e.g. poor life habits, poor classroom behaviour).

This study verified the findings from the perspective of empirical data that Forum Theatre enhances students' SEL, and bullying and conflicts portrayed on stage can be seen as a bridge between learning and doing of SEL (Goodwin et al., 2019; Lyngstad et al., 2021; O'Toole et al., 2004; Ross & Nelson, 2014). Peer action is effective and feasible in Chinese education contexts, and needs to be supported by the psychological and personality development of students. We are looking forward to furthering efforts in research and practice.

Although it has been two years since the study was completed, to our knowledge, it remains the only programme implementing Forum Theatre and peer teaching as a school-wide anti-bullying intervention in China. What is more precious is that the scripts presented in the Forum Theatre are written by the students themselves. We have collected extensive data from the teachers and students throughout the process, which are essential experiences for anti-bullying prevention intervention. A practical inspiration is that improving students' SEL framework is a good breakthrough point to gain support from teachers and parents. Considering that parents may refuse to participate in anti-bullying activities because their children are not involved in bullying, SEL can provide parents with a clear idea of what their children can gain from the programme.

Upon reflection, there are some implications and limitations that need to be addressed in the study.

First, unfortunately, due to insufficient experience, this study did not collect data on the students' SEL and its changes in the key class, and it also lacked interviews with the whole key class. The tracking of all key class students should have been strong evidence for the effectiveness of

the programme. Second, the programme did not carry out the second year of work. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, our travel was restricted and the administrative changes in the school meant that peer teaching in the relay classes could not proceed. Though the study showed that anti-bullying Forum Theatre is feasible and effective in China, there are unavoidable difficulties to implement the Forum Theatre for consideration. One prominent challenge is the general lack of training related to drama in education for primary and secondary school teachers in China. Also, the school-wide support for Forum Theatre is a challenge to the usual agenda, and schools usually deny the programme for wariness. However, as Olweus and Limber (2009) concluded after evaluating the Olweus bullying prevention programmes over two decades, teachers were key agents in the implementation of the whole-school anti-bully programmes. Thorough training and education for teachers on the theory and techniques of drama in education is crucial for the intervention to be adopted by the entire school community and for the whole project to be successful.

Conclusion

This study implemented a semester-long anti-bullying Forum Theatre in rural boarding middle schools in China and conducted qualitative and quantitative analyses. Based on the actual conditions, the project introduced the SEL framework as a tool for teaching and assessment. Results showed that bullying had significant negative associated with SEL. Specifically, self-management, social-awareness, social-competence, and responsible decision-making were significantly negatively correlated with bullying behaviour. Additionally, self-awareness, self-management, social-competence, and responsible decision-making were negatively correlated with being bullied behaviour.

Besides, Forum Theatre improved students' SEL and can be seen as a bridge between learning and doing of SEL. Anti-bullying Forum Theatre is effective and feasible in the Chinese education context and needs to be supported by students' psychological and personality development.

Unfortunately, the post-test after six months showed that the improvement of SEL was not maintained, indicating the limited impact of one-time Forum Theatre. Future research could consider integrating Forum Theatre into the daily management of schools.

Notes

- 1 The information of the International Day Against Violence and Bullying at School, including Cyberbullying can be accessed on the UNESCO website (Accessed on 15 January, 2024):
<https://zh.unesco.org/commemorations/dayagainstschoolviolenceandbullying/2020>
- 2 The School Bullying Research Centre of Shandong Normal University was established in 2017 to undertake international and domestic research, exchange and cooperation on anti-bullying. In 2019, the First International Conference on Prevention and Intervention of School Bullying was held. Further information can be found in the website (Accessed on 15 January, 2024): <http://www.antibul.sdnu.edu.cn/zxgzdt.htm>
- 3 The issue of anti-bullying has been added to the latest revised *Law on the Protection of Minors* on the Chinese government website. Compared to previous revisions, this revision represents a significant change and demonstrates the determination of the national government to address anti-bullying. The website of the *Law on the Protection of Minors* of the People's Republic of China (Accessed on 15 January, 2024):
http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-10/18/content_5552113.htm

References

- Burton, B., & O'Toole, J. (2009). Power in their hands: The outcomes of the acting against bullying research project. *Applied Theatre Researcher/IDEA Journal*, 10,1-15.
- Chen, C., & Zhi, T. (2017). Influencing factors of school bullying and construction of a long-term prevention and control mechanism: Based on the analysis of the measurement data of youth school bullying behavior in 2015. *Educational Development Research*, 20, 31-41 (In Chinese). DOI:10.14121/j.cnki.1008-3855.2017.20.007
- Dong, S. (2012). *Research on rural boarding schools in China*. Chinese Social Sciences Press. (In Chinese)
- Goodwin, J., Bradley, S. K., Donohoe, P., Queen, K., O'Shea, M., & Horgan, A. (2019). Bullying in schools: An evaluation of the use of drama in bullying prevention. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 14(3), 329-342. DOI:10.1080/15401383.2019.1623147.
- Gourd, K. M., & Gourd, T. Y. (2017). Enacting democracy: Using Forum Theatre to confront bullying. In L. Bell (Ed.), *Social justice and the arts* (pp. 116-132). Routledge.
- Guang, Y., Feng, Z., Yang, G., Yang, Y., Wang, L., Dai, Q., Hu, C., Liu, K., Zhang, R., & Xia, F. (2017). Depressive symptoms and negative life events: What psycho-social factors protect or harm left-behind children in China? *BMC Psychiatry*, 17, 402.

- <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-017-1554-1>
- Joronen, K., Håkämies, A., & Åstedt-Kurki, P. (2011). Children's experiences of a drama programme in social and emotional learning. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 25(4), 671-678.
- Lepp, M. (2011). Drama for conflict management DRACON international. In S. Schonmann (Ed.), *Key concepts in theatre/drama education* (pp. 99-104). Brill.
- Lu, W., Song Y., & Liang, J. (2017). An empirical study on student bullying in boarding schools in rural China. *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 5, 5-17. (In Chinese)
- Lyngstad, M. B., Baraldsnes, D., & Gjærum, R. G. (2021). Process drama in anti-bullying intervention: A study of adolescents' attitudes and initiatives. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 27(4), 524-538.
- Mao, Y., Du, Y., Yi, K., & Wen, T. (2018). School improvement based on the cultivation of students' social emotional ability: Exploration and practice of the Ministry of Education-UNICEF "Social Emotional Learning" project. *Primary and Secondary School Management*, 11, 31-33. (In Chinese)
- Mo, R., Yang H. Y., & Long T. (2020). Research on the dilemma and coping strategies of campus bullying governance. *Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Research*, 2, 89-96. (In Chinese)
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *Preventing bullying through science, policy, and practice*. The National Academies Press.
<https://doi.org/10.17226/23482>
- Nickerson, A. B., Aloe, A. M., & Werth, J. M. (2015). The relation of empathy and defending in bullying: A meta-analytic investigation. *School Psychology Review*, 44(4), 372-390.
- O'Toole, J., Burton, B., & Plunkett, A. (2004). *Cooling conflict: A new approach to managing bullying and conflict in schools*. Pearson Education Australia.
- Olweus, D., & Limber, S. P. (2009). The Olweus bullying prevention program: Implementation and evaluation over two decades. In S. R. Jimerson, S. M. Swearer, & D. L. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools* (pp. 377-399). Routledge.
- Petersen, K. S. (2012). *Activities for building character and social-emotional learning grades 1-2*. Free Spirit Publishing.
- Ragozzino, K., & O'Brien, M. U. (2009). *Social and emotional learning and bullying prevention*. Collaborative for Social Emotional Learning (CASEL).
- Restad, F. (2020). Is there a hole in the whole-school approach? A critical review of curriculum understanding in bullying research. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 40(4), 362-386.
- Rigby, K., & Slee, P. T. (2008). Interventions to reduce bullying. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 20(2), 165-184.
- Ross, G., & Nelson, R. (2014). Using theater and drama interventions to reduce bullying in school-aged children. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 48(4), 334-336.
- Smith, B. H., & Low, S. (2013). The role of social-emotional learning in bullying prevention efforts. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(4), 280-287.
- Stevens, V., Van Oost, P., & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2001). Implementation process of the Flemish antibullying intervention and relation with program effectiveness. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39(4), 303-317.

- Wolke, D., & Lereya, S. T. (2015). Long-term effects of bullying. *Archives of Disease in Childhood, 100*(9), 879-885.
- Wu, F. W., Song, Y. Q., & Huang, X. T. (2016). School bullying: Making rural boarding students more "injured" – An empirical study based on 17,841 rural boarding school students. *Primary and Secondary School Management, 8*, 8-11 (In Chinese).
- Wurf, G. (2012). High school anti-bullying interventions: An evaluation of curriculum approaches and the method of shared concern in four Hong Kong international schools. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 22*(1), 139-149.
- Yan, H., Chen, J., & Huang, J. (2019). School bullying among left-behind children: The efficacy of art therapy on reducing bullying victimization. *Frontier in Psychiatry, 10*:40. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00040.
- Yan, L., Zhu, Q., Tu, X., Zuo, X., Yu, C., Lou, C., & Lian, Q. (2018). Bullying victimization and child sexual abuse among left-behind and non-left-behind children in China. *PeerJ, 6*:e4865. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4865>
- Yan, X., & Yao, J. (2017). Research on campus bullying governance mechanism of "tolerance but not connivance" – Legal Thinking on campus bullying in primary and secondary schools. *Chinese Journal of Education, 1*, 10-14. (In Chinese)
- Zhang, E., & Chen, S. (2016). Psychological reflections on bullying in primary and secondary schools. *Chinese Journal of Education, 11*, 13-17. (In Chinese)
- Zhang, H., Zhou, H., & Tao, T. (2019). Bullying behaviors and psychosocial adjustment among school-aged children in China. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 34*(11), 2363-2375.
- Zhifeng. (2019, December 17). Are Chinese students the best in the world? The father of PISA: Overburdened and inefficient. *Jie Mo Dui*. <https://jiemodui.com/N/111970.html> (In Chinese)
- Zhu, G., Chen, N., & Xuan, H. (2019). An empirical study on peer relationship and campus bullying of rural boarding junior school students: A case study of 5 schools in Henan Province. *Educational Research and Experiment, 2*, 68-76. (In Chinese)
- Zhu, Y., & Chan, K. L. (2015). Prevalence and correlates of school bullying victimization in Xi'an, China. *Violence and Victims, 30*(4), 714-732.

防欺凌論壇劇場在中國農村寄宿中學的實踐——基於專案實踐的實證分析

喬秀青

山東師範大學心理學院 · 濟南

王一鷗

山東傳媒學院 · 濟南

趙菁

濟南時代春風青少年公益發展中心 · 濟南

摘要

2021年，修訂後的《中華人民共和國未成年人保護法》首次在立法中對欺凌進行了定義，並明確規定學校必須建立防止欺凌的機制。但如何建立一個可行的工作體系仍需進一步探索。本研究在一所中國農村寄宿制中學開展為期一個學期的防校園欺凌論壇劇場，並進行定性和定量分析。項目基於實際情況，引入社會情感學習（social-emotional-learning，簡稱 SEL）框架作為教學和評估的工具。結果顯示，欺凌與SEL之間存在顯著的負相關。論壇劇場改善了學生的SEL，可以看作是SEL學習與實踐的橋樑。防校園欺凌論壇劇場在中國教育環境中是有效和可行的，需要以學生的心理和人格發展為依託。

關鍵詞：防校園欺凌論壇劇場、社會情感學習、中國農村寄宿制中學、欺凌防治

電郵：qiaoxiuqing1990@163.com