

Bulletin of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.  
Series "Psychology". № 2(14), pp. 31-35 (2021)  
УДК 159.922.7  
DOI: [https://doi.org/10.17721/BSP.2021.2\(14\).6](https://doi.org/10.17721/BSP.2021.2(14).6)

ISSN 1728-3817  
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Kateryna Pinchuk, bachelor in psychology  
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2462-1023;  
Krystyna Zalipska, bachelor in psychology  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5331-5581

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

## INTERVENTION FOR CREATING EQUAL CLASSROOMS

*Bullying and victimization are prevalent during adolescence. In Europe and North America, approximately 6 % of middle school students are bullying others, and approximately 10 % of middle school students are bullied 2 or 3 times in a month. Moreover, adolescence is a sensitive period for social status. LaFontana and Cillessen (2009) showed a clear peak in prioritizing status enhancement in early adolescence. Given that the CEC (Creating Equal Classroom) project aims to reduce the level of bullying through mitigating classroom status hierarchy, grade 7 is a particularly relevant developmental stage to implement this intervention project.*

*Target population: Adolescents from grade 7 at the middle school*

*Methods: Questionnaires, multilevel modeling with Mplus 8.0 to estimate the intervention effects due to the nested nature of data, trainings and discussions.*

*Short description of results and conclusions: Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their social environment and for interacting with peers. This program is effective in reducing the frequency of adolescents' involvement in bullying situations. With help of this program, the number of both initiators and victims of bullying will decrease.*

*Keywords: Bullying, equality, pupils from 7<sup>th</sup> grade, victimization.*

**Formulation of the problem and analysis of recent research and publications.** Numerous foreign studies mention the problem of hierarchy and its connection with bullying. Below are the conclusions of researchers who will help us expand the topic of the article. For example, status hierarchy is a pervasive and fundamental feature of social organization in human groups [3]. A body of studies revealed that status inequality within societies is associated with victimization [1], bullying [4], and other violent behaviors [2]. Studies paid attention to the role of classroom status hierarchy in the development of bullying and aggression [5,7]. Classroom status hierarchy represents the distribution of power and dominance in the classroom [6,7]. In classrooms with high levels of the status hierarchy, only a few students hold the power in the classroom, while in low-hierarchy classrooms, children's social status is relatively egalitarian. A longitudinal study found that a high level of status hierarchy predicted increases in bullying 6 months later in a sample of 11,296 adolescents from 583 classes in Finland [6].

More importantly, social status hierarchy status is associated with the benefits of aggression and bullying behavior. Several cross-sectional studies have found that in middle childhood the association between aggression and popularity was stronger in hierarchical classrooms where a small number of students play a prominent role in interpersonal connections [1], and where levels of perceived popularity vary considerably across students [6, 20]. Thus, creating egalitarian classroom structures could be a promising way to reduce the level of bullying and victimization.

In order to reduce the level of bullying and victimization in the classroom, we design both universal and indicated measures to promote equality within the classroom. Concerning universal measures, we aim to raise awareness of equality, learn communication skills in equal and respectful ways, and give children equal opportunities to practice democratic skills. In terms of indicated measures, we aim to support isolated students, especially the victims of bullying by the support group approach [17]. The purpose of the support group is not to punish or blame the bullies and their assistants, but to create mutual concern for the well-being of the victim [18]. As a long-lasting goal, we also aim to reinforce youth's competence to participate in a democratic society and reduce the violence in the whole society. Tak-

en together, the Creating Equal Classrooms (CEC) program aims to decrease the level of aggression and bullying by creating an equal classroom environment.

**Formulating the goals of the article.** Every student needs to feel comfortable at school in order to achieve success. Separating or protecting students from bullies is not the goal of this program, but to create an atmosphere in the classroom so that everyone can feel equal to the other. Having collected the step-by-step components of the program, we structured them into groups, forming the information as a plan. As a result, we were able to reproduce the information as a table, which will help to achieve the goal of equality. It should be added that the use of our program in the future might contribute to a decrease in the percentage of bullying in classrooms. The relevance of the problem of bullying and hierarchy is widely disclosed in psychology and other sciences, therefore, the dissemination of our program will help the study of these problems more accurately.

**Presentation of the main research material.** As the program developed, two types of intervention (intervention format) were identified: universal and indicated. This means universal and targeted (blended) school-based interventions. Realizing that the program must be developed primarily for a wide audience, we decided to start development from the first type.

Thus, was distinguished a program structure and process, which combine several elements in **universal intervention**:

(1) Teacher training

Two days' training program for home teachers and principles of CEC schools

Contents: basic knowledge of bullying, strategies of creating equal classrooms

(2) Curriculums (providing 10 lessons about bullying and equality). Lessons will be every other week during 20 weeks duration. The lessons last from one to two hours, given one per week.

Topics of the lectures and groupworks include:

1. Voting as a means of self-expression and affirmation.

The teacher could begin by explaining what modes of government exist and how they differ, while receiving the students' testimonies and preconceptions. Questions such as: "What is a king, a dictator, a president, a parliament, a deputy, a citizen?", "What is the role of citizens in a dicta-

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torship compared to a democracy?" can help the teacher better understand what students know. A more active role through the right to vote by choosing which ideas one wants to support, but also through the possibility to run as a representative of the citizens in order to apply the program they will choose by majority.

Explaining the abuses of power with simple examples can show which harassing behaviors are unhealthy and bad for the organization of the class. This will also allow to deal with the notion of justice: fairly decide what place we

will occupy in this organization otherwise the rules can be distorted by our personal interests.

The representative democracy is used in a country because the population cannot vote nor discuss every day the organization of the society but in a class the number allows to use the direct democracy. In this lesson we would sit in a circle and talk about the practical feelings of the students.

To end the session the teacher would put the children in basic unequal role plays and then the two or three actors would judge what needs to be changed to make everyone equal in this situation.

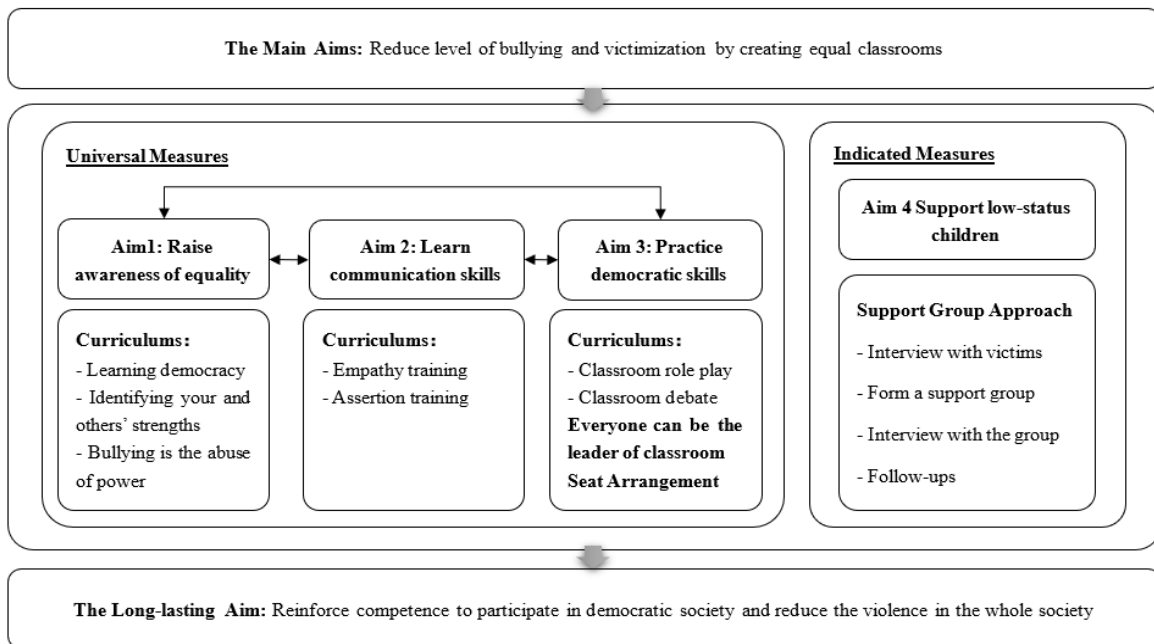


Fig. 1. Frameworks of the Creating Equal Classrooms (CEC) project

2. Learning to assert oneself through direct democracy.

Begin by going around the classroom and asking each student to write on a piece of paper what an egalitarian school would look like and on another piece of paper if they have ever seen behavior that they felt was unequal to abuse. Each paper would be put in turn in a different box. Then the teacher would tabulate the results to create a debate. In this way, the children could see that every vote counted (and that their vote counts as much as the others).

The goal of these sessions on equality and democracy is for children to become aware of the differences between individual and collective interests, in order to develop behaviors that will always be in favor of the common interest. Being aware of the point of view of others is also to relativize the importance of all and to see that our interest has no reason to take precedence over other classmates.

Teachers will also have the task of moving the debate forward to reach a compromise. They will have to be able to recognize the value of their opponent's position and can quickly find common ground with him/her. In this way, we hope that we will be able to better consider all sides of a problem in order to better solve it.

3. Each students' vote matter.

This lesson will be the first voting session for students to vote according to the voting rules. Each vote will be preceded by a debate moderated by the teacher, who will also have the role of stimulating the most timid, least popular students to give their opinion.

Each student has a voice that is as valuable as any other. The teacher does not vote to try to neutralize his or

her authority in the voting and to avoid that he or she takes someone's side in the debate and that the students follow him or her.

Voting means giving your opinion, making a choice for a candidate or for a decision. Voting can be by a show of hands but most often it is secret. The principle is to vote and choose together, unlike the elections of the delegates, which give some students the upper hand over others. Direct democracy should be respected. We could, on the other hand, form a rotation system for the tasks to be done in the classroom: watering the flowers, distributing the papers, erasing the blackboard. In this system, no student should be responsible for grading others, as might be done for grading participation, for example.

The first things to be discussed and voted on will be the rules of this class democracy (or school democracy, there could be two levels like a federal state): secret ballot or show of hands, number of deliberations, speaking time. Then the subjects can be numerous and can be adapted to the needs of the class but be related to the program or to current issues to initiate the students to their future role as citizens.

Then we could put a box where the children could put what they would like to be discussed and voted on, which we would empty in the end of every week. The teacher could also put topics on the agenda. These could be simple yes/no votes (like referendums) or multiple choice. In this system, the teacher has an important role to play, since he/she has to make sure that each student's speaking time is respected, that everyone participates and that no one is left out.

4. Identifying your and others' strengths. Exploring strengths of everyone, understanding differences in individuals

5. Respect is for everyone. Here teachers make each student aware of the subjectivity of his or her point of view. We are all human beings who have the same right for being respected. "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you".

6. Everyone should be included in the classroom. Here our target is to increase the sense of belonging by large group activities. This lessons could be carried out on the playground.

7. Bullying is the abuse of power. Aim is to learn the definition of bullying. Identify the differences between bullying and aggression. Understand the consequences of bullying. In this section, teachers should emphasize that bullying is the abuse of power and threatens the equality of classrooms.

8. Learning about assertive skills. Learning and training how to listen actively and being assertive. Active listening involves paying attention, asking questions, and reflecting on what someone says, and assertive skills refers to the ability to stand up for your own or other people's rights calmly and positively. Assertive skills promote controlling stress and improve coping skills with peers without being aggressive. Students learn positive communication skills through verbal instruction, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, and feedback. Finally, teachers explain how to use assertive skills in the bullying situations.

9. Empathy training. Aim: to explain what is empathy, its importance in life. Using literature and motives help students to understand the feelings of victims of bullying. Practicing 10 exercises in order to develop empathy.

10. Building an equal Classroom – Let's do it together. Students review the core components of previous lectures and reflect their learning experience to build an equal classroom.

It is also necessary to add such important universal intervention elements as:

(3) Seating arrangements. Decide the seating of the classroom in a prosocial way. For example, home teachers could place aggressive and victimized children closer to the prosocial high-status peers in the classroom [17, c.403-412].

(4) Everyone can be the leader [5, c.622-637]. Produce more the jobs opportunities for every students in the classrooms (e.g., watering flowers; closing windows in the classrooms). Praise all students on the weekly class meeting.

Further, it is important in our program to show that everyone is equal. The second type of intervention, **indicated**

**measure** is evidence that students need to be aware of equality. Support low-status students aim approach **four steps**:

- Interview with victims;
- Form support group;
- Interview with bullies;
- Follow ups.

The main goal of this support group approach is to provide additional help for students. Instead of focusing only on (changing) the behavior of the bully, bystanders and defenders are also involved in tackling bullying situations. The purpose of the support group is not to punish or blame the bullies and their assistants, but to create mutual concern for the well-being of the victim. It is emphasized that everyone has to do something to help to improve the situation. In other words, the responsibility to solve bullying is given to the support group. It is assumed that the shared distress will evoke empathy within the bullies and that the 'group pressure' of shared responsibility will trigger the bullies' willingness to alter their behavior. Moreover, the support group method could bring benefits, such as providing someone who listens and helps to overcome the problem and improve the well-being.

**Implementation.** The initial implementation of the program will last for about one year. The main goal of the program is to reduce violent behavior and the incidence of bullying and to develop social and intercultural competencies in schools. To facilitate the transfer of knowledge between researchers and practitioners (teachers), a "train-of-trainer" cascade model will be developed and applied. According to this model researchers train trainers (called multipliers), multipliers train teachers, and teachers train their pupils. The idea is to train staff working in educational institutions or in school psychological services to ensure the continuous transfer of knowledge between researchers and practitioners.

During the first semester of the academic year, the program deals with preventive measures at school. Firstly, teachers are becoming the main target group of training. Universal measures at the classroom level for students are introduced by teachers during the second semester. Ten lessons are given by home teachers biweekly. After the third lesson, the intervention classes start to carry out "everyone can be the leader" activity. The seating interventions are also implemented in this semester. In the third semester, only "everyone can be the leader" activity and seating interventions are implemented. Finally, the indicated measures are only used when the bullying incident happens. The schedule is presented in Fig. 2.

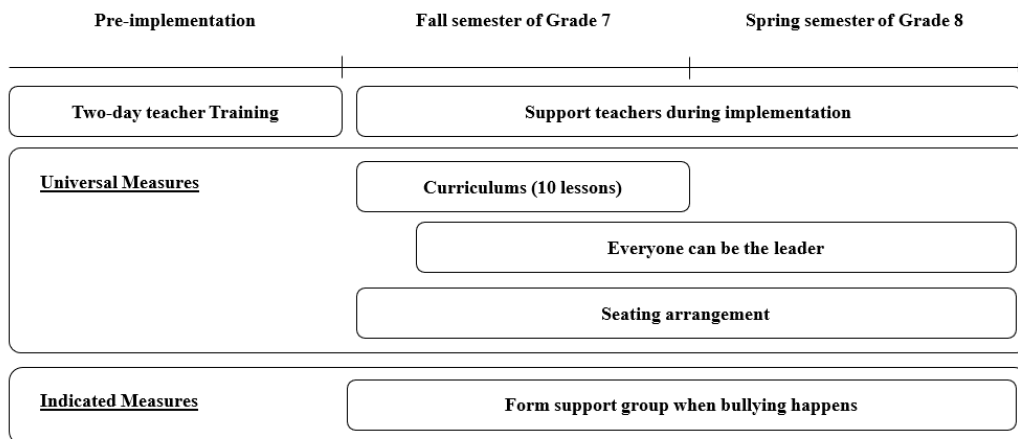


Fig. 2. Implementation of the Creating Equal Classrooms (CEC) project

The implementation of the program in schools is carried out at the individual and school-wide level. Pupils will be encouraged to take responsibility for their social environment and for interacting with peers. The opportunity is given in order to actively contribute to the improvement of the school environment. Additionally, teachers could get manual and online material that includes information on bullying and the key strategies of the project, as well as detailed lesson plans which will include the curriculum of 10 two-hour lessons. Lessons will be every other week during 20 weeks duration. Training and discussions are suggested as working methods. These methods will allow the analysis of social situations, and adolescents will be informed that such situations can be understood in different ways.

The large-scale evaluation of the effectiveness of the program includes both pre-testing and evaluation of the results after the completion of the program. It is also supposed to monitor changes at all stages of the program. To prompt the implementation of CEC project, the research team organizes two seminars with teachers of each school in each semester. In the seminars, researchers help teachers to solve their questions during implementing the project.

We believe that this program is effective in reducing the frequency of adolescents' involvement in bullying situations. With help of this program, the number of both initiators and victims of bullying will decrease.

**Evaluation.** Based on a synthesis of international experience and Chinese realities, the program allows creating a system of values, norms, and rules in the classroom, intolerant of bullying and any form of violence. The effectiveness of this program is in the intensity of work with representatives of schools and children, duration of the program, introduction of disciplinary methods into work.

The effective vector of this project is the democratization of the process of managing the coexistence of schoolchildren in the team, as well as emotional and value learning. Democratization is carried out through the introduction of clear rules that are oriented to establish positive interpersonal relationships. The main method is direct work with disciple-initiators or victims. It is aimed at increasing the emotional competence of pupils by teaching the skills of prosocial behavior.

With the successful implementation of our idea, when the amount of cases of bullying, anxiety in schoolchildren decreases and disappears the problem of victimization, prevention can be carried out at early bullying symptoms. The teaching staff, school administrators, parents, and students themselves will have enough knowledge to prevent bullying without the participation of anyone from outside.

**Research design and procedure.** The effectiveness of the program is tested in a randomized control trial. First, we send a letter describing the goals and content of the program with an enrollment form to middle schools. The schools that are willing to volunteer and join the RCT are randomly assigned to the first intervention or the waiting list control groups that implement the same program after completing the first intervention group. We aim to include at least 100 classrooms in Grades 7 (50 for intervention and 50 for control). All students complete the questionnaires at time 1, time 2, time 3.

**Data collection.** Prior to data collection, researchers sent consent letters to students, parents, teachers and school principals, in which the research aims and procedures are described briefly. The participants complete a battery of self-report measures during a single class period in schools under the guidance of postgraduate research

assistants. During the surveys, school teachers are not present. Students are told that the answers will not be revealed to anyone. The order of questions, items, and scales are extensively randomized to alleviate any systematic order effect.

#### Measurement.

- Bullying & Victimization: Olweus scale, peer nomination.
- Depression symptoms are measured by 10-item short form of Children's Depression Inventory [12].
- Social anxiety is measured by 2 social anxiety scales, the Fear of Negative Evaluation and the Social Avoidance and Distress, which were combined to measure students' level of anxiety [9, c.23, 51-59].
- Peer status: acceptance ("Whom do you like the most?"), rejection ("Whom do you like least?"), perceived popularity ("Whom do you consider as the most popular?"), peer nomination.
- Classroom status hierarchy: standard deviation of perceived popularity scores within a classroom [6, c.1699-1710].
- Antibullying Attitudes was modified into a 10-item version to better fit the present context from Provicim scale [11, c.311-330].
- School climate (academic, community, safety, institutional environment) measured by Delaware School Climate Survey—Student (DSCS—S).

**Data analysis.** We use multilevel modeling with Mplus 8.0 to estimate the intervention effects due to the nested nature of data. We fitted three-level models, with the first level representing change over time, the second level representing individual student differences, the third level representing differences between classrooms.

To test the effectiveness of intervention, we add two cross-level interactions (i.e.,  $T2 \times$  intervention, and  $T2 \times$  intervention) into the model. If a statistically significant interaction is found, we further probe the significant interactions by simple slope test. There are several dummy-coded variables in the models. The three waves of data collection are coded with two variables, T2 (Wave 2 = 1, other waves = 0) and T3 (Wave 3 = 1, other waves = 0). In addition, gender (girls = 0, boys = 1), and intervention (control school = 0, intervention school = 1) are entered into the models with dummy coding.

**Sustainability.** Sustainability refers to "the extent to which an evidence-based intervention can deliver its intended benefits over an extended period after external support... is terminated" [14, c.19-46]. To support the sustainability of the CEC project, several sustainment strategies are utilized. No or limited funding is the most common hindering factor for intervention sustainability [10, c.1-12]. Therefore, we first secure continuous funding and contracts to specifically finance sustainment strategies to be used. Second, we maintain teacher's skills through continued training, booster training sessions, supervision, and feedback. Third, students receive a short revision session every half a year after the implementation to review what they learned in the last lesson and discuss what has changed. Lastly, the effectiveness of the intervention is monitored after the implementation to check the sustainability of the CEC project.

**Fidelity.** The assessment of fidelity is an essential feature of program evaluations. Intervention fidelity has been defined as "the extent to which an intervention was delivered as conceived and planned—to arrive at valid conclusions concerning its effectiveness in achieving the target outcomes" [16, c.9]. It can be conceptualized and operationalized in terms of quantity (how much was done) or quality (how well it was done) of program implementation.

Implementation fidelity is systematically measured by collecting monthly teacher reports on the quantity as well as the quality of implementation of the CEC project during the trial. Several measures are included in the report such as (1) Frequency of implementation (= the sum of implemented lessons out of the total 10); (2) Duration of implementation (= the total duration of the lessons in hours); (3) Lesson preparation (= the total duration of the preparation in hours). The measures of lesson adherence and duration of lessons are chosen to reflect the quantity of implementation. The third measure, lesson preparation, is used as an indicator of the quality of implementation.

**Conclusions.** First of all, in order to disseminate our program, it will have to be scientifically monitored and published in journals to be known and recognized. To disseminate our program, the training of teachers will require a period of learning through experience and observation of teachers in countries that have tested the program first.

One of the greatest difficulties in the adaptation of this program may be the cultural and linguistic factors. Not only the translation of methods, but also its implementation in different cultures can become a serious obstacle slowing down the process of implementation.

In this way, a protocol and a certification that can be disseminated is applied more quickly and easily more or less adapt to each country. Political factors in the country will also have to be taken into account as equality is not recognized at the same level in every country. Countries that do not recognize the equal social and political status of women and men may not view our program favorably. The same goes for countries with social and economic inequalities that do not put in place the necessary public policies to reduce them due to lack of means or ideology. However, it is not conceivable to exclude certain principles of equality in order not to offend a country.

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Надійшла до редколегії 13.07.21  
Рекомендована до друку 15.11.21

Катерина Пінчук, бакалавр  
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2462-1023;  
Кристина Заліпська, бакалавр  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5331-5581

Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна

#### ПРОГРАМА-ІНТЕРВЕНЦІЯ ДЛЯ СТВОРЕННЯ РІВНОПРАВНИХ КЛАСІВ

**Булінг і віктимізація поширені в підлітковому віці. У Європі та Північній Америці приблизно 6% учнів середніх шкіл змушуються з інших, а приблизно 10% учнів зазнають знущань 2 або 3 рази на місяць. Крім того, підлітковий вік є чутливим періодом для соціального статусу. LaFontana та Cillessen (2009) показали явний пік у пріоритеті підвищення статусу в ранньому підлітковому віці. Ураховуючи, що проєкт CEC (Creating Equal Classroom) спрямований на зниження рівня булінгу через пом'якшення ієрархії статусу класу, сьомий клас є особливо актуальним етапом розвитку для реалізації цього проєкту-інтервенції.**

**Досліджувані:** підлітки із сьомого класу середньої школи.

**Методи:** анкети, багаторівневе моделювання із Mrus 8.0 для оцінювання ефектів інтервенції через вкладений характер даних, тренінги й обговорювання.

**Короткий опис результатів і висновки:** учнів заохочують брати відповідальність за своє соціальне оточення та взаємодію з однокласниками. Запропонована програма ефективна для зниження частоти залучення підлітків до ситуацій булінгу. За допомогою цієї програми зменшилась кількість як ініціаторів, так і жертв булінгу.

**Ключові слова:** Булінг, рівність, учні 7 класу, віктимізація.