Starting Young: Antibullying Strategies in Kindergarten

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INTRODUCTION

➢ Bullying remains a significant concern in educational settings, impacting student well-being and academic performance

➢ Bullying behaviors can emerge at an early age (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996; Pepler & Cummings, 2016; Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2014)

➢ Early childhood education represents a critical period for instilling social and emotional skills that foster positive peer interactions

➢ Research has shown that early interventions can significantly reduce the likelihood of bullying behaviors escalating as children grow older (Farrell, 1999; Levine & Tamburino, 2014)

➢ Addressing bullying behaviors in kindergarten is crucial to creating a safe and nurturing environment where all children can thrive

➢ Understanding how schools respond to bullying is critical for effective interventions
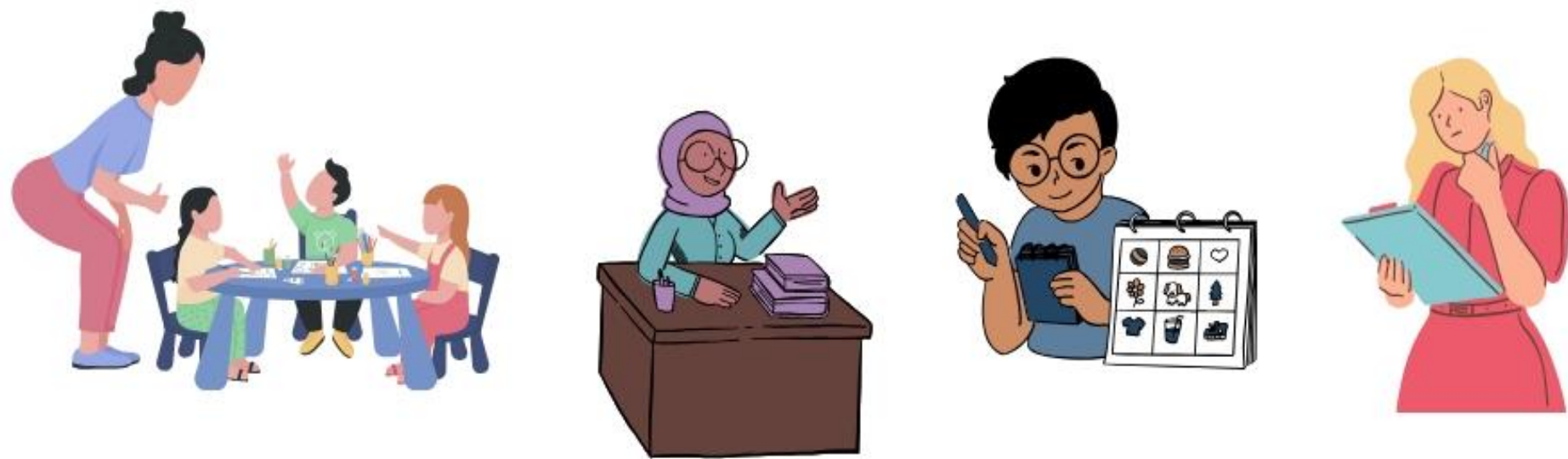
METHODS / PARTICIPANTS

This study utilized a **qualitative case study** approach

Semi-structured interviews

One public elementary school in a midwestern U.S state

Participants were all <u>female</u> (*n* = 5) and included three **kindergarten teachers**, one **clinician** (school counselor) and one **administrator**.

➢ The school enrolls approximately 500 students, with over 90% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, indicating a predominantly low-income student population.

➢ Interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions such as:
  - What antibullying strategies do you use?
  - How do you incorporate antibullying strategies in your daily teaching?
  - What challenges do you face when addressing bullying behavior(s) in your kindergarten students?
  - How do you encourage kindness, empathy, and problem-solving among your students?

➢ Interview responses were typed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis

AIMS

Aim 1: To investigate how kindergarten teachers, clinicians, and administrators implement bullying prevention policies.

Aim 2: To understand the challenges these educators face in addressing bullying behaviors and how they overcome them.

Aim 3: To assess the perceived effectiveness of antibullying policies and practices.
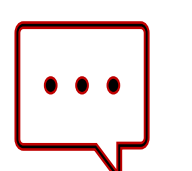
Aim 4: To provide actionable recommendations for improving bullying prevention strategies in early childhood education settings.
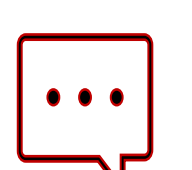
RESULTS

1 Differentiating Bullying from Peer Conflict

"Kindergarteners will sometimes mislabel bullying." - Admin

"Young students struggle to distinguish bullying from general conflicts." - Teacher 1

3 Daily Teaching Strategies

➢ Daily feeling check-ins, modeling behavior
➢ Sesame Street Videos to teach empathy
➢ Being attentive and alert to catch things
➢ Use of facial cues and body language
➢ Help students recognize their own feelings first
➢ Fostering community and a foundation of basic respect from day 1

2 Challenges in Addressing Bullying
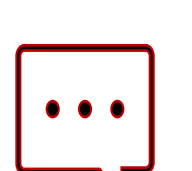
"It's hard for young children to understand the severity or emotional impact of their actions." - Teacher 2
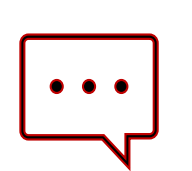
"Once the term "bullying" is introduced, students overapply it." - Teacher 1
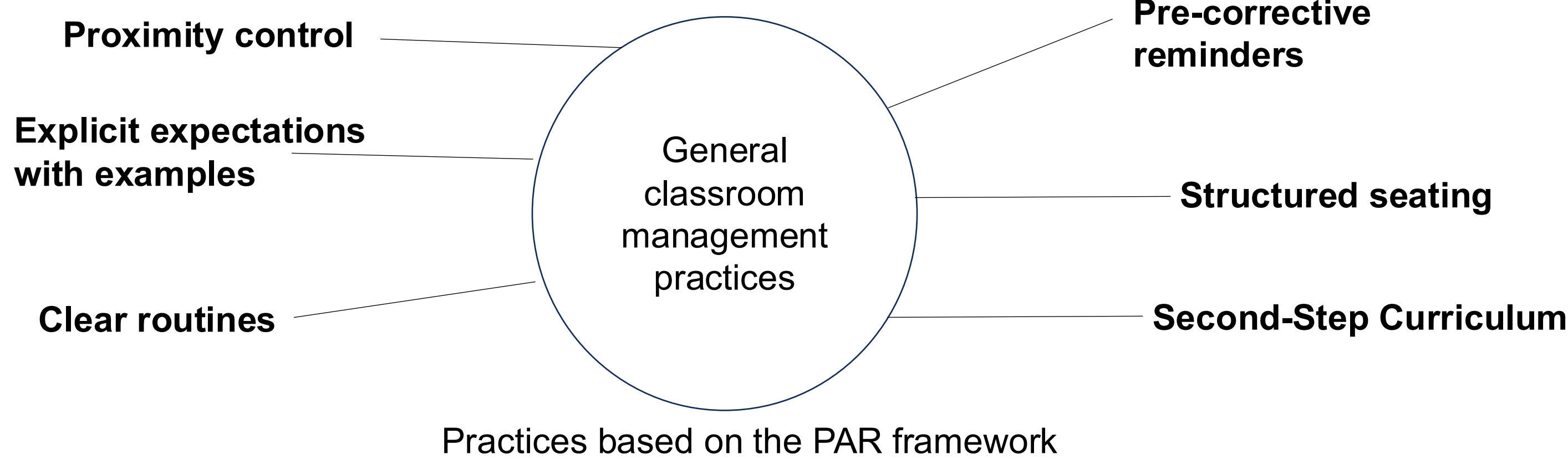
"It's often hard to distinguish between a pattern of bullying and a one-time incident." - Teacher 3
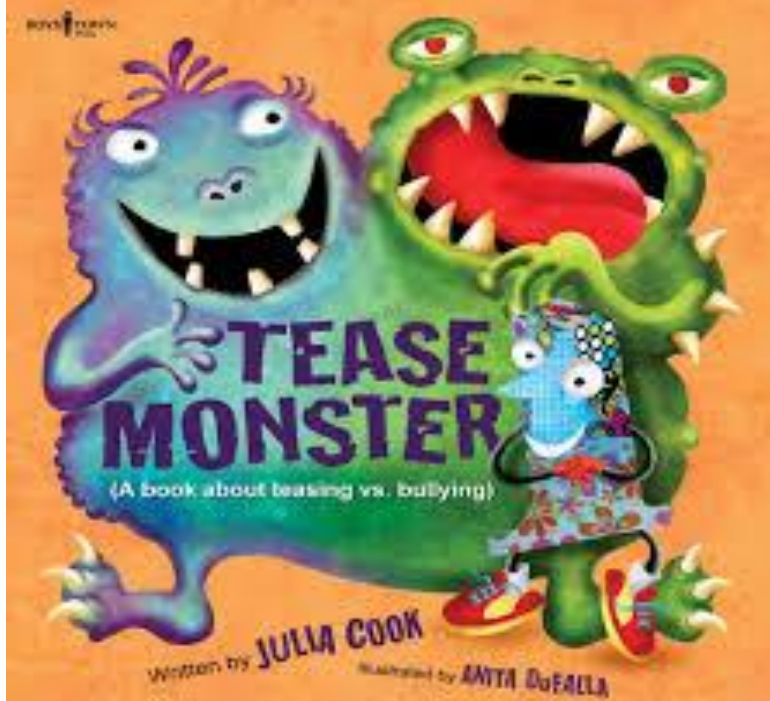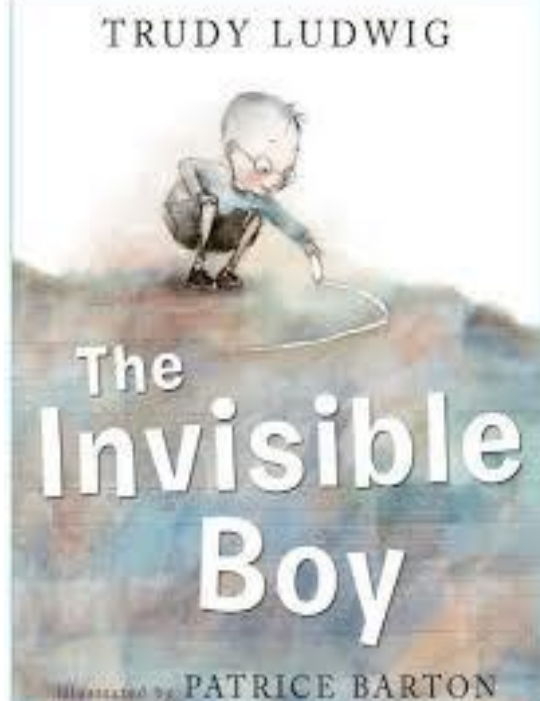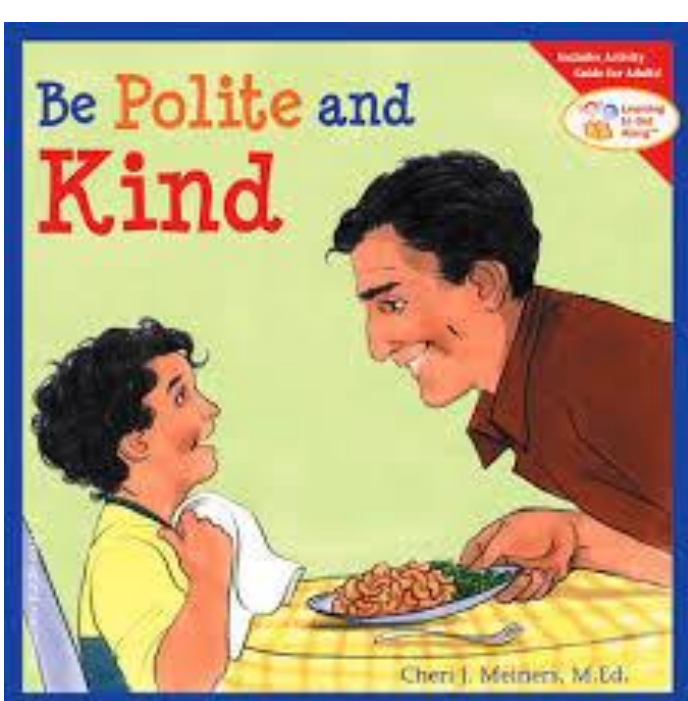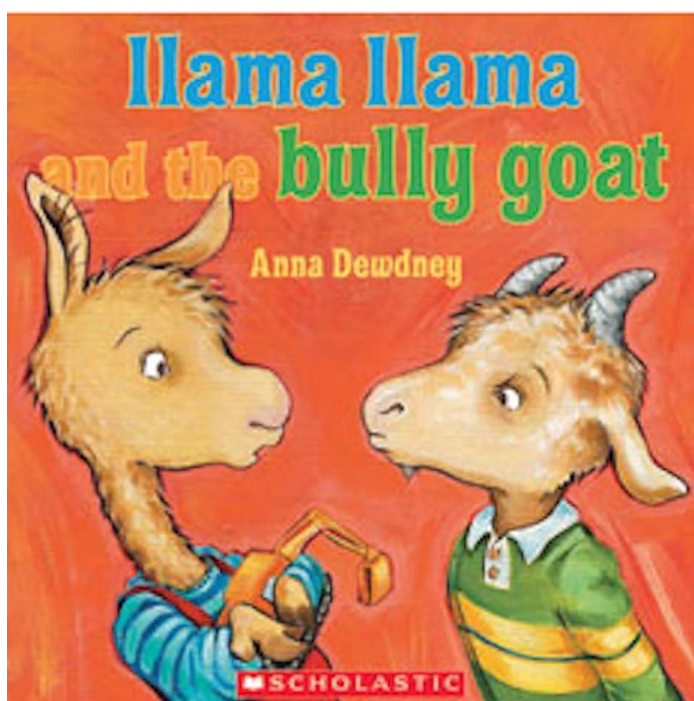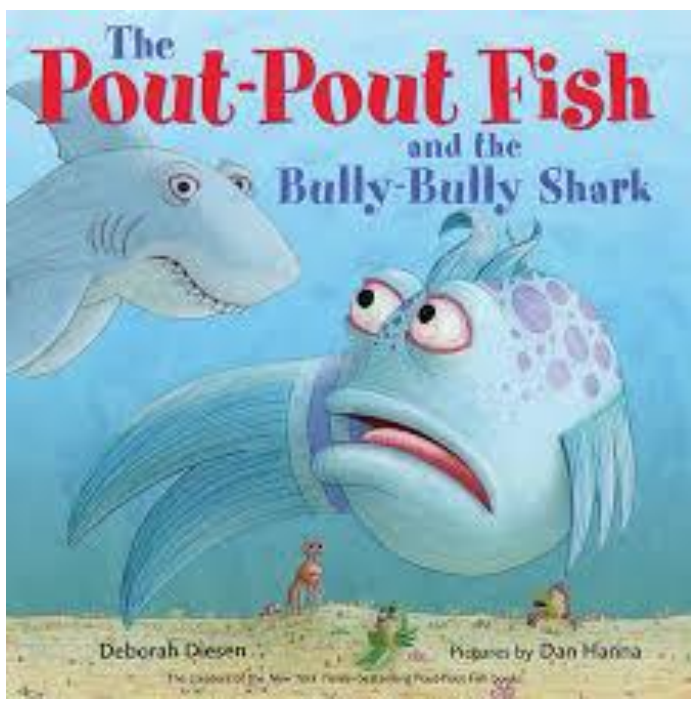
"Students often copy negative behaviors from home or daycare, which may counteract school-based teachings." - Teacher 2

➢ Overall, staff think their strategies are effective and that admin is supportive but would like clearer formal practices

➢ Staff like the bullying component of the Second-Step curriculum

➢ The school uses a district-wide behavior framework called PAR which stands for Prevention, Accountability and Restorative

Proximity control

Explicit expectations with examples

Clear routines

General classroom management practices

Pre-corrective reminders

Structured seating

Second-Step Curriculum

Practices based on the PAR framework

HELPFUL BOOKS USED BY THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

The Pout-Pout Fish and the Bully-Bully Shark — Deborah Diesen

llama llama and the bully goat — Anna Dewdney

Be Polite and Kind — Cheri J. Meiners, M.Ed.

The Invisible Boy — TRUDY LUDWIG, PATRICE BARTON

TEASE MONSTER (A book about teasing vs. bullying) — Julia Cook, Anita DuFalla

I Am Kind: A POSITIVE POWER STORY — Suzy Capozzi, Eren Unten — STEP INTO READING 2

SUPER MANNY STANDS UP! — KELLY DiPUCCHIO, STEPHANIE GRAEGIN

DISCUSSION

➢ While the PAR framework is in place, it is not developmentally tailored to the needs of kindergarten students
➢ There is a lack of training specifically focused on bullying prevention in early childhood
➢ Fidelity checks and consistent implementation are hindered by staffing and time constraints

Recommendations for practice
➢ Schools should invest in developmentally appropriate antibullying lessons, visuals, and activities for early learners
➢ Training tailored to early childhood educators would support more effective policy implementation
➢ Based on staff feedback, future iterations of the PAR framework should include early childhood-specific components

Limitations
➢ Possibility of shared biases or institutional influences
➢ Sample size was small and limited to one elementary school, restricting the generalizability of the results
➢ Social desirability bias may also have influenced participants to present their practices in a more favorable light

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