

A Participant-Driven Effort to Assess and Address an Emerging Climate of Harassment in a Rural High School

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a participant-driven effort to assess and address an emerging climate of harassment in a rural high school. In response to concerns about the school climate voiced by faculty, a collaborative team of school administrators, mental health professionals, faculty, and staff was convened by the school psychologist. The team: (a) surveyed 221 (94 male and 127 female) students to assess the “climate of harassment” in the school (b) used student feedback and “best practices” recommendations from the school-based harassment intervention literature to develop a 90-minute, activity-based educational workshop (c) trained mixed gender teams of faculty to facilitate workshop sessions with mixed gender groups of students (d) ensured that all students in the school took part in a workshop session and (e) secured a long-term commitment from the school to make the workshop a permanent part of the freshman orientation curriculum. Throughout the project, the team used collaborative, data-driven decision-making based on both quantitative and qualitative data and principles of participatory action research (PAR) to open a dialogue with students about issues of tolerance, diversity and respect and to develop a quality educational workshop for students. The activities of the team provide a model of what can be done in rural schools with limited resources to address a need for social change in the school environment.

INTRODUCTION

Smithville (not the real name) is a small town in rural northern New England. Like many towns in the area, the economy is based in large part on logging and dairy farming. As in many rural communities, the school is the cultural, social, and recreational center of the community (National Education Association, 2001; Yaunches, 2002). The following article describes a participant-driven effort to address issues that were working to erode the school climate. The use of data-driven decision making, as well as principles of participatory action research (PAR), make this a model of what can be done in rural areas with limited resources.

Background

Smithville High School was what many people would consider idyllic. The buildings were old but well cared for. Graffiti and vandalism were rare. Student discipline problems typically consisted of tardiness and verbal conflicts. Physical fights were almost nonexistent and if five fights occurred in a year, it would have been considered epidemic. The faculty and staff were hard working, committed individuals, many of whom lived and raised their families in the same community. The student population was active and generally close knit. The big school event each year was Winter Carnival where classes competed against each other in a variety of athletic, academic and charitable events. Winter Carnival week culminated in an Air Band competition which was always hotly contested.

It was in this environment that faculty and staff began to notice changes. The incidence of graffiti increased and teachers commented on the increasingly negative way that students were speaking to each other. Of particular concern was the increased use of sexual slurs being heard in casual conversation among students. Faculty and staff began expressing significant concern about the direction the school climate was taking. The change in school climate experienced in Smithville was unfortunately not an isolated incident. Rather, it was reflective of the growing climate of sexual harassment among students, faculty and staff within in our nation's schools.

Hostile Hallways

In 1993 the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published the results of a landmark study of sexual harassment in our nation's schools. The survey of 1,632 students in grades 8-11 alarmingly revealed that 81% of students (85% females; 76% males) experienced some form of sexual harassment while at school. In addition, 59% of students reported sexually harassing someone during their school lives.

In 2001 the AAUW published the results of a follow-up survey of 2,064 students in grades 8-11. The results indicated 8 years after the initial survey, sexual harassment at school was still a common student experience. As in 1993, 81% of students (83% female; 79% male) experienced some form of sexual harassment and more than half (54%) reported sexually harassing someone during their school lives. Interestingly, the frequency with which students reported experiencing sexual harassment at school remained unchanged from 1993-2001 despite the fact that in 2001, 69% of students reported their schools had a sexual harassment policy (up from 26% in 1993) and 36% reported their schools distributed educational materials on harassment (up from 13% in 1993).

The results of the AAUW surveys sent several clear messages to schools across the nation. First, all members of the school community (e.g., teachers, administrators, students, staff, local community) can no longer continue to perceive incidents of harassment at school as "childhood teasing or bullying, a normal part of growing up, or the boys-will-be-boys syndrome" (Steiniger, 2001, p. 11). When viewed as member of the continuum of violence that includes bullying, stalking, and dating/domestic violence (Chamberlain, 2003), the seriousness of sexual harassment can not be underestimated by schools seeking to create a safer school environment.

Second, the development of a sexual harassment policy, increased student awareness of the policy, and the distribution of educational materials are all necessary but not sufficient steps toward the elimination of harassment at school. In addition to policy awareness, administration, faculty and staff must consistently and fairly enforce the harassment policy and all members of the school community must embrace the policy as the standard for acceptable behavior at school (American Association of University Women, 2004; Schwartz, 2000; Sprague & Walker, 2002).

The 2001 AAUW survey highlighted a lack of policy enforcement by school personnel in that the harassment reported most frequently by students occurred in classrooms (61% physical; 56% non-physical) and the hallways (71% physical; 64% non-physical) in the presence of school personnel. The 2001 survey also highlighted a lack of acceptance of harassment policies as the standard for acceptable behavior at school. Student survey responses indicated: (a) 85% reported students were harassed by other students (b) 38% reported students were harassed by teachers and other school employees (c) 36% reported teachers and other school employees were harassed by students while (d) 29% reported teachers and other school employees harassed each other. As noted by Saufier (2006), student-student, student-staff, and staff-staff relationships play a critical role in the establishment of a positive school environment given that “the nature and quality of these relationships defines the school culture and significantly impacts school climate” (Saufier, 2006, p. 4).

Third, the elimination of a “climate of harassment” at school will require a committed effort from the entire school community whose goals should include: (a) a commitment from school and district administrators (b) anti-harassment policies (c) clear reporting procedures, disciplinary action guidelines, and grievance procedures (d) student education about harassment and harassment prevention (e) professional development for administrators and staff (e) family involvement and education (f) partnerships with community service providers and (g) counseling and support services for victims of harassment (American Association of University Women, 2004; Fineran, 2002; Office of Civil Rights, 2000; Schwartz, 2000; Steineger, 2001; Sprague & Walker, 2002). In short, “how a district responds to harassment demonstrates the district’s commitment to preventing and eradicating harassment” (Steineger, 2001, p. 29).

Finally, the 2001 AAUW survey results revealed that sexual harassment is a common student experience in urban, suburban, and rural schools across the nation. Although students attending urban schools reported being more afraid of being sexually harassed at school than students attending suburban or rural schools (36% vs. 29% respectively), the type of harassment experienced and/or witnessed, the person(s) responsible for the harassment, the locations within the school where the harassment occurred, and the individuals to whom the students reported the harassment was similar across urban, suburban, and rural schools.

Addressing The Issue

Concerns about the change in school climate at Smithville High School were initially voiced during a faculty meeting and it became apparent that these concerns represented a school-wide issue rather than isolated incidents. The faculty asked the school administrators and mental health professionals (i.e. guidance counselors, school psychologist, and vocational counselors) to address this issue and to offer suggestions for what might be done. Faculty, staff, administration,

and mental health staff met as a group to discuss the issue. The group discussion focused around a proposal of developing some type of school-wide intervention but the group felt like they did not yet have enough information to effectively target the proposed intervention.

The school psychologist made a recommendation that a participatory action research (PAR) methodology be used to address the issue. Participatory action research (PAR) has been defined by McTaggart (1989) as “an approach to improving social practice by changing it and learning from the consequences of change” (p. 1). The two primary goals of PAR are: (1) “to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people through research” and (2) “to empower people at a second and deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge” (Reason, 1998, p. 271). PAR is a collaborative process between individuals involved in creating a social change that uses a 5 stage process of planning (i.e. development of an action-based plan), acting (i.e. plan implementation), observing (i.e. observing the effects of the action plan), reflecting (i.e. reflect on observations of social change resulting from the action plan) and replanning (i.e. development of additional action plans) to create and evaluate social change (McTaggart, 1989; Wadsworth, 1998).

PAR research often begins with the collection of data on the issue of interest so that the collaborators on the project will have current and objective information upon which to develop action plans to create the desired social change. The data collection phase is then followed by a period of reflection in which the collaborators examine the data to define the nature and scope of the issue of interest. Finally, based on what has been learned from the data and reflection upon it, the collaborators develop an action plan (i.e. intervention) designed to create the desired social change (McTaggart, 1989). Given the Smithville faculty and staff’s uncertainty about the nature and scope of the problem and how to effectively target the intervention, the willingness of the faculty, staff, administration, and mental health professionals to take an active role in addressing the issue, as well as the lack of resources available for the school to hire external consultants to address the issue, the group decided that PAR was an appropriate methodology to address its current issue. It was at this point it was decided by the group that the first phase of the project would be to survey the student body regarding the “climate of harassment” within the school.

Assessment of School Harassment Climate

A survey was created by the school psychologist to assess students’ perceptions of the “climate of harassment” within the school. The survey assessed; (1) if students had witnessed and/or personally experienced 8 specific harassment behaviors while at school (i.e., unwelcome touching, inappropriate pictures & notes, cornering, blocked movement, inappropriate comments & gestures, forced participation in unwelcome activities, pressured participation in unwelcome activities), (2) how frequently each of the 8 specific harassment behaviors occurred at school (i.e., a rare occurrence, 1-2 times a year, once a month, once a week, a daily occurrence), (3) the individuals responsible for each of the 8 specific harassment behaviors (i.e., male peers, female peers, both male and female peers, male staff, female staff, both male and female staff), (4) the location(s) within the school where each of the 8 specific harassment behaviors were witnessed and/or experienced (i.e., hallways, classrooms, cafeteria, parking lot), and (5) action taken by students when witnessing and/or experiencing harassment behaviors at school (i.e., ignored it, walked away, told individual(s) to stop it, resisted with physical force, talked to someone about

the incident). The survey also asked students about their awareness of the school's harassment policy and the school personnel available to help students deal with harassment behaviors at school. Finally, the survey asked students to provide written suggestions as to how to control, reduce, or eliminate harassment behaviors within the school.

Of the nearly 300 students enrolled at the school, 221 students (94 male; 127 female) completed the survey (75%). The students were enrolled in grades 9-12. The student sample contained 76 freshman (48 female; 28 male), 75 sophomores (40 female; 35 male), 36 juniors (22 female; 14 male) and 34 seniors (17 female; 17 male). The number of juniors and seniors who completed the survey was limited due to an unrelated student protest that occurred at school on the same day the survey was scheduled to be administered. Students voluntarily completed the survey and were told that the results would be used; (a) to gather information concerning the harassment behaviors being witnessed and/or experienced at school (b) to develop educational programs for faculty, staff and students and (c) to provide students an opportunity to participate in the school-wide process of creating a safer, "harassment-free" school environment for both current and future students.

Harassment behaviors witnessed at school. Inappropriate comments & gestures, physical & verbal threats, unwelcome touching, and inappropriate pictures & notes were reported to have been witnessed during the school year by more than 50% of the students. Female students were significantly more likely than male students to report having witnessed inappropriate comments & gestures, $\chi^2(1; N = 221) = 21.17, p < .001$, physical & verbal threats, $\chi^2(1; N = 221) = 8.91, p = .003$, and inappropriate pictures & notes, $\chi^2(1; N = 221) = 4.56, p = .033$. A summary of the percentage of students who reported having witnessed each of the 8 harassment behaviors at school is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

| Witnessed Behavior | % All (N = 221) | % Males (n = 94) | % Females (n = 127) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Inappropriate Comments & Gestures | 76 | 60 | 87** |
| Physical & Verbal Threats | 59 | 47 | 68** |
| Unwelcome Touching | 58 | 52 | 63 |
| Inappropriate Pictures & Notes | 53 | 45 | 59* |
| Blocked Movement | 38 | 32 | 43 |
| Cornering | 35 | 28 | 40 |
| Pressured Participation | 25 | 23 | 26 |
| Forced Participation | 16 | 17 | 15 |

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Harassment behaviors personally experienced at school. Inappropriate comments & gestures (44% of students) and unwelcome touching (32% of students) were the two forms of harassment behavior most frequently personally experienced at school. Pressured and forced participation in unwelcome activities were the forms of harassment behavior least likely to be personally experienced at school (13% of students and 8% of students, respectively). Female students were significantly more likely than male students to have personally experienced harassment in the form of inappropriate comments & gestures, $\chi^2(1; N = 221) = 12.24, p < .001$. A summary of

the percentage of students who reported having personally experienced each of the 8 harassment behaviors at school is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

| Experienced Behavior | % All (N = 221) | % Males (n = 94) | % Females (n = 127) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Inappropriate Comments & Gestures | 44 | 30 | 54** |
| Unwelcome Touching | 32 | 33 | 31 |
| Physical & Verbal Threats | 20 | 17 | 23 |
| Blocked Movement | 19 | 16 | 22 |
| Inappropriate Pictures & Notes | 19 | 15 | 21 |
| Cornering | 17 | 14 | 19 |
| Pressured Participation | 13 | 11 | 14 |
| Forced Participation | 8 | 7 | 9 |

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Frequency of harassment behaviors at school. With respect to the perceived frequency of the 8 harassment behaviors at school, physical & verbal threats, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 43.32, p < .001$, blocked movement, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 57.44, p < .001$, inappropriate pictures & notes, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 38.75, p < .001$, forced participation in unwelcome activities, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 182.24, p < .001$, pressured participation in unwelcome activities, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 87.26, p < .001$, and cornering, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 66.71, p < .001$, were significantly more likely to be perceived by students as rare occurrences within the school environment. It is worth noting, however, that although these harassment behaviors were more likely to be perceived as rare occurrences at school, sizeable numbers of students did perceive physical & verbal threats (22%; $n = 49$), inappropriate pictures & notes (15%; $n = 33$), pressured participation in unwelcome activities (15%; $n = 33$), blocked movement (13%; $n = 29$), being cornered (12%; $n = 27$) and forced participation in unwelcome activities (10%; $n = 22$) as daily occurrences at school. Unwelcome touching, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 23.14, p < .001$ and inappropriate comments & gestures, $\chi^2(4; N = 221) = 48.48, p < .001$, were significantly more likely to be perceived as a daily occurrence within the school environment. A summary of the percentage of students who perceived the frequency of each of the 8 harassment behaviors to be a rare occurrence, 1-2 times a year, once a month, once a week or a daily occurrence is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

| Frequency of Behavior | All (N = 221) | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| | % Rare | % Yearly | % Monthly | % Weekly | % Daily |
| Inappropriate Comments & Gestures | 24 | 15 | 9 | 15 | 37** |
| Unwelcome Touching | 20 | 15 | 13 | 16 | 34** |
| Physical & Verbal Threats | 36** | 18 | 12 | 12 | 22 |
| Blocked Movement | 40** | 19 | 15 | 13 | 13 |
| Inappropriate Pictures & Notes | 37** | 17 | 16 | 14 | 15 |
| Cornering | 42** | 17 | 16 | 13 | 12 |
| Pressured Participation | 43** | 22 | 8 | 11 | 15 |
| Forced Participation | 56** | 14 | 12 | 8 | 10 |

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Individuals responsible for harassment behaviors at school. In evaluating the behavior of students and staff within the school environment, the largest percentage of both male and female students identified male peers as the individuals most responsible for the harassment behaviors witnessed and/or experienced at school (37% and 45% respectively). It is also worth noting that a sizeable number of both male (25%; $n = 24$) and female (29%; $n = 37$) students perceived both male and female peers as responsible for the harassment behaviors witnessed and/or experienced at school. Male staff, female staff, and both male and female staff were perceived by students as being responsible for a minimal amount of harassment behaviors witnessed and/or experienced at school (1%, 4%, and 3% respectively).

Given that both male and female students reported that staff were responsible for only a small portion of the harassment behaviors witnessed and/or experienced at school (4% and 5%, respectively), analyses focused on incidents of peer harassment. With respect to the 8 specific harassment behaviors, students were significantly more likely to report having witnessed and/or experienced unwelcome touching, $\chi^2(2; N = 221) = 68.65, p < .001$, inappropriate comments & gestures, $\chi^2(2; N = 221) = 56.58, p < .001$, and use of inappropriate pictures & notes, $\chi^2(2; N = 221) = 9.35, p = .009$ by opposite gender peers. In contrast, students reported witnessing and/or experiencing significantly more physical & verbal threats, $\chi^2(2; N = 221) = 18.75, p < .001$ by same gender peers.

While male students reported witnessing and/or experiencing significantly more forced participation, $\chi^2(2; N = 221) = 15.73, p < .001$, and more pressured participation in unwelcome activities, $\chi^2(2; N = 221) = 25.71, p < .001$ from male peers, female students reported witnessing and/or experiencing more forced and pressured participation in unwelcome activities from both male and female peers. Both male and female students reported that male peers were most often responsible for the cornering behavior witnessed and/or experienced at school (45% and 62% respectively).

Location of harassment behaviors at school. Although students reported witnessing and/or experiencing harassment behaviors throughout the school, they were significantly more likely to witness and/or experience harassment behaviors in the school hallways than in the classrooms, cafeteria, or parking lot, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 375.43, p < .001$. Nearly half of all male and female students (44% and 44% respectively) reported having witnessed and/or experienced harassment behaviors in the hallways of their school.

With respect to the 8 specific harassment behaviors, students reported it was significantly more likely to witness and/or experience unwelcome touching, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 51.02, p < .001$, cornering, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 143.27, p < .001$, blocked movement, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 138.04, p < .001$, physical & verbal threats, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 18.51, p < .001$, pressured participation in unwelcome activities, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 23.84, p < .001$, and forced participation in unwelcome activities, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 27.67, p < .001$ in the school hallways than in the classrooms, parking lot, or cafeteria. Both inappropriate comments & gestures, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 29.55, p < .001$ and inappropriate pictures & notes, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 76.25, p < .001$ were significantly more likely to be witnessed and/or experienced in the school hallways and classrooms than in the parking lot or cafeteria. A summary of the percentage of students reporting the classroom, hallway, cafeteria,

or parking lot as the most frequent location where each of the 8 harassment behaviors were witnessed and/or experienced at school are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

| Experienced Behavior | % Classrooms | % Hallway | % Cafeteria | % Parking Lot |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| Inappropriate Comments & Gestures | 32** | 36** | 18 | 14 |
| Unwelcome Touching | 24 | 45** | 19 | 12 |
| Blocked Movement | 15 | 59** | 15 | 11 |
| Physical & Verbal Threats | 23 | 39** | 19 | 19 |
| Inappropriate Pictures & Notes | 41** | 39** | 10 | 10 |
| Cornering | 17 | 59** | 15 | 9 |
| Pressured Participation | 23 | 39** | 17 | 21 |
| Forced Participation | 22 | 40** | 17 | 21 |

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Response to harassment behaviors. Students reported that ignoring the behavior was their most common action when witnessing and/or experiencing harassment behaviors at school (41% of students). Walking away (19% of students), verbally confronting the harasser (17% of students), physically confronting the harasser (12% of students) and talking to someone about the harassment incident (11%) were less frequent actions taken by students when witnessing and/or experiencing harassment behaviors at school.

Male students were more likely than female students to report they responded with force when witnessing and/or experiencing harassment behaviors at school (16% and 7% respectively) while female students were more likely than male students to report they had talked to someone about the incident after witnessing and/or experiencing harassment behaviors at school (18% and 6% respectively). This was especially true for female students in response to witnessing and/or experiencing physical & verbal threats, pressured participation in unwelcome activities or forced participation in unwelcome activities.

Knowledge of school harassment policy. Student responses indicated that there was not a significant difference in male and female students' awareness of the schools' harassment policy, $\chi^2(1; N = 221) = 2.79, p = .095$. However, only 59% of the female students and 47% of the male students were aware of the school's harassment policy, the range of behaviors the harassment policy addressed, and the potential consequences for students who exhibit harassment behaviors within the school environment. The low level of reported student awareness of the harassment policy was surprising given the fact that all students at the school were required to sign a student handbook acknowledging their awareness of all school policies.

School staff available to assist in matters of harassment at school. Guidance counselors, teachers, and the school psychologist were identified by students as the school personnel they would most likely approach to report harassment behaviors they had witnessed and/or personally experienced at school (20%, 16%, and 14% of students respectively). Other school personnel identified by students as potential sources of assistance in matters of school harassment included school counselors, the principal, students, the main office staff, the school nurse, peer mediators,

and the vice principal. A summary of those school personnel identified by students as potential sources of assistance for dealing with harassment behaviors witnessed and/or experienced at school are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

| School Personnel | % of Students | School Personnel | % of Students |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Guidance Counselors | 20% | Other Students | 7% |
| Teachers | 16% | Main Office Staff | 7% |
| School Psychologist | 14% | School Nurse | 6% |
| School Counselors | 8% | Peer Mediators | 5% |
| Principal | 8% | Vice Principal | 2% |

Note: 7% of students identified non-school personnel as potential sources of assistance (e.g. police, school handbook, parents, family)

Student suggestions for eliminating harassment behaviors at school. Student suggestions as to how harassment could be controlled, reduced, or eliminated from the school environment focused on 8 central themes. These 8 themes fell along a continuum from ignoring harassment to the development of school-wide educational programs. The 8 themes emerging from the students' written suggestions were as follows:

Theme 1: Ignore the behavior. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: ("Harassment is not a serious issue at school"; "Most of this behavior is just normal fun and joking around"; "The school is making too big a deal out of this issue").

Theme 2: Harassment is an individual student issue. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: ("Let people defend themselves"; "We are old enough to take care of this ourselves"; "This is an individual issue, not a school issue").

Theme 3: Harassment policy awareness. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: ("The school should develop a clearly defined harassment policy"; "The school needs to distribute the harassment policy to all students"; "The harassment policy should be reviewed with students each school year").

Theme 4: Better monitoring of the school environment. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: ("The school must reduce the number of opportunities for students to leave class"; "The school should hire more individuals or assign more individuals to supervise the hallways between classes and during lunch").

Theme 5: Significant consequences for harassment behaviors. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: ("Detention, suspension, and expulsion"; "Contact the parents of both students involved in a harassment incident, especially the parents of the harasser"; "Involve the police in incidents of school harassment"; "Put student who is guilty of the harassment on probation and require the student to complete a behavior improvement plan in order to remain a student at the school").

Theme 6: Education of students about topic of harassment. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: (“The school should hold assemblies or educational programs on the topic of harassment”; “Students should be required to read educational materials about harassment”; “Peer group meetings should be held to discuss harassment incidents occurring at the school and how these incidents can be avoided in the future”).

Theme 7: Provide counseling for victims of harassment and students who harass. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: (“School staff should try to reinforce student’s self-esteem”; “Comfort/counseling should be made available to victims of harassment”; “Confidential counseling should be made available to harassment victims”; “The school should have both parties (i.e., victim and perpetrator) attend therapy sessions”; “The recent loss of some of our counselors has been a major loss for the students at this school”).

Theme 8: School-wide approaches to dealing with harassment issues. Student comments expressing this theme included the following: (“Have a zero tolerance policy towards harassment at school”; “There must be consistent enforcement of the harassment policy”; “The school needs to respond to student concerns or run the risk of losing the student’s trust”; “Investigate incidents thoroughly without jumping to quick conclusions”; “Encourage students to report harassment and have a designated staff member to report incidents to”; “Talk openly about the issue of harassment in order to make our school a safer place for students to learn”).

Reflection on “Climate Survey” Results

Data gathered during Phase 1 of the project was presented by the school psychologist to school administrators, mental health professionals, faculty, staff, and a local domestic violence counselor who had volunteered her expertise and time to the project. The group decided that the best approach for beginning a school-wide program of sensitivity to the issue of harassment was to create a common knowledge base for the entire school community. This common knowledge base would include dialogue about the issues of tolerance and diversity in order to develop a safe framework within which to discuss the sensitive issues associated with sexual harassment.

Based on “best practice” recommendations from the school-based sexual harassment intervention literature, the group decided that to be effective, the school-wide program would need to contain the following features: (1) a commitment on the part of the school administration (e.g. resources, planning time, faculty and staff development credit) to the long-term support of the program (2) involvement of faculty and staff in the development of the program (3) training of faculty and staff to effectively deliver the program to students, model appropriate behavior, and enforce the school’s anti-harassment policy consistently and objectively (4) a multicultural curriculum which focused on issues including diversity, tolerance, individual differences, and respect for others (5) empowerment of students to respond to instances of witnessed/experienced harassment through development of self-esteem, communication, and assertiveness skills, (6) a training environment that promotes open discussion between students as well as students and school personnel and (7)

educational information on sexual harassment that is comprehensive in its content as well as age and grade appropriate (American Association of University Women, 2004; Maine Governor's Children's Cabinet, 2006; Schwartz, 2000; Sprague & Walker, 2002; Steineger, 2001).

Based on the results of the school "climate survey" and a review of the sexual harassment literature, the group decided the discussion of sexual harassment would include the following issues: (1) behaviors that illustrate the "hostile environment" and "quid pro quo" definitions of sexual harassment, (2) examples of opposite gender and same gender peer harassment (3) the physical, emotional, and psychological effects on students who have been sexually harassed at school (4) the relationship between bullying and sexual harassment, (5) the role of homophobic attitudes in harassment behaviors, (6) the school's sexual harassment policy (including behaviors considered to be forms of harassment, procedures for reporting incidents of harassment, as well as the consequences for those students committing harassment at school), and (7) how students can empower themselves to take more proactive measures to eliminate harassment from their school environment.

Development of School-Wide Harassment Education Workshop

Using the "best practices" recommendations from the school-based sexual harassment literature, the sexual harassment literature, and the results of the school "climate survey" as a foundation, an activity-based 90 minute workshop was developed by the school psychologist to begin the process of opening a dialogue within the school about the issues of tolerance, respect for others, and diversity and building a supportive framework for the discussion of harassment among faculty, staff, and students. The educational workshop contained 6 activities.

Workshop Activity 1: The "Corner to Corner" Activity. The "Corner to Corner" activity (adapted from Schrupf, Freiburg, & Skadden, 1993, p. 165) was designed to increase students' awareness of their beliefs and to increase students' acceptance of the different beliefs held by others. Students were asked a series of questions about their gender-based beliefs (e.g., a woman should be the President of the United States, women should be able to participate in military combat), beliefs about social issues (e.g., the legal drinking age should be lowered to 16; the only way to be successful after high school is to go to college) and perceptions of the "harassment climate" within the school (e.g., sexual harassment is a major problem at school; most behavior labeled as harassment by the school is only innocent teasing and joking among students). After each question, students were instructed to walk to the corner of the room which contained a sign reading either "AGREE" or "DISAGREE" to express their beliefs. Students in each corner were then given an opportunity to discuss (without criticism) their reason for supporting their beliefs, thus exposing students to multiple perspectives on each issue.

Workshop Activity 2: The "Tolerance" Activity. The "Tolerance" Activity (adapted from Schrupf, Freiburg, & Skadden, 1993, p. 166) was designed to demonstrate to students that individuals have different levels of tolerance for different beliefs, behaviors, and people. The word "tolerance" is written on the chalkboard and students are asked to generate a list of words they associate with the word tolerance. Through a discussion of student responses, it is elicited that tolerance is the acceptance of beliefs, behaviors or people one may not agree with. Students

are then asked to provide examples of things they cannot tolerate and examples of times in their lives they exercised extreme tolerance. Students are then asked whether they believe they have become more or less tolerant in the last year and how their level of tolerance compares to those of their family and friends. A series of gender-based statements (e.g., I think it's OK for men to cry; I think that it's OK for a woman to be a truck driver), social issue statements (e.g., I would marry someone of a different race or religion; I think it's OK to use aggression to stand up for something I believe is right), and statements addressing the "harassment climate" within the school (e.g., I think it's OK to tell sexually suggestive jokes in school; I think all students should expect to experience a certain amount of teasing, joking, and harassment at school) are then read to students. Students are asked to respond with either a thumbs-up or thumbs-down response to indicate their level of tolerance for the behavior described in each statement. Finally, students are asked to discuss the negative consequences that can occur when individuals are not tolerant of others. This discussion centers on specific examples of intolerance of beliefs, behaviors, or people that the students have observed within the school environment.

Workshop Activity 3: The "Are You Assertive" Activity. The "Are You Assertive" Activity (adapted from Rizzo-Toner, 1993, p. 71) is designed to provide the student with a self-assessment of their level of assertiveness across a variety of social settings. Students are asked to complete an assertiveness survey containing 10 items (e.g., I've done something I shouldn't have done because I felt pressured to do it; I have apologized for something that wasn't my fault; I've been out on a date with someone I didn't want to date because I felt bad about saying no). Students respond "YES" or "NO" to each of the 10 items on the survey. After completing the survey, students are asked to discuss situations in their lives in which they were not assertive and their reasons for not being assertive. This discussion includes incidents of harassing behaviors students have witnessed and/or experienced within the school environment. Finally, students are asked to brainstorm and discuss ways in which they can learn to become more assertive when witnessing and/or experiencing harassing behaviors at school as well as in their lives across a variety of social settings.

Workshop Activity 4: The "Be Assertive" Activity. The "Be Assertive" Activity (adapted from Vernon, 1989, pp. 131-133) is designed to teach students the difference between assertive, aggressive, and non-assertive behavioral responses and to examine which type of response is most effective in achieving a desired outcome. Students are provided with working definitions of assertion, aggression, and non-assertion and are then asked to complete a work-sheet which contains three scenarios (e.g., parents establishing a curfew decision; boyfriend or girlfriend stands you up; getting a bad grade on an exam and you think the teacher was unfair grading it). For each scenario, behavioral responses are provided which demonstrate assertion, aggression, or non-assertion. Students are asked to identify which of the behavioral responses demonstrates assertion, aggression, or non-assertion. Responses are then shared and discussed. Students are then asked to engage in a role-play exercise in which they are assigned an assertive role, an aggressive role, or a non-assertive role. Role-play scenarios are based on incidents of harassing behaviors witnessed and/or experienced at school by students (e.g. you hear a student tell a sexually explicit joke in a group setting at school; you are touched inappropriately by a fellow student while at school). Discussion follows the role play exercise and centers on a discussion of which type of response (assertion, aggression, non-assertion) is most effective at addressing the harassing behaviors.

Workshop Activity 5: “Evaluating Incidents of Sexual Harassment” Activity. In the fifth activity, students are asked to complete a worksheet which asks them to indicate whether they personally believe that the behavior described in each of 13 scenarios represents an example of sexual harassment, inappropriate behavior (but not sexual harassment), appropriate behavior, or whether they are unsure of how to classify the behavior. The scenarios include a variety of behaviors considered sexual harassment under the “hostile environment” and “quid pro quo” definitions of sexual harassment (e.g., teasing, repeated requests for dates, sexual comments, sexual gestures, pressured behavior, sexual touching). Student responses to the worksheet are then discussed. During the discussion, students are provided examples of: (1) behaviors that exemplify both the “hostile environment” and “quid pro quo” definitions of sexual harassment, (2) how same gender and opposite gender peers can exhibit harassment behaviors at school (3) the long-term physical and psychological effects of being harassed at school (4) the relationship between bullying and sexual harassment and (5) the role of homophobic attitudes in harassment behaviors. The discussion also addresses the specific details of the school’s anti-harassment policy. Discussion then occurs in which students discuss how their responses to each of the 13 scenarios would (or would not) change in light of the new information presented to them during the workshop.

Workshop Activity 6: “Personal Rights” Activity. The educational workshop concludes with the distribution of a “Personal Rights” handout to the students (adapted from Schrupf, Freiburg, & Skadden, 1993, p. 51) which describes basic personal rights they have as students in the school and as members of society (e.g., You have the right to say no and to not feel guilty; You have the right to make mistakes; You have the right to be treated with respect; You have the right to feel good about yourself). The goal of this activity is for students to affirm that they are worthy of respect from others and should be able to attend school and function in society without others violating their basic personal rights.

Implementation of Harassment Education Workshop

Faculty and staff members participated in the workshop led by the school psychologist. The training for this group also included discussion about the importance of faculty and staff modeling appropriate behavior for students at school and enforcing the school’s anti-harassment policy consistently and objectively. As a group, faculty and staff members were overwhelmingly positive about this opportunity to discuss and clarify for themselves what types of behaviors constitutes harassment and the difficulties inherent in relaying clear information to students, especially when harassment is often in the eye of the beholder. Initially, it was thought that the school’s mental health professionals (i.e. guidance counselors, school psychologist, & vocational counselors) would present the workshop to students, however, after taking part in the workshop themselves, 90% of the faculty (29 of 33) volunteered to co-lead a workshop session with the students. Faculty members who felt uncomfortable with the topic of harassment opted out of the project at this time. Faculty and staff members were paired up with a faculty or staff member of the opposite gender with whom they felt comfortable and became a workshop facilitator team. As a demonstration of its commitment to the project, administration offered staff development credit for faculty and staff who participated in the project.

The 90 minute workshops were scheduled and completed during one school week for all students at the high school. Each workshop session was attended by 15-20 students within the same grade. Student groups were purposefully kept mixed gender as the workshop facilitator teams all were comprised of mixed gender faculty/staff pairs. At the close of each workshop session, after the workshop facilitator teams had completed each of the 6 workshop activities with students, students were encouraged to read the school's sexual harassment policy which was part of their student handbook as well as encouraged to seek out a faculty or staff member who they felt comfortable with should they wish to report an incident of harassment they had witnessed and/or experienced at school.

Reflection on Harassment Education Workshop

After all students at the school had attended a workshop session, the school psychologist, school administrators, mental health professionals, faculty, and staff met to discuss and reflect upon their observations and impressions of the project. The school administration expressed its continued support for the project and suggested that the workshop be made a permanent part of the curriculum by requiring all incoming freshman to complete the workshop each school year. This would ensure that the discussion of issues such as tolerance, diversity, respect for others, and harassment were on-going and permanent themes within the school environment. Faculty and staff who served as workshop facilitator teams reported a positive response from students and a large volume of productive discussion within the various workshop activities. They also reported that the 90 minutes allotted for the workshop was a sufficient amount of time in which to complete the 6 workshop activities. Faculty and staff also reported a greater willingness on the part of students to approach school personnel to talk about harassment-related questions since the completion of the workshop, as students were made aware that all faculty had gone through the same educational workshop.

An important issue that arose during the discussion was that workshop facilitator teams reported the 13 harassment scenarios used during workshop Activity 5 ("Evaluating Incidents of Sexual Harassment") were not comprehensive enough to address the wide variety of behaviors that fall within the "quid pro quo" and "hostile environment" definitions of sexual harassment that arose in discussions during the workshop sessions with students. To address this issue, the group decided to make workshop Activity 5 more comprehensive and expand the number of harassment scenarios to be presented to students for evaluation and discussion.

Post-Reflection Modification of Harassment Education Workshop

A typology of sexual harassment proposed by Gruber (1992) was used as a foundation for expanding the number of harassment scenarios to be presented to students during the workshop. Gruber's typology organizes behaviors deemed to be examples of sexual harassment into 3 main categories: verbal requests, verbal comments, and nonverbal displays. Verbal requests include sexual bribery (i.e. quid pro quo requests for sex), sexual advances (i.e. questions or statements

expressing desires, intentions, or sexual interest), relational advances (i.e. repeated requests for a social relationship), and subtle pressures/advances (i.e. inappropriate personal questions). Verbal comments include personal remarks (i.e. jokes, teasing, sexual slurs, questions about sexuality/appearance), subjective objectification (i.e. remarks about a person either in his/her presence or in the form of rumor), and sexual categorical remarks (i.e. sexually-based comments about men/women and manhood/womanhood). Nonverbal displays include sexual assault (i.e. aggressive form of sexual contact involving coercion), sexual touching (i.e. sexual and sexualized touching), sexual posturing (i.e. violations of personal space and attempts to (or threats to) have physical contact), and sexual materials (i.e. pornographic materials/objects which sexually debase men/women or manhood/womanhood).

Scenarios were generated by the school psychologist and a research psychologist who volunteered his expertise and time to the project that included both male-female and same gender interactions and covered the broad range of behavior contained within Gruber's (1992) typology. In total, workshop Activity 5 was expanded from 13 to 26 harassment scenarios for evaluation and discussion. The modified version of workshop Activity 5 that contained the 26 harassment scenarios was presented to the group by the school psychologist for comment and critique. The group agreed that the new scenarios more adequately captured the complexity of harassment and the variety of behaviors that arose in discussions during the workshop sessions with students. The group agreed that the new scenarios should be made a permanent part of the workshop and would be presented to the incoming freshman the following academic year.

A decision was also made by the group that it needed to begin to evaluate the extent to which the harassment education workshop was having an effect on students' perceptions of the various harassment behaviors. In order to begin this evaluation process, the school psychologist recommended a pretest-posttest methodology and analysis be used to evaluate workshop Activity 5 ("Evaluating Incidents of Sexual Harassment"). The school psychologist explained to the group that in a pretest-posttest methodology, students would evaluate the behaviors in the 26 harassment scenarios prior to completing workshop Activity 5 and once again after completing the entire workshop. Changes in students' perceptions of behaviors contained in each of the 26 harassment scenarios could then be examined. The group decided to support the psychologist's recommendation and approved that a pretest-posttest methodology and a specific analysis of Activity 5 be included as a component of the workshop for the following academic year.

Delivery of Modified Harassment Education Workshop to Incoming Freshmen

At the start of the next academic year, all incoming freshman were required to participate in a workshop session. Once again, the workshop sessions were facilitated by mixed gender teams of faculty and staff and were administered to mixed gender groups of 15-20 freshman. A total of 65 freshman students (31 males and 34 females) participated in the workshop sessions. Prior to beginning Activity 5 of the workshop ("Evaluating Incidents of Sexual Harassment"), students were asked to complete a survey which asked them to evaluate the behavior contained in the 26 sexual harassment scenarios developed for the workshop. For each of the 26 scenarios, students were asked to indicate whether they perceived the behavior in the scenario as sexual harassment (SH), appropriate behavior (A), inappropriate behavior (I) or whether they were

unsure of how they perceived the behavior (U). At the conclusion of the workshop, students were once asked to evaluate the behavior in each of the 26 harassment scenarios. After all freshman had completed the workshop, student responses were analyzed to determine whether there had been a change in students' perceptions of the behavior in each of the 26 harassment scenarios following the discussion and presentation of information on harassment-related issues that occurred during Activity 5 of the workshop.

Analysis of Harassment Scenario Evaluations

Pretest Results.

Prior to completing workshop Activity 5 ("Evaluating Incidents of Sexual Harassment"), male and female students' perceptions of the behaviors in 16 of the 26 harassment scenarios were not significantly different. Four of these 16 scenarios which described a use of sexual gestures (e.g. males making sexual gestures while walking behind females in the hallways) and instances of sexual bribery (e.g. a male telling a female that if she and her friends want to be part of the popular crowd they would need to have sex with him and his friends; a male telling a female unless she has sex with him he will disclose embarrassing information about her; a male cornering a female in a stairway at school until she agrees to go out on a date with him) were perceived as clear examples of sexual harassment.

For 9 of these 16 scenarios, students agreed the behaviors described were, at a minimum, inappropriate for a school environment. Seven scenarios describing a use of personal or sexual categorical remarks (e.g. a female teasing a male about his masculinity; a male asking a female about her bra size; males teasing another male about the size of his jock strap; a male refers to females as "broads" or "babes"), instances of subjective objectification (e.g. a female writing a sexual comment about a male in the girl's bathroom; both males and females speculating about a male's sexual orientation when he is not present), and sexual touching (e.g. males and females "depantsing" students in the hallways) were equally likely to be perceived as either inappropriate behavior or examples of sexual harassment. Two scenarios which described a display of sexual materials (e.g. a male wearing a t-shirt containing sexual graphics or suggestive language) or a subtle pressure/advance (e.g. a male saying "I am feeling really horny today" while talking with a female) were both perceived as inappropriate behaviors.

For 3 of these 16 scenarios, both male and female students were less sure about how to perceive the described behaviors. Specifically, 1 scenario describing a use of sexual humor (e.g. a female tells explicit sexual jokes at school and on the school bus to males and females) was equally likely to be classified as either inappropriate or appropriate behavior. In addition, the behaviors in 2 scenarios describing a use of personal remarks (e.g. females doing "wolf whistles" at males in school who they think have nice bodies) and sexual touching (e.g. male sports teams having a tradition of grabbing females and kissing them after the team wins) were equally likely to be perceived as appropriate, inappropriate, or examples of sexual harassment. Perceptions of the behaviors described in these 16 scenarios remained unchanged following the completion of the entire workshop.

Prior to completing Activity 5 of the workshop, male and female students' perceptions of the behaviors in 10 of the 26 harassment scenarios were significantly different. While a majority of both male and female students perceived the following behaviors as inappropriate or examples of sexual harassment, for 8 scenarios describing sexual touching (e.g. a female gives a male a "snuggly" in the hallway, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 13.05, p < .005$; females pinching the butts of males who are getting books out of their lockers, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 9.86, p < .020$; a female massages a male's muscles and asks him if he has been working out, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 9.15, p < .027$), a display of sexual materials (e.g. a male passes a Playboy magazine around the boy's locker room before gym class, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 11.11, p < .011$), a sexual advance (e.g. a male stares at a female's body suggestively while talking to her at school, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 12.77, p < .005$), a relational advance (e.g. a male asks a female repeatedly for a date even though she always says "no", $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 12.22, p < .007$), and a use of personal or sexual categorical remarks (e.g. a female is teased by a male about the size of her breasts, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 8.29, p < .040$; a male uses sexual analogies and explanations when working on class assignments with females, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 8.49, p < .037$) male students were significantly more likely to perceive these behaviors as examples of appropriate behavior.

For the remaining 2 scenarios, male students were significantly more likely to perceive an incident of subjective objectification (e.g. a male writes the word "slut" on a female's locker, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 9.35, p < .009$) as inappropriate behavior than female students who were more likely to perceive the behavior as an example of sexual harassment. Interestingly, male students were also significantly more likely to perceive a use of a sexual categorical remark (e.g. a male always says "it must be her time of the month" whenever a female is in a bad mood at school, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 14.05, p < .003$) as an example of sexual harassment than female students who were more likely to perceive the behavior as inappropriate.

Posttest Results

After completing the entire workshop, male students' perceptions of the behaviors described in 6 of the 10 scenarios were no longer significantly different from the perceptions of female students. Specifically, after completing the workshop, male students now perceived: (1) the behavior in 3 scenarios describing sexual touching (e.g. females pinching the butts of males who are getting books out of their lockers; a female massages a male's muscles and asks him if he has been working out) and a use of personal remarks (e.g. a female is teased by a male about the size of her breasts) as examples of sexual harassment (2) the behavior in 2 of the scenarios describing a relational advance (e.g. a male asks a female for a date repeatedly even though she always says "no") and a use of sexual categorical remarks (e.g. a male uses sexual analogies and explanations when working on class assignments with females) as equally likely to be perceived as being inappropriate behavior or sexual harassment and (3) the behavior in 1 scenario describing sexual touching (e.g. a female gives a male a "snuggly" in the hallway) as an example of inappropriate behavior.

Male students remained significantly more likely than female students to perceive the behaviors in 2 of the harassment scenarios as examples of appropriate behaviors (e.g. a male stares suggestively at a female's body while talking to her at school, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 11.18$,

$p = .011$; a male passes a Playboy magazine around the boy's locker room before gym class, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 9.69, p = .021$) and to differ significantly from female students on whether the behaviors in 2 of the scenarios represented inappropriate behavior or were examples of sexual harassment (e.g. a male writes the word "slut" on a female's locker, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 12.42, p = .006$; a male always says "it must be her time of the month" whenever a female is in a bad mood at school, $\chi^2(3; N = 221) = 9.18, p = .027$).

Reflection on Modified Harassment Education Workshop

The school psychologist held a meeting with the members of the project team to present the results of the analysis of students' perceptions of the behavior in the 26 harassment scenarios. After presenting the results, the school psychologist led a discussion that focused on the types of behaviors for which there were gender differences in perceptions or a lack of clarity on the part of students as to how to perceive a behavior and ways in which these issues could be addressed in future workshops with students.

The project team also discussed the future activities of the group. The group decided that they would focus their efforts on 4 main activities: (1) the continued delivery of the harassment education workshop to incoming freshman (2) periodic re-assessments of the school climate to examine the impact of the harassment education workshop on the level of harassment behaviors in the school environment (3) recruitment of community members willing to volunteer their time and expertise to strengthen the quality of the educational experience for students and to begin building long-term partnerships between the school and the community and (4) application of the PAR research model to additional areas of concern that arise within the school environment (e.g. bullying, substance use). The meeting concluded with the school administration re-stating its commitment to support the future efforts of the project team and a commitment on the part of the members of the project team to continue their involvement in the program.

DISCUSSION

One of the most exciting aspects of this project was the extent to which the faculty and staff took ownership of it from start to finish. Faculty and staff were the persons who initially noticed and defined the problem and who took responsibility for developing a solution. The fact that faculty were willing and able to give of themselves and their time and to work together to present workshop sessions to students not only made the project successful for that year but also led to it becoming adopted as a standard part of freshman orientation to the high school. The harassment education intervention became part of larger institutional change, not simply an add-on brought in by an outside consultant. This move from a reaction mode, to a more prevention-minded mode was a major shift in strategy yet, one that provided access to every student and every faculty and staff member, not just those individuals who were personally experiencing harassment at school.

The training of the faculty and staff was also seen as positive outcome of the project. Faculty and staff were overwhelmingly positive about the opportunity to discuss and clarify what constitutes harassment, how to effectively model appropriate behavior, and how to professionally enforce the school's harassment policy. This was the first time in this school's history that the administration had committed resources (e.g. planning time, faculty and staff development credit) to addressing this type of sensitive issue. The professional manner in which the school administration listened to and valued the faculty's and staff's perceptions of changes in the school climate also served to strengthen the relationship between administration and faculty and staff members.

The students also benefited in numerous ways from their participation in the project. First, through their opportunity to take part in the school climate survey and their opportunity to engage in open discussion about their experiences with harassment behaviors at school during the harassment education workshops, students could see that the school was interested in the study body being active participants in the change process. Furthermore, commitment on the part of the school put the time and resources into developing a harassment education workshop illustrated for students the strength of the school's commitment to establishing a harassment-free and safe environment for students. Second, students became more knowledgeable about the potential long-term physical, psychological, and emotional consequences for students who experience harassment at school. Third, through participation in the workshop sessions, all students at the school were made aware of the school's harassment policy including the types of behaviors the policy addressed as well as the consequences for students engaging in harassing behaviors at school. Fourth, the students now had a trained faculty and staff who they could approach to report incidents of witnessed and/or experienced harassment and an administration willing to listen to student concerns and ready to take appropriate action to address student concerns. The presence of a trained faculty and staff within the school increases the likelihood that a student can find someone at school they feel comfortable talking with and/or to whom they can report an incident of harassment. Finally, the harassment education workshop had helped to further develop a common perception of inappropriate behavior at school among male and female students. Prior to taking part in the workshop, female students perceived a wider range of behaviors as inappropriate or examples of sexual harassment than male students. This is a common finding when examining gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). After taking part in the workshop, however, male perceptions of a variety of behavior changed resulting in both male and female students' perceiving the behavior in 22 of the 26 harassment scenarios as inappropriate or examples of sexual harassment. This development of a common "language" among students with respect to perceptions of harassing behaviors was one of the central goals of the project.

While there was some initial concern on the part of the school administration, faculty, and staff about the potential for false reporting and overuse of the school's sexual harassment policy resulting from a school-wide discussion of harassment, this was not found to be the case following the workshop. While it was true that several situations were brought to the faculty soon after the workshop sessions were conducted, even one involving another faculty member, this was seen as a positive outcome as it showed students that the school did indeed take its harassment policy seriously and allowed them to see their concerns addressed in a concerned, supportive, and constructive manner. This validation of the school's anti-harassment position

and policy was seen as constructive in terms of strengthening relationships between students, faculty, staff, and administration at the school.

This project also allowed for the school psychologist to assume a role of leadership in the change process. Hines (2002) stated that “the school counselor must be prepared to lead the way toward the development of a culturally responsive school and community” (Hines, 2002, p. 2). Lee (2001) adds that school counselors need to be “agents of change with the knowledge and skill to translate cultural awareness into constructive action” (p. 258). The project also allowed the school psychologist to work in a more consultative role with faculty and staff, which allowed for greater impact on the school in terms on the number of students reached as well as greater flexibility in terms of time and resources. The school psychologist, at this time, was responsible for servicing a school district which measured approximately 300 square miles and which had 9 sites to be visited weekly. This is the kind of model that rural school districts must employ in order to utilize their limited resources and personnel in ways that will strengthen the institution rather than simply try to stay one step ahead of a crisis.

An additional benefit of the project was that it also provided an opportunity for a process (i.e. PAR research model) to be modeled that could be applied to a number of current and future areas of concern within the school. The processes of assessing the school climate, reflecting on the results of assessment efforts, developing targeted interventions based on assessment data, and evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions are all processes that can be accomplished by a motivated faculty and staff who have the support of administration and school and community leaders willing to volunteer their expertise and time to work collaboratively to address the issue. In addition, many of the “best practice” principles used as a foundation for the development of the harassment education workshop can, and have been, applied to other issues facing schools including bullying (Furlong, Morrison, & Grief, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, through their participation in the program, faculty and staff were able to see themselves as true change agents rather than merely policy enforcers and their experience of success and accomplishment makes it more likely that they will use this process again.

Finally, the success of the project also highlighted several of the strengths associated with small, rural schools. The close relationships between faculty, staff, and students allowed for open and productive discussion about sensitive harassment-related issues. The flexibility and quick response time created by direct lines of communication, less bureaucracy, and autonomy at the building level allowed the school to begin addressing the issue soon after the awareness of the issue first arose. The traditions of volunteering and collaboration within rural communities as well as the greater opportunity for those individuals who are directly affected by issues in the school environment to be involved in the development of solutions to address these issues also contributed to the success of the project (National Education Association, 2001; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003; Rouk, 2001; Yaunches, 2002). Despite the availability of limited resources, this project demonstrates that small, rural school can create desired change when they rely on their people, their sense of community and cooperation, and their commitment to the education and success of their students.

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