



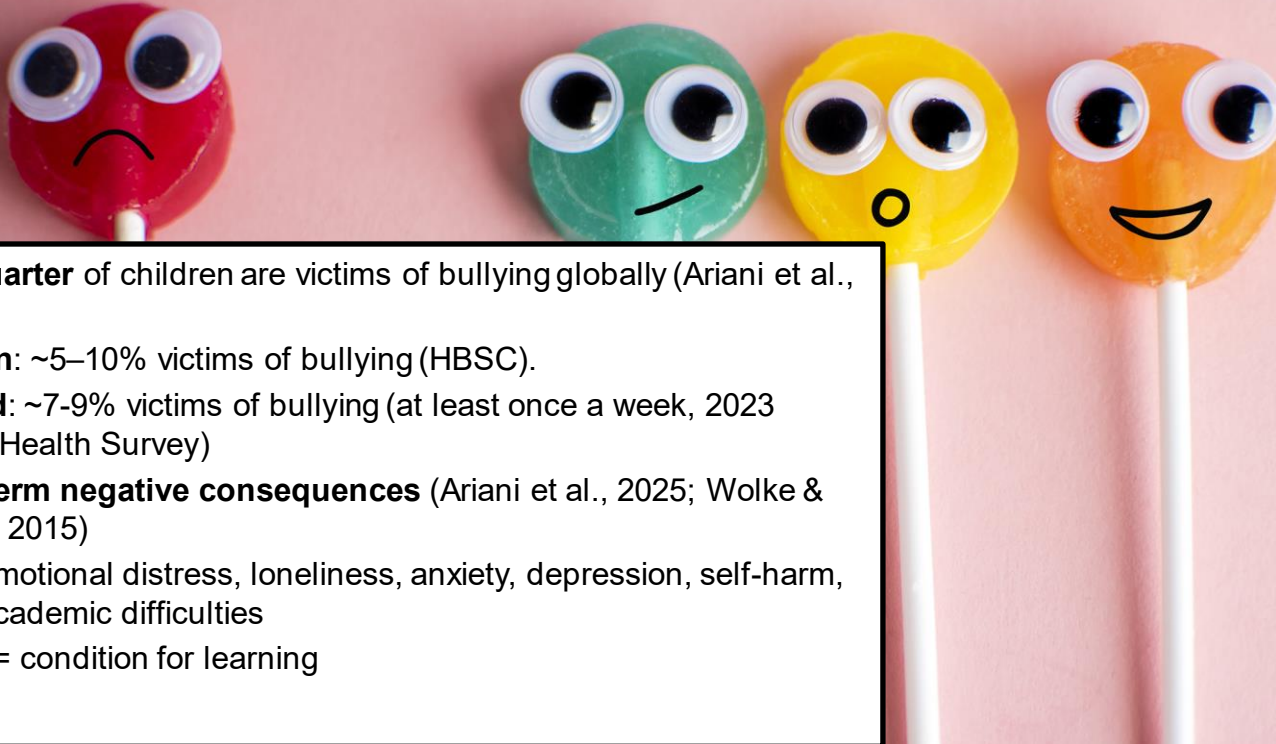
Höskolan
Kristianstad

Classroom Characteristics of Bullying

Social and Moral Processes of School Bullying

Marlene Bjärehed

Why does this matters?



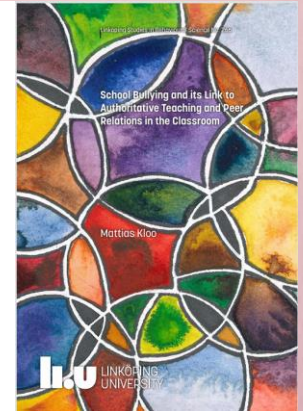
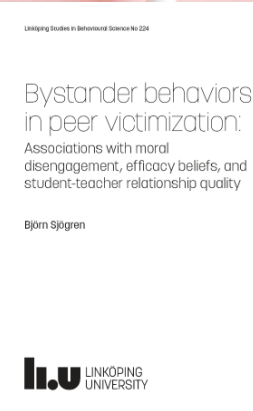
- ✓ **One-quarter** of children are victims of bullying globally (Ariani et al., 2025).
- ✓ **Sweden:** ~5–10% victims of bullying (HBSC).
- ✓ **Finland:** ~7-9% victims of bullying (at least once a week, 2023 School Health Survey)
- ✓ **Long-term negative consequences** (Ariani et al., 2025; Wolke & Lereya, 2015)
 - emotional distress, loneliness, anxiety, depression, self-harm, academic difficulties
- ✓ Safety = condition for learning

Not one cause



School bullying is a complex phenomenon

- Involves morality
- Happens in a social context
- Involves group processes (Participant roles)
- Shaped by interactions over time



Individual and Collective Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement

refers to the psychological processes that allow individuals to temporarily “switch off” their moral standards.

- “It was just a joke” (euphemistic labeling)
- “Everyone was doing it” (diffusion of responsibility)
- “At least it wasn’t as bad as what others did” (euphemistic labelling)
- “He brought it on himself” (blaming the victim)

Reduces guilt and the feeling of doing something wrong

- More likely to engage in aggressive behavior
 - More likely to bully others (offline and online)
 - More likely to support the bully (reinforce, assist)
 - Less likely to defend the victim
- (Gini et al., 2014; Killer et al., 2019)

Collective moral disengagement

refers to shared ways of justifying harmful behavior that emerge within a group through social interaction..

- If students belong to classrooms with higher collective moral disengagement they are
- More likely to bully others (offline and online)
 - More likely to support the bully (reinforce, assist)
 - More likely to increase in individual moral disengagement over time

(Bjärehed et al., 2021, 2024; Bjärehed, 2022)

Defender self-efficacy and collective efficacy to stop peer aggression

Self-efficacy:

the beliefs an individual has in their capabilities to successfully organize and execute the lines of action required to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1997)

Defender self-efficacy:

The belief in one's ability to successfully intervene in bullying or peer aggression to defend a victim (Thornberg et al., 2017).

Classroom Collective efficacy

The shared belief among students and teachers in a classroom regarding their conjoint capability to work together to intervene in, prevent, and stop bullying or aggressive behaviors.

Student with higher defender self-efficacy are

- More likely to defend victims
- Less likely to act as passive bystanders

(Sjögren et al., 2020, 2021, 2024)

If students belong to classrooms with higher collective efficacy they are

- More likely to defend victims
- Less likely to support

(Sjögren et al., 2020)

Student-teacher relationship quality

Student-teacher relationship quality

The extent to which interactions between a teacher and a student are characterized by warmth, trust, low conflict, sensitivity, and high expectations.
(Hamre & Pianta, 2001)

Students who have positive, supportive relationships with teachers are:

- less likely to be involved in bullying
- less likely to be victimized
- more likely to defend others
- more likely to tell teachers about bullying

(Bjereld et al. 2024, Thornberg et al., 2022; Sjögren et. al., 2020)

Longitudinal findings

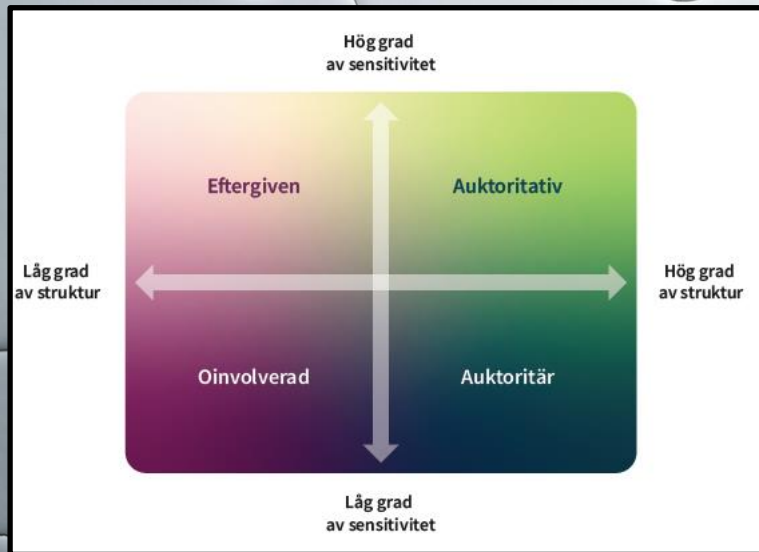
Students who have close and high-quality relationships with teachers are:

- less likely to show physical aggression toward peers over time
- less likely to show increases in moral disengagement over time

(Bjärehed et a., 2024; Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011)

Authoritative classroom climate

An *authoritative classroom climate* is characterized by a combination of high levels of teacher support and warmth, together with clear structure, expectations, and consistent rule enforcement.



Teachers who displayed high levels of warmth, caring, and supportiveness together with high levels of structure, control, and demandingness tended to have students

- who reported less bullying victimization.

Support and warmth was the most important aspect for students in grades 4-6.

(Kloo et al., 2024)

Students in classes with *greater* authoritative classroom climates were:

- more likely to defend victims.
- less likely to reinforce bullying, remain passive, be victimized

(Thornberg et al., 2018)

Implications in the classroom

“Teachers are in a unique position to impact the classroom peer group and to serve as a particularly powerful force in influencing student behavior ”

Hymel et al., 2015, p.18



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Reducing Moral Disengagement in the Classroom



SESSION 1 : LUMI

BONUS Remplir les étapes de l'histoire dans l'ordre au tableau

L'enseignant(e) lit l'histoire aux élèves de façon vivante, vérifie qu'il n'y a pas de difficultés liées au vocabulaire, puis résume brièvement l'histoire : Lumi et ses deux meilleures amies ne sont plus dans la même classe, deux filles de la classe chuchotent et rigolent quand Lumi répond aux questions de Madame Rita. Cara s'est fait de nouvelles amies et ne veut plus jouer avec Lumi, Maral et Sélimane ne veulent pas que Lumi soit dans leur groupe. « Oh non, pas elle... », Madame Rita traite Lumi de pleureuse et d'égocentrique mais dit à Madame Rita que c'est « pour rien ». Lumi essaie de parler à une autre fille de la classe mais Madame Rita l'empêche, leur défend Lumi, mais Madame Rita et Sélimane se moquent de lui et Lumi part de la classe en pleurant. 10 minutes

minutes - Répondre ? 0 1 2 3 4 - Remarques :

QUESTIONS INDIVIDUELLES 10 minutes

L'enseignant(e) lit les 2 questions et amène les élèves à réfléchir sur ce qu'ils ont vu ou entendu. Les élèves qui souhaitent leur réponse aux autres. Message clé : « Beaucoup d'élèves se sentiraient mal dans cette situation. » (Ce remède aide la plupart des élèves.)

1. Comment penses-tu que Lumi se sent à ce moment-là ? Et toi, comment te sentirais-tu dans la même situation ? (Si tu es une des filles chuchotant et que à chaque fois que tu réponds à une question en classe)

QUESTIONS INDIVIDUELLES

minutes

Répondre ? 0 1 2 3 4

Remarques :

Tolmatcheff et al. (2022).

Research informed strategies

- Explicit focus on moral disengagement
- Story-based interventions integrated into teaching (fiction, film, comics)
- Teacher modeling, explicit instruction, and feedback
- Framing justifications as “little lies” (Tolmatcheff et al., 2022)

Effects demonstrated in research:

↓ Moral disengagement

↓ Bullying and victimization

↑ Defending behavior

↓ Outsider behavior

(Wang & Goldberg, 2017; Tolmatcheff et al., 2022)

Building defender self-efficacy and strengthen collective efficacy to stop peer aggression

Students are more likely to act when they

- *Feel responsible for intervening*
- *Have the necessary skills*
- *Believe in their ability to perform the action (self-efficacy)*
- *Expect the action will lead to desired outcomes*

(Bandura, 1997)



Research-informed practices
(Gaffney et al., 2021)

Modelling (peers, teachers, film)

- Show that action *works*

Practice (role play, scenarios)

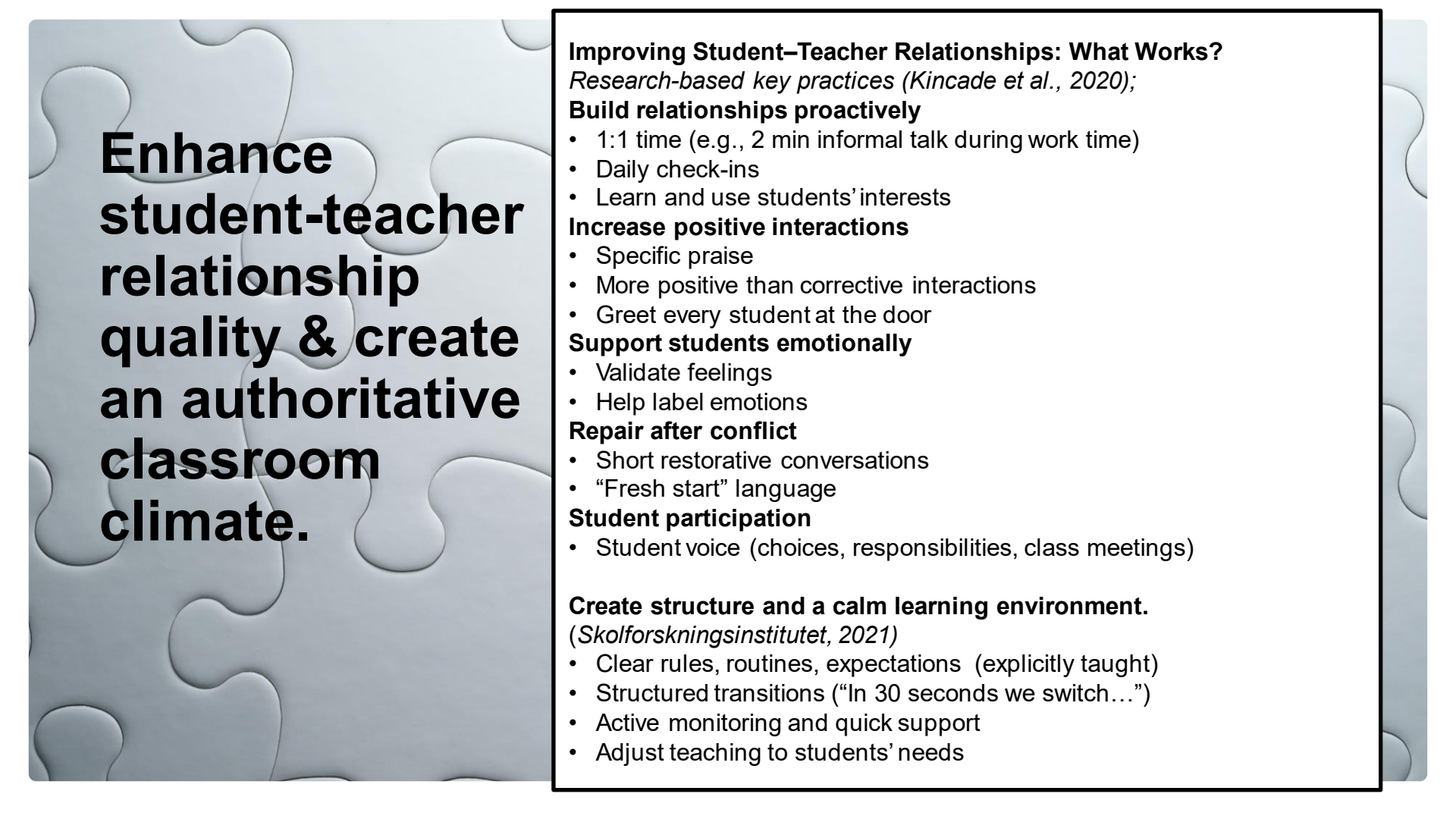
- Train *how* to act – alone and together as a group

Whole class / small group discussions

- In what ways can we defend
- Outcome expectancies: “What happens if I intervene?”

Collective efficacy:

“Focus on building a positive climate within schools, characterized by feelings of safety, security, and belonging of all members of the school community.”
Hymel et al., 2015



Enhance student-teacher relationship quality & create an authoritative classroom climate.

Improving Student–Teacher Relationships: What Works?

Research-based key practices (Kincade et al., 2020);

Build relationships proactively

- 1:1 time (e.g., 2 min informal talk during work time)
- Daily check-ins
- Learn and use students' interests

Increase positive interactions

- Specific praise
- More positive than corrective interactions
- Greet every student at the door

Support students emotionally

- Validate feelings
- Help label emotions

Repair after conflict

- Short restorative conversations
- “Fresh start” language

Student participation

- Student voice (choices, responsibilities, class meetings)

Create structure and a calm learning environment.

(Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021)

- Clear rules, routines, expectations (explicitly taught)
- Structured transitions (“In 30 seconds we switch...”)
- Active monitoring and quick support
- Adjust teaching to students' needs

What's next?

Project: Defending bullied peers in different ways: A longitudinal study of peer defending as a multidimensional construct

2025-2028

(Björn Sjögren, Linköpings universitet)

Focus on different ways to defend peers and the role of individual and contextual factors: cognitive and affective empathy, **defender self-efficacy**, **collective efficacy**, anti-bullying norms, **authoritative teaching**, **teacher-student relationships** and class climate (peer relations).

Grades 4-6 to 6-8)

Project: When morality is out of play and contributes to bias-based harassment among students

2026-2029

(Linda Wänström, Linköpings universitet)

Examines how **moral disengagement** is associated with bias-based harassment with respect to all seven discrimination grounds: gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and age.

Grades 7 to 9

Thank you for listening!

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