

## **Positive Role Models vs. Bullies: Can They Be Distinguished By Following Articulate Animals Into Worlds of Suspended Disbelief?**

Dr. Suzanne (Evagash) Miller, Professor of Education, Point Park University

### **Abstract**

Orally and later in written form, stories have been used to identify and reinforce the values of a culture. The parables of the Bible and the vocalization of articulate animals in Aesop fables continue to be used to teach morals to children. While the majority of existing research investigates the effective use of animals as a tool in character and values education, limited research has been done regarding the benefits of using articulate animals to teach leadership education and to promote the wise selection of leaders.

The purpose of this pilot study will be to qualitatively test the theory that students who read and discuss selections from modern fantasy that identify specific articulate animals as role models or bullies will respond differently to questions posed in whole-group discussion. The random selection of middle-school students engaged in followership training will read and discuss the roles of specific animals in selected children's literature. During whole group discussion, responses will be observed and recorded, noting differences to the following two questions: "Are followers responsible for the actions of a leader?" and "Is a bully a leader?"

### **Introduction**

*We are all following the leader, the leader, the leader*

*We're following the leader wherever he may go*

*We won't be home till morning, till morning*

*We won't be home till morning*

*Because he told us so*<sup>1</sup>

These lyrics from the Disney movie *Peter Pan* are familiar to most and represent the current conception regarding a follower's blind submissiveness to the wishes of the leader. In Sarah Sloan's article, "Characteristics of the Child Who is a Follower," she warns parents about the dangers of a child who demonstrates the characteristics of a follower. "If you were to look up the word follower in the dictionary, you would find follower defined as one who subscribes to the teachings of others: a servant." Further, Sloan states, "[Child-] followers tend to have poor social skills and co-dependency. [They] tend to shy away from responsibility for their actions and behavior."<sup>2</sup>

Fables and fairytales offer a different status of the follower. Stories, such as *The Magic Lantern: A Fable About Leadership, Personal Excellence and Empowerment* demonstrate the unique paradigm between the leader and followers. It identifies the power followers have in selecting and advising a leader and the follower's responsibility of at times functioning in leadership roles.

Dr. Rubino's fable, *The Magic Lantern*, tells the story of a group of dwarves and their young leader on a mission to restore peace and harmony to their village in turmoil.

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Pan Disney Movie, "Following the Leader Lyrics," 1953, <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/classicdisney/followingtheleader.htm>. (accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Sloan, "Characteristics Of The Child Who Is A Follower," *Helium*, March 5, 2009, <http://www.helium.com/items/1365680-follower/> (accessed October 29, 2010).

Throughout their journey, the characters overcome the many challenges, and through self-discovery, they develop the distinctions necessary to be the best that they can be as they step into leadership and lives of contribution to others. *The Magic Lantern* teaches us such noble lessons as the power of forgiveness, the meaning of responsibility and commitment, what leadership is really all about, the magic of belief and positive expectation, the value of listening as an art, the secret to mastering one's emotions and actions.<sup>3</sup>

“There is consensus among most of those who study stories designed for children that one of their most important, if not primary, purposes is to teach children the morals of their parents, religion, and/or society and, in doing so, influence their behavior.” In the *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Peter Hunt is quoted as stating that children's stories “are overtly important educationally and commercially—with consequences across culture, from language to politics: most adults, and almost certainly the majority in positions of power and influence, read children's books as children, and it is inconceivable that the ideologies permeating those books had no influence on their development.” In the same article, West states, “There has been a sense of some obligation on the part of children's books to provide a moral passageway through which a community's moral standards are communicated from one generation to the next. Children's literature can play an important role in the process of child rearing.”<sup>4</sup> A major concern for parents today, as well as society overall, is the increased level of violence and the willingness of children to silently witness peers being bullied and harassed.

### **Motivation**

Bullying and hostility in schools are major concerns, just as they are in society overall. A response to this critical situation has been state mandates requiring school districts to have anti-bullying policies, as well as weapons policies. Most school districts meet these mandates through the implementation of pre-packaged, anti-bullying kits that do not include the usage of literature and stories that are well-know, highly popular, and selected by the children. Throughout recorded history, stories and literature have been used by all cultures to teach society values. Based on this historic foundation, my study explores the benefits to school and anti-bullying programs of using highly popular, self-selected children's literature, in lieu of or in conjunction with pre-packaged kits.

### **Problem of Bullying and Hostility**

Violence and incivility have become major concerns for most countries. Bullying among students in Norway, Australia, and England has been extensively studied for the past 30 years. Recently researchers in the United States have also begun to examine bullying and victimization in schools.<sup>5</sup> Political figures, from small towns to the national capitol, daily discuss in the media their desire to create non-partisan relationships, free of bias and angry rhetoric.

Responses by the White House, Congress, numerous states, national education institutions, and individual school districts are overwhelmingly suggesting a need for character or values education. Congressional action to fund character education initiatives, state mandates

---

<sup>3</sup> Joe Rubino, "The Magic Lantern Review," *Homepage*, January 2001, [http://mlm.us/joe\\_rubino.html](http://mlm.us/joe_rubino.html). (accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Craig T. Palmer, "THE MANY MANIPULATIONS OF MORTY MOUSE: Children's Stories and the Parental Encouragement of Altruism," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 62 (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Amy and Gallo Milsom, Laura L, "Bullying in Middle Schools: Prevention and Intervention," *Middle School Journal* 37 (January 2006).

requiring that schools spend some time every day on character education, to the establishment by one of the country's major education organizations of a league of values-driven secondary schools, are a few examples of responses to the problem.<sup>6</sup>

One of the stumbling blocks is the issue of "what values" or "whose values" are to be taught. For example, should sex education be included in character education? Another response to the heightened violence and bullying across the United States is the formation of narrowly focused, anti-bullying programs and subscription by school districts to implement various programs that offer research-based training for school personnel. For example, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)<sup>7</sup> involves training for teachers and support for professionals to identify the various forms of bullying and to encourage children to openly discuss and report incidents.<sup>8</sup> PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) is a curriculum developed to assist teachers to comfortably and confidently teach lessons involving social and emotional issues to elementary-age children.<sup>9</sup> The curricula materials for these "top-down" anti-bullying programs have a narrow approach and are developed exclusively for purchase by school districts and implementation by teachers. Since these programs allow for limited use of readily available materials that children are already familiar with through academics or self-selection, an unintentional outcome of these programs is that the students perceive these anti-bullying approaches and procedures as only applicable within the school building. They do not transfer logically for them outside the school doors.<sup>10</sup>

### Use of Literature to Teach Values

Historically, books such as the *Bible* and stories such as fables, that were common to a society, were used to transmit values, including distinguishing between a positive leader and an individual who abuses power. The *Bible* stories and parables stressed the importance of wisely selecting and following good or moral leaders. In the *Bible*, followers are referred to as disciples, heightening the status of the follower and making them responsible for supporting ethical leaders and advising against the abuse of power. In the United States, the *Bible* was required to teach and sustain acceptable values and create a cohesive society, including wise choices regarding leaders and the recognition of the power of followers. The common schools, which after the American Revolution supplanted education by church institutions in the United States, required that the children be literate and moral. The *Bible* was used to achieve both goals. When *Bible* reading in public schools for the express purpose of teaching Christian values was no longer permitted (circa 1963), there was a resurgence of interest in fables and fairytales to teach commonly acceptable values. Fairytales such as *Red Riding Hood* and *Cinderella* were rewritten for a contemporary audience and new illustrations visually enhanced the stories that had cautioned countless generations about bullies and villainous leaders. Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, became popular to help children distinguish between good leadership, bullies and the enabling power of a follower. These age-old stories were also made available in various forms, including audio and video. Phrases such as, "Any

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> "Olweus Bullying Prevention Program," [http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying\\_prevention\\_training\\_info.page/](http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying_prevention_training_info.page/) (accessed October 29, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Kyle Lawson, "School district officials debate method of handling bullies," *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, December 30, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> "Paths (promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)," <http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/> (accessed October 29, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Mary Ellen Flannery, "Does It Get Better?" *neatoday*, January/February, 2011.

excuse will serve a tyrant,” (Aesop, c 550 B.C.) were once again used to create understanding within society that far surpasses these six words.

Currently, fantasy is experiencing all-time popularity in the form of novels, tie-in graphic novels, and movies. Characters such as Despereaux, Harry Potter, and the *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*’ characters, Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf, are well known to middle-school students. Discussions about these fictitious characters, the books, and the movies are all part of teen conversations, as well as those of their parents. Current school safety programs, including character and anti-bullying education, do not routinely incorporate these highly popular, student-selected, and readily accessible media. The implication of this study is that school anti-bullying programs would benefit by the inclusion of using highly popular, student-selected literature. Young adults identify with these fictitious characters. Like Alice in her world of suspended disbelief who made the connection between her fantastical dream and her life, “I suppose I will be taking orders from rabbits next,” usage of these novels can help create connections between school and teenage life, including distinguishing between positive role models and bullies.

Some schools do in fact subscribe to literature-based, character education programs, such as the Heartwood Program, which teaches a set of seven core values—courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love—using multicultural literature.<sup>11</sup> The limitations of character education programs such as this is the lack of consensus as to what values should be included. Typically, they are limited to lower elementary grades (K-5) while the research indicates that middle-school grades should be the target group. Also, the literature does not include student-selected stories and is written specifically for the packaged program. And, leadership training and the significance of followership are not addressed specifically. Although the Heartwood stories may have characters who are leaders or bullies, teaching children how to distinguish between the two is not one of the core values or focus. Again, programs such as Olweus deal exclusively with anti-bullying; the other programs, such as Heartwood, deal with character education. Both use pre-packaged, instructional materials. Both deal with specific issues—bullying or character education. Both use trained school personnel to teach pre-packaged, instructional materials.

However, as William Edgington states in his article, *To Promote Character Education, Use Literature for Children and Adolescents*, “Teachers have available an equally practical mode of instruction [to ready-made kits] – the use of literature for children and adolescents. Used to transmit values in this country for well over two hundred years, literature provides an important component to education: relevance to the lives of the children”.<sup>12</sup>

Friends of Freddy, an organization of nearly 200 members, include highly successful people, such as Henry S.F. Cooper, Jr., who reported extensively on the U.S. space program for *The New York Times*, attribute their moral foundation in part to avidly reading Walter R. Brooks’ Freddy series. “Brooks speaks powerfully to his young readers’ moral sense without ever overtly moralizing. [Freddy books] represent the very best of American fantasy writing for children,” says Mr. Cooper. “They are the American version of the great English classics, such as the Pooh books or *The Wind in the Willows*. Above all, it is Brooks’ moral words that stick

---

<sup>11</sup> "Heartwod: Teaching Life's Lessons Through Literature," <http://www.heartwoodethics.org/> (accessed October 29, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> William D. Edgington, "To Promote Character Education, Use Literature for Children and Adolescents," *The Social Studies* (2002).

with the readers.”<sup>13</sup> Members of the Friends of Freddy Organization emphasize the lessons that the books taught them that could be applied to their lives.<sup>14</sup>

The rationale of this study has historic roots. Historically, well-known stories that are common to a large segment of the population were used to teach shared values, including the distinction between leaders and bullies. Fables that were developed from the oral tradition of myths and folktales have been used over the centuries to enlighten and to teach conventional wisdom.<sup>15</sup> Fables are allegorical; they describe one thing while reflecting upon another. Therefore, they are an excellent form of literature to transmit cultural values. According to Gillian Brown, “What makes fables last is not the authority associated with neither their longevity, nor the universality of their message, but their utility for diverse purpose and circumstances.”<sup>16</sup> Although fables always have a moral, other forms of literature have also served to transmit cultural values from one generation to another. Among the shared values, the distinction between a leader and a bully was taught through literature.

### **Leadership**

Although there is considerable debate regarding whether or not a person is a born leader, there seems to be some consensus as to what qualities a leader should possess. The results of a long study of leadership, conducted by Kouzes and Posner, involving more than a million people who were asked to “describe the best leader you had,” identified 20 characteristics. The top five or core-qualities of a leader were: honest, forward-looking, competent, inspiring, and intelligent.<sup>17</sup>

Various forms of these 20 characteristics are evident in the numerous leadership training programs available for adults. Although there are hundreds of organizations nationwide, such as the American Philanthropic Organization, Kiwanis Club, and Scouts, that host or specialize in “service” leadership programs for children, there are few children’s programs that exclusively offer leadership training to children, by recognizing core-characteristics.

One resource for leadership training specific to children is *KidLead: Growing Great Leaders*, a landmark book by Alan E. Nelson that offers practical ideas for developing the leadership potential in children and youth. The *Lead Now* curriculum developed from Nelson’s book identifies 16 qualities, 8 character issues, and 8 competency skills that leaders should possess and followers should look for in a leader.<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of this study, four qualities were selected from Nelson’s sixteen. One quality was selected from each sub-theme—Values (commitment), Attitudes (confidence), Relationships (communication), and Decisions (vision).

### **Followership**

Children of all ages are familiar with the tune and lyrics *We’re following the leader, the leader, the leader. We’re following the leader, wherever he may go.* However, it is very difficult to find information or resources about followership and the characteristics of a good follower—a key factor to the success of any group. “Consciously or not, adults assume that leadership is something one earns or grows into. Thus young people cannot possibly be leaders in the present.

---

<sup>13</sup> Adam Hochschild, *Freddy Discovered by the New York Times: That Paragon of Porkers--Remembering Freddy the Pig* (2009: New York Times Book Review, May 22, 1994; repr: New York Times).

<sup>14</sup> Walter R. Brooks, *Freddy Goes to Florida* (New York: Penguin Group, 1949).

<sup>15</sup> Gillian Brown, “Fables and the Forming of Americans,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 43 (1997).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> James M. Kouzes and Barry Z Posner, *Leadership the Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Alan E. Nelson, *KidLead: Growing Great Leaders* (Book Surge Publishing, 2009).

They may be ready to rehearse leadership, but not to perform it.”<sup>19</sup> The article entitled, “Service-Learning Leadership Development for Youth,” further states, “Several elements are critical to the effective young leaders, including youth/adult partnerships that grant young people decision-making power and responsibility for consequences. Partnerships in which young people and adults share learning and leadership allow them to become co-creators of community.” In the preface of *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner recognize the importance of followership. “The leader’s tale, however, is only half the story. To be a leader you have to have constituents [followers].”

As Ruskin states in his article, *Followership*, “If you have never heard the term before or never thought twice about it, you are not alone. It usually appears as a ‘non-word’ when documents are spell-checked on the computer. Is it a new concept? Not really; just one that is often overlooked or forgotten. And just why followership is overlooked and forgotten is an intriguing question. Without followers would there be leaders? Who would they lead? ... Leadership is an interactivity: leaders depend on followers and vice versa.”<sup>20</sup>

*The Origins of Leadership*, by Mark van Vugt, “discusses the origin of leadership which pervades in every aspect from the family and the office to local community. The evolutionary perspective of leadership highlights the importance of the followers and the reasons behind the respect between the leader and the follower. In essence, leadership is a response to the need for collective action. How do members of a group decide what to do and how and when to do it? An obvious solution is for one individual to take the initiative and provide guidance while the rest agree to follow. If this strategy promotes survival, then psychological adaptations for both leadership and ‘followership’ are likely to evolve.” Mark van Vugt further states, “The psychology of followership is usually neglect, but it is more interesting than that of leadership. Most of us are destined to be followers, yet we are only starting to understand what makes a good follower and how they influence leaders.”<sup>21</sup>

For the purpose of this study, discussion centered on the need for followers to be perceptive when selecting a leader, the follower’s responsibility for the actions of the leader, and the necessity of the follower to at times assume leadership responsibilities. The principle of followership was summed up by the 19<sup>th</sup> century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli who said, “I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?”

## Research Methodology

The pilot study was designed to test the theory that middle-school students’ responses and anecdotal comments to two questions, “Are followers responsible for the actions of a leader?” and “Is a bully a leader?” would be affected by discussion and analysis of specific articulate animals who exhibited characteristics of a leader, a bully, and/or a follower in selections from three children’s modern fantasy books and accompanying videos clips. The pilot study was conducted twice, on two separate dates, with two different populations of middle-school

---

<sup>19</sup> Joy Des Marais and Youa Yang and Farid Farzanehkia, “Service-Learning Leadership Development for Youths,” *Phi Delta Kappan* (May 2000).

<sup>20</sup> John Ruskin, “Followership,” *Holden Leadership Center*, [http://leadership.uoregon.edu/resources/exercises\\_tips/skills/followership/](http://leadership.uoregon.edu/resources/exercises_tips/skills/followership/) (accessed November 2, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Mark van Vugt, “The Origins of Leadership,” *New Scientist* 198 (June 14 2008).

students—15 parochial students on February 10, 2011 and 14 public school students on April 4, 2011.

Several days before the research, classroom teachers distributed pre-questionnaires to the students that posed two questions, “Are followers responsible for the actions of a leader?” and “Is a bully a leader?” Students were requested to provide a two-sentence minimum explanation for their responses.

On the day of the study, pre-questionnaires were collected and students were given a researcher-designed *Lab Book* or instructional materials. Classroom teachers were given a lesson plan that identifies Commonwealth of Pennsylvania standards, along with the time frame for each portion—instruction, whole-class readings and discussion, and student presentations.

As a group, students completed exercise sheets that asked them to define three terms (leaders, bullies, and followers) and give verbal and non-verbal characteristics for each. A brief question and answer session provided the students with additional examples to what was provided on the exercise sheets and suggestions were provided regarding potential verbal and non-verbal cues for each characteristic. For example a verbal cue for the characteristic *confident* might be stating firmly, “I definitely know;” a non-verbal cue for *confident* would be making eye contact.

Upon completion of the leadership terms, students were told that they were going to be contestants in a game show called, “Are you Smarter Than An Articulate Animal?” Students were asked to verbally define the term “articulate animal” (assumes human characteristics, including speaking). Students were told that the talking animals could not be present, but the words of the animals were available through the selected readings from three different modern fantasy stories. Story titles were not disclosed. Further, they were told that the winners of the competition would be the group (students vs. animals) who make superior choices regarding a leader, are better followers and refuse to follow a bully. Before the competitive activity began, check sheets were reviewed regarding characteristics of a leader, bully, and a follower. After 1) review of the identified characteristics of a leader, bully and follower; 2) discussion of the characteristics that are shared by all three; and 3) identification of what verbal and non-verbal cues to look for that would help distinguish the difference, students were given two versions of the same selected scripts from modern fantasy portraying articulate animals as positive role models and/or bullies. In the “neutral” scripts the terms focus character and main character were substituted for the character’s name, descriptive terms were also removed.

Students read aloud “neutral” scripts, (selections with character names and descriptive words, such as angrily were removed), from three modern fantasy stories. After each whole-group reading of a “neutral” script, the students individually voted as to whether or not, like the main character (Despereaux, Jenner, or Alice), he/she would follow the focus character or leader (Botticelli, Nicodemus, and Caterpillar). At the conclusion of the three “neutral” readings and voting, the students were given a matching sheet that disclosed all six characters—three focus (leaders) and three main (followers).

Once all three neutral scripts were read and voted upon, the “authentic scripts” or actual text from *Tale of Despereaux*,<sup>22</sup> *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*,<sup>23</sup> and *Alice in Wonderland*<sup>24</sup> were read aloud; video clips from each selection were viewed. At the conclusion of the three

---

<sup>22</sup> Kate DiCamillo, *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, some Soup, and a Spool of Thread* (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (New York: Alladin Paperbacks, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass* (London: CRW Publishing Limited, 2004).

“authentic” script readings and video viewings, students “re-voted” to determine if they would follow the focus character or not. They were then grouped and assigned a specific authentic script and accompanying video clip. Each group re-read assigned scripts, reviewed video clips, looking for verbal and non-verbal characteristics of a good follower. Each group then presented answers to the following three questions:

1. Based on group discussion, determine whether the main character is a “good” follower (Despereaux, Jenner, or Alice). Yes? or No?
2. Did the follower empower the leader or focus character (Botticelli, Nicodemus, or Caterpillar)? Yes? or No?
3. Identify any other character from a book or a person who demonstrates similar characteristics or behavior.

After group presentations, students individually completed post-questionnaires:

- Is a bully a leader? Yes? No? (circle one) Explain answer (two sentences).
- Are followers responsible for the actions of a leader? Yes? No? (circle one) Explain answer (two sentences).

Final activity: Students were asked, “Were you smarter than an articulate (talking) animal?”

## **Research Design**

### **Subjects (two separate groups)**

Fifteen (15) middle-school students (grades 5 through 8), attending a Greek Orthodox School (THEOS) and fourteen (14) sixth graders, attending six different public schools in the North Hills School District and Pittsburgh CAPA, participated in the researcher-designed exercises.

### **Materials** (researcher developed)

Classroom-Teacher Lesson Plan

*Smarter-Than* award certificates

*Student Lab Book* (sample of content in Appendix)

- Venn diagram and samples of leadership instructional materials (Appendix A)
- Neutral/authentic scripts and presentation group assignment (Appendix B)
- Sample of THEOS Presentation – *The Tale of Despereaux* Character Comparison (C)
- Sample of Public-School Student Presentation – *Alice in Wonderland* Character Comparison (D)

### **Time-Frame**

1 ½ hours divided into ½-hour segments (½ hour for instruction and discussion of characteristics of leaders, bullies and followers; ½ hour for readings of neutral and authentic scripts and viewing of video clips; ½ hour for group readings, video viewing, and presentations).

### **Findings -- Questionnaire Per Population**

**Parochial-School Subjects**, February 10, 2011, 15 middle-school students, grades 5 through 8

Pre-and Post-Questionnaires: Comparisons of responses on pre-and post- questionnaires for question #1, “Is a bully a leader,” showed a slight increased recognition that a bully is a leader.



The anecdotal comments clarified that the students were not comfortable using the terms leader and bully interchangeably. They made the distinction that a leader cares and a bully is mean. But, both have followers.

Comparisons of responses on pre- and post- questionnaires for question #2, “Are followers responsible for the actions of a leader,” showed strong recognition that a bully is a leader. One 7<sup>th</sup> grader’s pre-questionnaire answer to question #2 was, “No.” His anecdotal comment on the pre-questionnaire was “[Followers] never think for themselves.” Same student’s post- questionnaire answer to question #2 was, “Yes.” His anecdotal comment on the post-questionnaire was “Followers empower a leader.” When questions #1 and #2 were combined, more than half of the participants recognized that followers are responsible for the actions of a leader.

**Public-School Subjects**, April 4, 2011, 14 sixth graders from a six different North Hills schools and CAPA

Pre-and Post-Questionnaires: Comparisons of responses on pre-and post- questionnaires for question #1, “Is a bully a leader,” showed a significant increased recognition that a bully is a leader. Eleven of the 14 students changed their responses on post- questionnaire to recognize a bully as a leader. Anecdotal comments strongly supported the responses, “A bully is a leader, but not a good one. They need followers to make them powerful and successful.”

On pre- and post- questionnaires: Comparisons of responses on pre- and post- questionnaires for question #2, “Are followers responsible for the actions of a leader,” showed strong recognition that a bully is a leader. Ten (10) of the 14 students recognized that followers are responsible for the actions of a leader. One female student stated, “The followers make the leader feel like they are powerful. And the actions of the leader are made by the followers.” Another female student stated, “If a leader doesn’t have followers they won’t go on. If someone tried to do something and nobody followed, they might not do it.”

**Combined Questionnaire Findings**

For both populations, there was a significant difference in the *Yes* and *No* responses from the pre- questionnaire to the post- questionnaire. On the post- questionnaire, both populations (parochial and public) overwhelmingly stated that followers assume responsibility for leaders--positive role models as well as bullies. The anecdotal comments supported their “Yes” selection.

**Findings -- Group Presentation Per Population**

**Parochial-School Subjects**, February 10, 2011, 15 middle-school students, grades 5 through 8

The group assigned *Tale of Despereaux* stated that Despereaux was not a good follower because he followed and empowered Botticelli, an evil leader. The group compared Despereaux to Anakin from *Star Wars* (Episode 3) who, like Despereaux, follows a bully—the evil emperor. Two students from this group offered as a text comparison Moe from the *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip to Botticelli, both bullies.

The group assigned *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* stated that Jenner was not a good follower because he betrayed Nicodemus and incited fellow-followers to plot the murder of Nicodemus and create chaos for the community. Jenner did not empower or support Nicodemus, a wise, ethical leader who encouraged the rats to change their ways. The group compared Jenner to Judas, who betrayed Jesus, a wise, ethical leader who encouraged change.

The group assigned *Alice in Wonderland* stated that Alice was not a good follower because she sought the advice of a silly character instead of being perceptive and looking at verbal and non-verbal cues, such as the Caterpillar rudely turning his back on Alice while speaking and asking Alice challenging questions such as, “Who are you?” Alice empowered a silly Caterpillar by returning to listen to the ridiculous advice, “One side will make you grow taller the other side will make you grow shorter.” The group compared Alice to Harry Potter, who as a student sometimes seeks the advice of Headmaster Dumbledore, who makes silly statements that sometimes have double meanings.

**Public-School Subjects**, April 4, 2011, 14 6<sup>th</sup> graders from a six different North Hills schools and CAPA

The group assigned *Tale of Despereaux* stated that Despereaux was not a good follower because he followed and empowered Botticelli, an evil leader. The group compared Botticelli to Kronos, the Titan king who manipulates others to his corrupt ways in the Rick Riordan *Percy Jackson Lightning Thief* series.

The group assigned *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* stated that Jenner was not a good follower because he betrayed Nicodemus and did not empower a good and ethical leader. The group compared Jenner to Gaston, who in *Beauty and the Beast* remains self-centered throughout the story, instead of growing in a positive way like the Beast.

The group assigned *Alice in Wonderland* stated that Alice was not a good follower because she sought the advice of an abusive character and empowered the Caterpillar to the status of a leader by following his advice. The group compared the relationship between Alice and the Caterpillar to Ariel and Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*. Ariel seeks Ursula’s advice to win Prince Eric’s love, knowing that Ursula is a wicked sea witch.

### **Combined Group Presentation Findings**

All students from both populations unanimously determined that Despereaux, Jenner, and Alice were not good followers. Despereaux and Alice followed abusive leaders or bullies and Jenner betrayed a noble leader. All students were able to identify characters from various media (books, movies, comic strips, and textbooks) that demonstrate similar characteristics or behaviors.

### **Closing Activity**

When students were asked the concluding question, “Are you smarter than an articulate (talking) animal?” the overwhelming answer was “Yes!” The students’ explanations were:

- Unlike the main characters in the stories—Despereaux, Jenner, and Alice, “we” (students) were able to distinguish between a positive role model (Necodemus) and a bully (Botticelli and Caterpillar).
- Unlike the main characters in the stories and comparison stories, “we” (students) are better followers because we recognize that we empower positive role models, as well as bullies. We are responsible for the actions of a leader.

Each student was given a *Smarter-Than* award certificate for superior decisions compared to talking animals and excellent use of the power of a follower. Students were asked to post the certificate in a prominent place in their homes as a reminder of their participation in the study and to remind them of their power as a follower to choose a positive role model or a bully.

## Conclusions

The findings of the pilot study serve as a reference point for understanding the benefits of using the third person perspective of animals in student-selected literature to help middle-school students distinguish between a positive role model and a bully, and the power of followership.

All the students in the study were highly motivated by the “Are You Smarter Than?” competition. They actively participated in the discussion and presentations. The use of articulate animals allowed for emotional distancing and students freely identified the behaviors of the characters as positive role models, bullies, or effective followers. They were also able to give additional examples from other stories of characters that exhibited similar characteristics. They quickly made connections between the articulate animals and other forms of media, as well as life experiences. They freely volunteered anecdotal comments about sensitive issues in their lives regarding peer pressure and harassment.

Students were able to distinguish discrete differences between a positive role model and a bully based on verbal and non-verbal cues. For example, they identified the rude behavior of the Caterpillar, blowing smoke in Alice’s face and turning his back on her as he spoke to her. The students stated that they would not have returned when the Caterpillar called, “Come back!” They identified Botticelli’s words to entice Despereaux as insincere and would not have followed Botticelli to find the princess, even though Despereaux did.

The individual and group responses overwhelmingly demonstrated the effective use of literature as a tool to help middle-school students distinguish positive role models from bullies and to identify their responsibility in the selection of who to follow. For example, a personal insight from a seventh grader was, “You [the follower] don’t need to follow a leader. You can be your own person. You should lead yourself.”

## Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Little research was found regarding classroom use of popular, self-selected children’s literature as part of anti-bullying curriculum. Children’s literature that is easily accessible and well-known to middle-school students in various forms is underutilized as a tool for anti-bullying, either alone or in conjunction with pre-packaged kits. Children’s literature that is selected by the student, purchased by the parent, or experienced in video form at the movies does not cause debate regarding “whose values” are being taught? As Robert Ruddell emphasizes, in *Teaching Children to Read and Write: Becoming and Effective Literacy Teacher*, “The teacher’s goal should be to connect students with literary work through discussion that link students’ background knowledge, personal interests, and responses to the story characters.”<sup>25</sup> The results of this pilot strongly support the beneficial effects of using highly popular literature to create opportunities for children to discuss the roles of story characters (leader, bully, and follower) and linking the behaviors to their lives.

Even with the limitations of time (1 ½ hours) and small samplings (29 middle-school students on two different dates), the positive results of the pilot study suggest that further research should be conducted over a longer period of time, with a larger, diverse population to measure the benefits of incorporating children’s literature into the classroom anti-bullying curriculum and the district-wide anti-bullying programs. Some additional benefits would be:

- Financial savings for districts compared to the purchase of pre-packaged kits that serve a narrow purpose

---

<sup>25</sup> Robert Ruddell, *Teaching Children to Read and Write: Becoming and Effective Literacy Teacher* (Berkeley, CA: Allyn and Bacon, 2005).

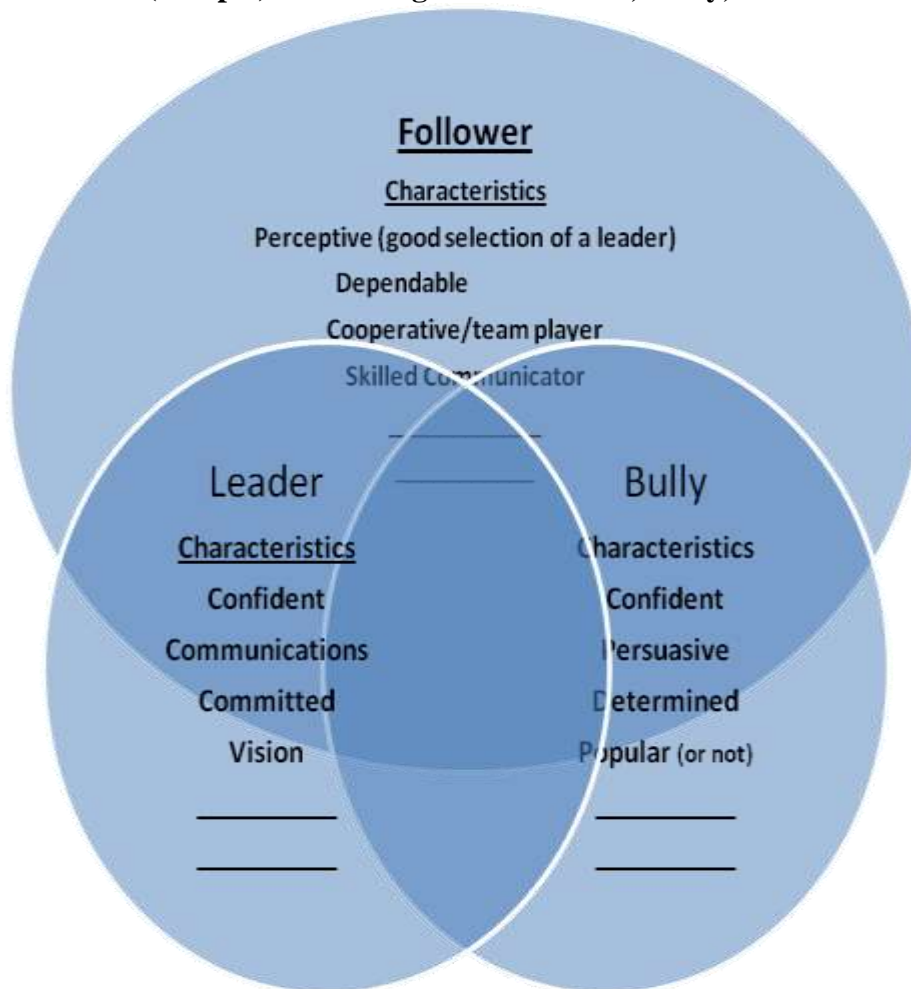
- Meeting numerous academic standards in various content areas, including reading, writing, and literature
- Creating a school environment that encourages connectedness among teachers, school personnel, and students
- Meeting the needs of each student through self-directed activities based on student-selected materials
- Providing a connection between home activities or parental/sibling discussions and school activities

The implication of this study is that school anti-bullying programs would benefit by the inclusion of highly popular, student-selected literature. The overwhelmingly positive responses regarding followers being responsible for the actions of leaders, strongly implies that literature can be used as a catalyst in school anti-bullying programs. Anecdotal comments strongly imply that literature can create opportunities for disclosure regarding bullying and harassment that students are experiencing without feeling as if they are “tattling.” One sixth grade student commented after the study, “Just like Botticelli, bullies encourage you to smoke cigarettes by telling you that you can be popular and part of the cool kids.”

## Reference List

- "Heartwood: Teaching Life's Lessons Through Literature." <http://www.heartwoodethics.org/> (accessed October 29, 2010).
- "Oweus Bullying Prevention Program." [http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying\\_prevention\\_training\\_info.page//](http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying_prevention_training_info.page//) (accessed October 29, 2010)
- "Paths (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)." <http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-progrms/paths/> (accessed October 29, 2010).
- Brooks, Walter R. *Freddy Goes to Florida*. New York: Penguin Group, 1949.
- Brown, Gillian. "Fables and the Form of Americans." *Modern Fiction Studies* 43 (1997): 115-143.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*. London: CRW Publishing Limited, 2004.
- Des Marais, Joy and Youa Yang and Farid Farzanehkia. "Service-Learning Leadership Development for Youths." *Phi Delta Kappan* (May 2000).
- DiCamillo, Kate. *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, some Soup, and a Spool of Thread*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2003.
- Edgington, William D. "To Promote Character Education, Use Literature for Children and Adolescents." *The Social Studies* (2002): 113-116.
- Flannery, Mary Ellen. "Does It Get Better?." *neatoday*, January/February, 2011, 38-40.
- Hochschild, Adam. *Freddy Discovered by the New York Times: That Paragon of Porkers-- Remembering Freddy the Pig*. 2009: New York Times Book Review, May 22, 1994. Reprint, : New York Times.
- Kouzes, James M. and Posner, Barry Z. *Leadership the Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- Milsom, Amy and Gallo, Laura L. "Bullying in Middle Schools: Prevention and Intervention." *Middle School Journal* 37 (January 2006): 12-19.
- Nelson, Alan E. *KidLead: Growing Great Leaders*. Book Surge Publishing, 2009.
- O'Brien, Robert C. *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. New York: Alladin Paperbacks, 1975.
- Palmer, Craig T. "THE MANY MANIPULATIONS OF MORTY MOUSE Children's Stories and the Parental Encouragement of Altruism." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 62 (2006): 235-240.
- Peter Pan Disney Movie. "Following the Leader Lyrics."1953. <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/classicdisney/followingtheleader.htm>. (accessed March 20, 2011).
- Rubino, Joe. "The Magic Lantern Review." *Homepage*, January 2001. [http://mlm.us/joe\\_rubino.html](http://mlm.us/joe_rubino.html). (accessed March 3, 2011).
- Ruddell, Robert. *Teaching Children to Read and Write: Becoming and Effective Literacy Teacher*. Berkeley, CA: Allyn and Bacon, 2005.
- Ruskin, John. "Followership." *Holden Leadership Center*. [http://leadership.uoregon.edu/resources/exercises\\_tips/skills/followership/](http://leadership.uoregon.edu/resources/exercises_tips/skills/followership/) (accessed November 2, 2010).
- Sloan, Sarah. "Characteristics Of The Child Who Is A Follower." *Helium*, March 5, 2009. <http://www.helium.com/items/1365680-follower/> (accessed October 29, 2010).
- van Vugt, Mark. "The Origins of Leadership." *New Scientist* 198 (June 14 2008): 42-44.

**APPENDIX A -- (Sample) Venn Diagram of Leader, Bully, and Follower Characteristics**



**Leader**

*Definition: Somebody who has followers others*

**Example:** – President Obama

**Bully**

*Definition: Attempts to enforce power over*

**Examples:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Follower**

*Definition: member of team or group*

**Example** of (positive): Disciple, \_\_\_\_\_

**Example** of (negative) - By-stander, \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

(Sample) *The Tale of Despereaux* – 1) Neutral

### 2) Authentic Scripts from *Lab Book*

(Sample) *The Tale of Despereaux* –

### 3) Presentation Exercise from *Lab Book*

#### Neutral Script

This is a story about a character on a quest. However, everyone he encounters either wants to harm him, or does not take him seriously because he is different. He meets another character, another “outcast,” who promises to help him successfully complete his quest.

-----

Main character: “I don’t want to hurt you. I just need to get by you. I... I am on a quest.”

**Focus Character:** “Really? How extraordinary. A quest for what?”

Main character: “A quest to save the princess.”

**Focus Character:** “The princess, the princess, the princess. Everything seems to be about the princess. Others have searched; and they didn’t find her. That goes without saying. But now you (small and unimportant) have arrived. And you are on a quest to save the princess.”

2) Authentic Script -- *The Tale of Despereaux*, by Kate DiCamillo, (pp. 242-245)

**Despereaux (follower):** “I don’t want to hurt you,” said Despereaux. “I just need to get by you. I... I am on a quest.”

**Botticelli:** “Really?” said Botticelli. “How extraordinary. A mouse on a quest. Back and forth, back and forth went the locket. “A quest for what?”

**Despereaux (follower):** “A quest to save the princess.”

**Botticelli:** “The princess,” said Botticelli, “the princess, the princess. Everything seems to be about the princess these days. The king’s men were down here searching for her, you know. They didn’t find her. That goes without saying. But now a mouse has arrived. And he is on a quest to save the princess.”

### 3) GROUP ACTIVITY & PRESENTATION FOR DESPEREAUX

As a group do the following:

1. Review characteristics of a good **follower** found on Venn diagram and *Lab Book* (pages you completed for a leader, bully, and follower).
2. Re-read script and think about Despereaux as a follower of Botticelli.
3. Think about Despereaux and all the followers of Botticelli in the video clip.
4. Discuss verbal cues from authentic script, verbal and non-verbal cues in video, and follower characteristics on Venn diagram and completed page for a follower.
5. Based on group discussion, determine whether Despereaux is a “good” follower. Yes? or No?
6. Did Despereaux empower Botticelli by following him? Yes? or No? Explain..
7. On Flipchart page, write answers to #5 & 6, plus explanation (at least two sentences).
8. Present Flipchart findings to class.

## APPENDIX C

Sample of THEOS Presentation – February 10, 2011

### *The Tale of Despereaux* Character Comparisons

**Botticelli**



**Despereaux**



Presentation Question: Was Despereaux a good follower? Did he empower Botticelli, an evil leader?

Group Answer: Despereaux, the hero in *Tale of Despereaux*, is not a good follower. He follows Botticelli the evil rat leader and could like Anakin Skywalker potentially go to the dark side permanently, even though his quest is noble.

**Anakin Skywalker**



**Palpatine/Darth Sidious**



Presentation Task: Identify any other character from a book or a person who demonstrates similar characteristics or behavior.

Group Response: Like Despereaux Anakin Skywalker, the tragic hero in *Star Wars*, follows the evil Emperor, Palatine, to the Dark Side.



## APPENDIX D

Sample of Public School Presentation – April 4, 2011

### *Alice in Wonderland* Character Comparisons

Caterpillar



Alice



Presentation Question: Was Alice a good follower? Did she empower or elevate Caterpillar to a leadership position?

Group Answer: Alice is not a good follower. She seeks the advice of the abusive Caterpillar, who blows smoke in her face and turns his back to her while she is speaking.

Ursula



Ariel



Presentation Task: Identify any other character from a book or a person who demonstrates similar characteristics or behavior.

Group Response: Like Alice, Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* story seeks the advice of Ursula, the wicked sea witch, hoping to win Prince Eric's love.

Published by the Forum on Public Policy

Copyright © The Forum on Public Policy. All Rights Reserved. 2011.