

Bullying in Schools

Robert Chase

EDU-600 2011

Module 8 – IRP

Bullying in Schools

One of the most important issues facing educators today is the prevalence of bullying in our schools. Bullying is typically viewed as ongoing, negative behavior directed toward a victim by an individual or group (Roland, 2002). Research on general bullying indicates that thirty percent of bystanders support the perpetrators instead of the victims (Boulton, 1993). This is troubling, considering that children have a right to be educated in a school system that is free from bias, prejudice, and intolerance.

Educators (administrators, teachers) are implementing anti-bullying programs in school systems worldwide, as a result of recent tragic events involving students and bullying. As educators, we have to examine what we are doing to ensure the safety of our students. Schools are inundated with information on how to address bullying; however, many educators have little knowledge about its complexities, conditions, and forms. The focus of this literature review is in response to the following questions:

1. What more can schools do to ensure the safety of students?
2. How many bullying incidents are reported each year?
3. What are some of the successful school policies?

In order to address these questions, we will look at examples of bullying, some bullying statistics, social and psychological factors of bullying (the effects bullying have on the perpetrator and the victim), cyber-bullying, cyber-libel, and techniques schools use to combat bullying, and successful school programs.

Examples of Bullying

Bullying can take on a variety of forms, including verbal taunting, physical assaults, exclusion, and cyber bullying. Boys, more likely than girls, are victims of bullying as well as bullying others. Cyber-bullying is verbal and written harassment, by children and adolescents via cell phones, text messages, webcams, and email.

Bullying Statistics

Are children being bullied in our schools? According to one survey in Northern Ireland, 70 pupils, out of the 120 surveyed, were mentioned by peers as someone who had been bullied (Callaghan and Joseph, 1995). Twenty-two percent of pupils in schools who have implemented anti-bullying policies reported being bullied. In schools with no policy in place, thirty-one percent of students reported being bullied (Taylor, 1996). In the absence of compulsory anti-bullying policies, fifty-nine percent of respondents reported that their schools were proactive and did have an official policy in place. Fifty percent of all respondents believed that their school provided real help for victims. This supports the belief that schools were proactive in the management of bullying/victim problems. However, twenty-seven percent of pupils did not believe this to be the case (YLTS, 1998).

Social and Psychological Factors

Victims of bullying experience emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, and sometimes depression. They normally have a more difficult time making friends and usually experience less social support. Of the students who are elementary school aged,

bullies and their victims have poorer school performance than their peers. Most victims of bullying are male; they are also typically in the elementary grades and tend to be African American. Those who are victims of bullying tend to experience higher levels of sadness, distress, and social isolation. Children who bully are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property, drop out of school, and engage in more serious criminal activities as a young adult (Olweus, 1993).

Cyber-bullying

International statistics on technology use indicates that cyber-bullying among children and adolescents are of great concern. In Britain, 16 per cent of children and adolescents have been bullied over the internet. In Canada, incidents of verbal harassment have ended tragically, with the victims tormented and humiliated that they have chosen to commit suicide. Even though cyber-bullying takes place via electronic airwaves, it creates an unwelcome school distraction. Since the boundaries of a learning environment are no longer confined to school campuses, socially acceptable behavior must be understood by all students. Cyber-bullying can greatly damage a student's reputation and have horrible consequences. Educators cannot allow cyber-bullying to consume the school, as it is our moral and legal responsibility to report unlawful activity when it becomes known.

Cyber-Libel

Cyber-libel is a term used to describe defamation that takes place in cyberspace. It is instantaneous, seamless, interactive, blunt, borderless, and far-reaching. Cyber-libel also is largely impersonal and anonymous. Canadian courts have a tendency to value

reputation over freedom of expression. The general consensus is that Internet Service Providers (ISP) should shoulder more of the blame. This is not the case in the United States. The role of ISPs in monitoring and reducing cyber-bullying is more complicated. The legal tests involve looking at whether the web or bulletin board provider is a distributor or publisher; whether the material represents broadcast information, etc. The general tendency of United States courts is to protect the right of ISPs, not to intervene. The Communications Decency Act (CDA) grants broad immunities to ISPs. The legislation leaves no one legally accountable for cyber-targeting (US Congress, 1996). Additionally, the judicial record in the United States for supporting cyber-victims of sexual harassment is dismal. Cyber-threats are generally thought of as fictional and the aggressors have been found innocent of wrongdoing. Because of fear of litigation, courts have generally used a hands off approach regarding cyber-space. A proactive approach towards cyber-bullying is needed if students are to engage in positive interactions with each other. Failure by educators to address cyber-bullying may result in them unwittingly endorsing an atmosphere of intolerance. Schools must adopt policies that outline consequences of cyber-bullying and make students aware of the importance of acceptable behavior in both inside and outside the school campus.

Techniques that schools have used to combat bullying

A major step in preparing future teachers and administrators to combat bullying should be to provide training programs by university, education, and law faculties. These classes would be a part of the core curriculum, instead of electives. This would be done at the undergraduate level as well as the graduate level. There are various strategies that

schools/school districts can implement to help combat bullying and promote a positive school climate. In regards to cyber-bullying, tech experts from corporate organizations could speak about how difficult it is to get rid of posted electronic media. Establishing a website that details the school's anti-bullying program is an additional helpful tool. The website can also have forms to fill out where students can report bullying activity without fear of retribution. To ensure the staff is all on the same page regarding policies and programs, each staff member must undergo anti-bullying professional development. Parents can attend workshops where they can learn strategies to empower their children to use anti-bullying strategies. In order to receive greater support of anti-bullying programs from teachers and administrators, the sharing of data collected and analyzed is vital.

Successful school programs

School staff, parents, and leaders in the community have been able to collaborate and increase awareness of the bullying issue. Intensive training programs in preventing bullying and developing intervention strategies have been developed for teachers and staff. Schools that employ a more congenial atmosphere rather than one of zero tolerance tend to be more successful in the implementation of programs designed to help end bullying. Staff and students therefore have a better understanding of the fundamentals of school policy. Communication of expected behaviors and the fundamental right to learn in a non-hostile environment also has helped parents, students and staff better understand the mission of the school. Parents have been trained, through workshops, in how to recognize the symptoms of a student who has been bullied as well as anti-bullying intervention. Additionally, programs designed to empower students use coping skills,

anti-bullying techniques, and report all forms of harassment. All of these policies and programs continue to help greatly. As a member of my school's discipline committee, it is my duty to help as many children as I can. I recognize that we need to aggressively identify students who are exhibiting symptoms of bullying and work with them on skills that will help build self-esteem. I believe that schools are doing as much as can possibly be done to help solve the bullying issue. School districts are taking the issue of bullying seriously. With the help of parents, community leaders, and politicians, I feel that bullying is finally being given the amount of attention that it deserves. Despite all the effort, the number of bullying incidences remains high. Often times this is a result of schools having strong, proactive anti-bullying policies. As a result, students are better able to detect bullying and report it more often. These methods would help more schools to ensure the safety of our students.

In today's technological society, bullying has taken on a different form. Cyber-bullying is very prevalent among our children and adolescents. Cyber-bullying is done through the use of cell phones, websites, instant messaging, and email. Bullying affects students in various ways, such as low self-esteem, poor grades, emotional distress, and feelings of loneliness. Due to the amount of trust educators receive from our students, faculty owe it to them to ensure their safety and well-being. It is important that schools have full support of the anti-bullying program by the entire staff for it to be effective. Next school year, I propose to my school administrators that we set up a website to report bullying. I feel that it could be feasible if it is connected through the webpage for the school. Additionally, I would like to invite community leaders or local politicians to speak about the seriousness of bullying and what, if any, policies are in place for our school.

References

- ARK (1998b). The Young Life and Times Survey (YTLS). Belfast: Queen's University and the University of Ulster. Retrieved January 10, 2005, from <http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt>
- Boulton, M. (1993). A comparison of adults' and children's abilities to distinguish between aggressive and playful fighting in middle school pupils: Implications for playground supervision and behavior management. *Educational Studies*, 19, 193.
- Callaghan, S., & Joseph, S. (1995). Self-concept and peer victimization among school children. *Personal and Individual Differences*, 18, 161-163.
- Glover, D., Cartwright, N., Gouch, G., & Johnson, M. (1998). The introduction of anti-bullying policies: Do policies help in management of change? *School Leadership & Management*, 18 (1), 89-107
- Harlow, K.C., & Roberts, R. (2010). An exploration of the relationship between social and psychological factors and being bullied. *Children & Schools*, 32 (1), 15-26
- McGuckin, C., & Lewis, C.A. (2006). Experiences of school bullying in Northern Ireland: Data from the life and times survey. *Adolescence*, 41 (162), 313-320
- Olweus, D. (1993). Victimization by peers: Antecedents and long-term outcomes. In K.H. Rubin & J.B. Asendorff (Eds.), *Social withdrawal, inhibition, and shyness*. (pp.315-334). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Roland, E. (2002). Bullying, depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts. *Educational Research*, 44, 55-67.

Shariff, S., & Johnny, L. (2007). Cyber-libel and cyber-bullying: Can schools protect student reputations and free-expression in virtual environments? *Education Law Journal*, 16 (3), 307-342

Taylor, A. (1996). Comparison study of bullying rates in three schools with anti-bullying programs and three control schools with no anti-bullying programs in Northern Ireland. Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Young, A., Hardy, V., Hamilton, C., & Biernesser, K. (2009). Empowering students: Using data to transform a bullying prevention and intervention program. *Professional School Counseling*, 12 (6), 413-420