

Teaching about Bullying and Cyberbullying with the Internet

C. Frederick Risinger

I thought this topic would be easy, but it's become very emotional and personal to me. The day that Michael Simpson, editor of *Social Education*, and I agreed on this topic, a 15-year-old boy in Greensburg, Indiana, hanged himself in a barn at his grandmother's home. Friends said he had been bullied and tormented for years at school. "Kids would act like they were going to punch him and stuff and push him," one of his friends is quoted as saying. That day, his tormenters told him he was a "piece of crap" and that he ought to kill himself. The abuse had been going on for years, evidently because of his perceived sexual orientation.

Two nights ago, I woke up at 3:00 a.m. and, as usual, thought about what I needed to accomplish. I thought about this column and about Billy Lucas, the boy mentioned above. Then I thought about Charles Frederick (that's me) and Jimmy R. I was a skinny, shy kid with a teacher mom in a little town in southern Illinois. Some kids, especially Jimmy R., picked on me. (Our last names forced us to be seated close to each other for years.) He shoved, kicked, punched my arm when we had immunization shots (while my arm was still sore), and made my life miserable. In a 7th grade pep assembly, he did the same and, on the way out of the gym, tried to trip me. Suddenly, I turned around and went berserk. I kicked, hit, scratched, and probably bit Jimmy. We were both sent to the principal's office and given detention. When Mr. Trampe gave me my punishment, he ended the conversation by saying, "Charles Frederick, I have to punish you just like Jimmy, but I'm glad you did what you did." Jimmy R. never bothered me again.

Then, this morning, as I finished this column, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University released an astounding report on the links between social media (read: "Facebook")

and teen alcohol, drug, and substance abuse. You must at least read the report summary. It's truly scary. The topic of cyber bullying comes up. Nineteen percent of all teens surveyed report being victims of cyber bullying. The survey reveals that cyber bullied teens "are more than twice as likely to smoke, drink and use marijuana" as teens who are not. You can find both the report summary and the full report at www.casacolumbia.org/.

Clearly, bullying and cyber bullying are important issues in schools, not only in the United States but in many other nations. In the recommended sites that follow, you'll find teacher lesson plans and other resources dealing with racial, religious, and gender-related bullying. Girls bullying other girls seems to be as significant (and often more devastating) as bullying among boys. I also found several sites that discussed workplace bullying and bullying of students by teachers. (That truly saddens me.)

It appears that many local districts and states have anti-bullying programs already in place. I've included some of their resources and links. Yesterday, when my wife and I were in a teachers' supply store, I noticed a sign that said, "Bully Free Zone." Here are just some of the sites that I think would be

helpful for teachers and schools combating bullying and cyber bullying. There are many others that you can access via Google or BING (which has become my preferred search engine—I think it brings up a better group of resources).

Cumberland County (NJ) AVA Center
www.cumbavac.org/Bullying_Violence_Vandalism.htm

This is one of the several school districts that have a list of resources for their teachers and administrators. It is one of the more comprehensive ones and has links to other sources, lesson plans, and webquests. A couple of the links were outdated, but this is a good place to begin if you're looking for resources.

Safe Schools Coalition
www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-lesson-plans.html

This website focuses on bullying and cyber bullying related to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. While I knew that bullying toward students because of self-identified or perceived sexual identity existed, I didn't know the extent of this behavior. One of the reasons I selected this site for the column is that it has lesson plans and resources for all grade levels. Some of the lessons and activities recommend the use of a video or DVD. A few must be purchased, but most are free downloads.

Education World
www.educationworld.com/a_special/bully.shtml

I selected this site because of the breadth and quality of the resources and lesson plans. About halfway down the page, there are links to several papers that are part of a 10-part series of essays on bullying in schools by psychologist Ken Shore. Some of the topics are: (1) Understanding School Bullying; (2) Bullying Myths; and (3) A Bullying Prevention Program. The last one helps teachers and administrators set up a bullying prevention program specifically designed for your school. I really liked the featured lesson plans, too. They contain activities and encourage discussion groups that prompt students to think about the impact of bullying.

CyberSmart! Curriculum

<http://cybersmartcurriculum.org/>

This is an outstanding website. It has a K-12 scope and sequence chart and is broader than just bullying. It has an excellent lesson on cyber bullying and other lessons that focus on identity protection and “21st Century Challenges,” which help students deal with the impact of the Internet on all of our lives. CyberSmart! Is now part of Common

Sense Media, which you can find at www.common SenseMedia.org/educators. You should go to this site and download their free Digital Literacy and Citizenship curriculum. They help you guide students to be “Digital Citizens” who “make safe, smart, and ethical decisions in the digital world where they live, study and play.” There’s some great information in there for adults, too.

National Crime Prevention Council

www.ncpc.org/topics/bullying/

You have probably seen public service television spots featuring McGruff, the crime prevention dog. This site has a great set of resources about bullying, including advice for parents and adults, information and lesson plans for teachers, and resources that specifically focus on girls and bullying. There is also a set of strategies for adults to help reduce bullying. On the same page, there are links to NCPC resources on cell phone safety, fraud and identity theft, cyber bullying, and Internet safety. You’ll find a batch of good resources for the classroom.

Beat Bullying

www.beatbullying.org/dox/resources/lesson-plans.html

My final site is one of the best. This is an organization based in the United Kingdom and it has some outstanding lesson plans and even a great PowerPoint presentation (for both elementary and secondary levels) that teachers can use in their classrooms. This is the only site I found that has a “Faith-based Bullying Lesson Plan.” Bullying can be based on dislike of a student’s religious affiliation. They also have a lesson for “Disability-based Bullying,” another reason why bullying occurs. Posters and other online resources are there, too.

I learned a lot by doing this column. As I said at the beginning, it became very personal to me. It also made me recall why Mr. Trampe was my favorite principal. 🌐

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