

# REACHING OUT

A report series published by the Initiative for Child and Family Studies at

ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

Issue Two

2006

## Editor's Welcome

*Steven A. Meyers*

Welcome to the second issue of *Reaching Out*. This report series is designed to summarize research in helpful terms for professionals who work with children and families. Sponsored by the Initiative for Child and Family Studies at Roosevelt University, our second issue focuses on the needs of elementary school teachers.

The first article, written by Ann Epstein and Jeff Kazmierczak, describes the effects of childhood bullying in schools. Adults often underestimate the significant effects that bullying can have on children's self-esteem and school functioning. Fortunately, teachers, parents, and school administrators can make a difference if they try. The authors describe concrete strategies

and programs that have been shown to work. In the second article, Marti Livingston-Lansu reminds us that teachers not only share knowledge and information, they also can affect children's priorities and values in positive ways. She describes the importance of helping students learn that they can make contributions to their communities and she shares ideas for sensitizing children to societal inequalities through classroom activities.

We hope that *Reaching Out* provides you with relevant information. Feel free to contact us to provide feedback or with ideas for future issues.

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## Anti-Bullying: Effective Strategies for Teachers and Schools

*Ann Epstein and Jeff Kazmierczak*

### SUMMARY

*Bullying devastates the lives of student-victims. Bullied children miss school, develop physical symptoms, become anxious around their peers, feel depressed and ultimately are unable to concentrate in school. This article describes successful interventions for addressing, preventing, and remedying bullying specific to K-8 students.*

### IMPACT OF BULLYING

Approximately 25% of elementary age children—with some estimates as high as 70%—endure forms of verbal abuse that include taunts, insults, teasing, threats, humiliations, and harassment. Approximately 30% of sixth through tenth graders report either being a bully themselves or being bullied. Bullies have an unusual need to dominate and to feel in control; they have little or no remorse for hurting another child.

## TACKLING BULLYING

### Complexity of the Problem

Schools and communities, including Chicago Public Schools (CPS), are working hard to address the many factors involved in bullying, which include the bullies, the victims, the school climate, and home involvement. Many of these efforts are guided by theories that simultaneously consider the impact of family, school, and community on children. Imagine a child, like a drop of water in a pond, lies in the center of radiating, concentric rings, where the closest ring includes family and friends and the farthest ring signifies the whole of society. The child's social experiences are represented by the various rings are ongoing, and are viewed as cumulatively affecting the child's growth.

Being bullied in school, especially over a long period and without adult intervention, will affect how bullied children (or bullies) interact with their family, friends, and the community. This is particularly true of the current "meanness" phenomena affecting young girls. Beginning as early as second grade and continuing through middle school, girls relay

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# Can Your Students Make a Difference in their Community?

Marti Livingston-Lansu

## SUMMARY

*Teachers are in a powerful position to help students meet a critical societal obligation: to demonstrate a commitment to the common good. One part of this process involves sensitizing students to inequalities that exist in our society based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, ability, and sexual orientation. Teachers can help students develop empathy to diverse groups and to take action to promote broad change through the different activities outlined in this article.*

When my son entered the 7th grade, he needed to take a science course. He was assigned to a natural science class taught by Mr. Wilson who used an unconventional approach to motivating his students. The first day of class, as he moved around the room, highlighting the various pieces of laboratory equipment and explaining their use and care, he wanted to make sure that the students would properly handle them. He said, “Pretend your parents stand behind this wall. They’re watching what goes on in class and can see what you do. How would they respond to what they see?”

What Mr. Wilson may not have realized was that his students stationed at the lab tables that lined the wall were watching *him*. They saw how carefully he cupped the glass beakers, how closely he watched the Bunsen burner’s flame, and how respectfully he measured out the chemicals. And, on a human level, students in Mr. Wilson’s class observed how equitably and respectfully he interacted with each student. He modeled the behavior he hoped his students might emulate.

Later that semester, I tagged along with the class field trip to a local quarry. The chaperones were instructed to spot the teens as they scrambled up a loose face of rock in search of samples to examine back in class. “Mr. Wilson, why does this rock crumble in my hand?” one asked excitedly. “That’s St. Peter’s Sandstone which runs all the way from Minnesota down to Starved Rock. It crumbles because of acid rain.”

The class had previously learned that heat and pressure would transform a sedimentary rock like sandstone into the metamorphic rock Quartzite; now out in the field they could visually differentiate between the two. This teachable moment, however, could have transcended the dissemination of information if Mr. Wilson had gone on to explain the causes and effects of acid rain, how it can be avoided, and how it can be rectified. He could also have encouraged students to transform their interest into action by crafting letters to news editors or legislators to foster concern about further deterioration of our fragile ecosystem. What could have happened if he did?

## A FOCUS ON THE COMMON GOOD

Many teachers model values they hope their students will ultimately adopt. They foster curiosity and encourage creativity, they demonstrate respect and tolerance, they encourage persistence and tenacity. Teachers are also in a

position to help students meet a critical societal obligation: the commitment to the common good.

We are responsible for each other. The Preamble of our Constitution states, “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” These responsibilities are not delegated to our government, but should be performed by individuals on a collective basis.

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**Whenever you present information related to a social justice issue, punctuate the experience by having the student do something.**

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People who believe in social justice are especially committed to the well being of all members of society. The core principle of social justice is that all people should have equal rights and access to opportunities, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender, or sexual orientation. Certain groups of people often have doors shut in their faces, blocking access to necessary resources. They are frequently derogated and denied a voice in many important decisions. When teachers and students focus on the common good, they think of ways to challenge such disparity.

## TEACHING IDEAS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

At this point in the article you may be asking, “How exactly do I encourage students to take action or promote such broad change?” It starts by talking with your students about age-appropriate responses to social injustices. Children in the early grades (K-3) need simple, clear-cut exercises that will open their minds to experiences beyond their own.

For example, during reading exercises, ask students what they think the characters in the story are thinking and feeling. Help them draw analogies between the character’s situation and their own. Discuss what they think might be different if the characters had someone who advocated on their behalf. Students can write or draw an alternative ending to the story based on this idea. Better yet, they can create a character who enters the narrative and acts as an advocate. As you present math concepts, create age-appropriate story problems that relate to the social justice dilemma that you are addressing. Music is also a powerful teaching tool. Introduce your students to songs sung by the oppressed, whether they concern civil rights or labor issues. Use a variety of examples ranging from lighthearted tunes, such as “Second-hand Rose” and laments like “Nobody Knows the Trouble I See.”

Whenever you present information related to a social justice issue, punctuate the experience by having the students do something. This can be as simple as asking them to turn to their neighbor and share thoughts about this issue or discuss possible feelings if placed in a similar situation. Concepts also

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## Research Roundup

Debbie Fenn

We provide readers with a summary of selected examples of cutting-edge research that can inform their teaching.

### Relationships at School Matter

To test the possible link between peer acceptance and academic performance, this longitudinal study examined 248 students as they progressed through the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The status of a child's social relationships with peers was paired with the same child's learning and performance in school, revealing a consistent match in both areas of either low or high quality. The results are an interesting demonstration that in addition to the three *R*s universally considered fundamental to school success (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic), there exists a fourth crucial *R*: relationships. Of special interest is the authors' discussion of the implications for future relationship-enhancing classroom work.

Flook, L., Repetti, R., & Ullman, J. B. (2005). Classroom social experiences as predictors of academic performance. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(2), 319-327.

### Make a Difference

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take root when the student writes or draws a response. Art projects can be used to create memory aids, such as jewelry typically worn by the group being studied. The instructor explains to the class that this is not mere ornamentation but identification with and concern for this group of people.

Older students can discuss more abstract issues. To begin instilling an awareness of social justice, involve the entire class in discussion that unpacks a quote from Edmund Burke (1729-1797), "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [wo]men to do nothing." Help students find answers to the following questions:

1. What exactly is evil?
2. Whose responsibility is it to stand against evil?
3. When is inaction wrong?
4. How should a person respond to evil?
5. Why is social justice everyone's responsibility?

Encourage students to grapple with issues by reading a short story or viewing a video clip about the topic. 'Gentleman's Agreement' is an old film that addresses the issue of inaction. Draw examples from the daily newspapers to flesh out your point. And finally, make the situation come alive by helping them generate solutions that they would actually be willing to live with themselves. Older students can also take action through classroom assignments such as writing

### A Different Way to Teach Math?

International comparisons of teaching techniques, especially in mathematics, have led to increasing debate about the value of conceptual teaching. Conceptual teaching is a means of attaining greater insight into math. American teaching methods rely heavily on lecture, drill, and practice. Teaching methods in high-achieving nations such as Japan and Germany use extensive conceptual challenges.

The authors of this study conducted a comparison of the two teaching styles and examined the effectiveness of each. They also focused on the five commonly perceived barriers to conceptual teaching of mathematics in the United States: teacher autonomy, trade-offs with computational strategies, student achievement, class size, and teacher qualifications. The authors also discuss alternative paradigms for math instruction in the United States.

Desimone, L. M., Smith, T., Baker, D., & Ueno, K. (2005). Assessing barriers to the reform of U.S. mathematics instruction from an international perspective. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(3), 501-535.

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letters to the editors of newspapers or to public officials. Such correspondence not only improves persuasive writing skills, but may also influence policy.

As always, patiently and graciously respond to every student's contribution. Welcome questions and applaud even the smallest contributions as each one grapples with these issues. If it is apparent that someone doesn't understand the concept you're presenting, gently probe the student's concerns and correct misinformation. These fears and lack of knowledge may very well form the basis of injustice. In the 1960s, a popular saying stated, "Feed a man a fish and you've fed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you've fed him for a lifetime." In like manner, when you encourage children to become advocates for fairness and social change, you've fostered justice for all.

### Suggested Resources

#### Books

Apple, M. W., & Beane, J. A. (Eds.). (1995). *Democratic schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Beyer, L. E. (Ed.). (1996). *Creating democratic classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

#### Websites

Teachers for Social Justice, <http://www.teachersforjustice.org>

The Change Agent, <http://www.nelc.org/changeagent>

Teaching for Change, [www.teachingforchange.org](http://www.teachingforchange.org)

Rethinking Schools Online, [www.rethinkingschools.com](http://www.rethinkingschools.com)

## Anti-Bullying

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hurtful comments about one another. While boys tend to be more overt and physical in their bullying behavior, girls' more quiet degradations (verbal and physical) are devastating and long-lasting.

Research on bullying has shown that:

1. Bullying is a constellation of behavioral interactions.
2. Disorders such as depression and anxiety contribute to bullying and are often overlooked.
3. Families must be active partners in anti-bullying programs.
4. Anti-bullying programs must interrupt/neutralize the current peer support for bullying behavior.
5. Anti-bullying interventions must alter adults' (teacher, bus driver, administrator) responses.
6. Changes must occur within the upper reaches of administration to have lasting effects.

These six factors provide a basis for identifying components of effective anti-bullying programs and inform the suggestions we make in this article.

### Anti-Bullying Strategies

Effective anti-bullying programs are strategically built on firm foundations that support the aforementioned "rings" that surround a child. Schools with effective anti-bullying programs **conduct periodic surveys** to assess the degree of bullying. Students identify where and when bullying occurs, which are dubbed "hot spots." Next, adults monitor hot spots in school restrooms, playgrounds, cafeterias, or school busses. School personnel, particularly bus drivers and cafeteria workers, participate in programs to learn how to effectively address bullying scenarios.

Schools with effective programs also focus on building a **climate of acceptance**, where students feel that they belong to their school community. Students who feel accepted are better able to resist the pressures of bullying. A sense of belonging is fostered through specific teaching strategies (such as clear role assignments during cooperative learning projects) and by a broad-based emphasis on student recognition. In addition to academic success, students are recognized for effort, appropriate leadership, and helpfulness. In schools where acceptance of differences is honored, students and their parents sign anti-teasing pledges and practice effective conflict resolution strategies.

A difficult-to-implement, yet important component of effective anti-bullying programs is **reaching out to families**. Schools with effective anti-bullying programs report high levels of parental support. By involving families, schools form close partnerships

with parents that help assure the acceptance and promotion of school anti-bullying practices. What tends to make this component one of the most challenging to implement is the fact that unstable homes, characterized by ever-fighting parents, often do not support anti-bullying efforts. Perhaps the worst outcome associated with combative home environments is that they foster weaker self-concepts in children. Weak self-concept is a powerful predictor among elementary and middle school children for becoming a bully. Effective anti-bullying programs educate parents about the potential effect of their combative behavior. Informing parents about the impact their fighting has on their children's self-concept and bullying behavior can be an effective first step.

**Teacher involvement** through immediate, caring and consistent responses is also a strong component of effective anti-bullying programs. Unfortunately, most teachers and school personnel across the U. S. tend to perceive incorrectly that they are sufficiently involved when bullying occurs. While 71% of teachers believe that they always intervene during instances of bullying, only 25% of students report that teachers actually intervene in bullying situations. Teachers and school personnel need to remain vigilant in responding quickly to instances of bullying, and in supporting students who witness bullying. Students who muster the courage to speak out about bullying should be praised by teachers and school personnel. In fact, teachers and school personnel should actively help develop the social skills needed to successfully intervene during acts of bullying.

Teachers and school personnel must support bullies, victims, and bystanders in their daily struggles to make friends, be appropriately assertive, and learn to take turns. In addition, teachers and school personnel need to recognize kindness in bystanders, victims, and bullies. These **character education and social skills programs** are an integral part of effective anti-bullying programs. However, experts warn that teachers and school personnel need to persist in these; otherwise, "one time" life lessons are forgotten.

### EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS

The US Departments of Education and Justice reported that over 78% of public schools had adopted some type of formal school violence prevention program by the 1996-1997 school year. Unfortunately, fewer than 25% of such programs report outcome data showing their effectiveness. There is a danger that the rush toward implementing some type of program (usually without outcome data) could result in unrealistically high expectations for fast changes. The urgent need to implement something should not be overcome by desperation to implement anything. Four anti-bullying programs that have documented success are *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies*, mentoring through *Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America*, and challenging the culture of bullying through *Bugging Bug/Acid 9* and *Culture and Lifestyle Appropriate Social Skills (CLASSIC)* activities.

#### Exemplary Anti-Bullying Programs

**Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies** is designed for children in Kindergarten through 5th grade. Developed

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## Anti-Bullying

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by educators at Pennsylvania State University (see [www.prevention.psu.edu](http://www.prevention.psu.edu) for a detailed description), the program enhances children's self-control, emotional understanding, self-esteem, relationships, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Classroom teachers set aside three 20 minute sessions each week, and use dialoguing, role-playing, storytelling, modeling (by teachers and peers), and social and self-reinforcement to help children express and regulate their emotions. Activities take place inside and outside of the classroom, and parents are encouraged to practice activities at home. Participating children demonstrated significantly stronger skills in recognizing and understanding their own and others' emotions, understanding social problems, and developing effective alternative strategies and solutions. Teachers reported significant improvement in children's self-control, emotional understanding, ability to tolerate frustration, and conflict resolution.

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**Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America (BBSA)**, founded in 1904, is the oldest and largest mentoring organization in the United States (see [www.bbbsa.org](http://www.bbbsa.org) for further description). It serves over 225,000 young people ages 5 through 18, in 5,000 communities through a network of 470 agencies. BBSA starts with the simple premise that every child in America who would like to have a mentor should have one. Training and support is provided for mentors, who set up shared experiences based on the specific interests of their mentees. Shared experiences build anti-bullying behaviors and attitudes, and lead to greater self-confidence, better grades, better classroom attendance, and lower risk taking.

**Bugging Bug/Acid 9** classroom activities emphasize connection, appreciation, collaboration, self-reflection, community, diversity, and respect. Classroom activities are designed to promote a positive, enriching context in which students come to see that they have multiple options for responding to problems. Teachers honor varied cultural influences represented among their students. The goal is to convey that bullying problems tend to occur when students feel they have no other options. A first step is to externalize the problem so students learn to control the inappropriate behavior instead of it controlling them. Bullying behaviors are given names. Younger children call these behaviors the "Bugging Bug" or "Bugging Habit," while older students refer to bullying behaviors as "Acid 9".

A 21-week program facilitates the shift from a classroom culture of disrespect and top-down control to students treating others as they would like to be treated. Representative

questions addressed through role-play, paired activities and writing projects include:

- What does (Bugging Bug, Acid 9) get kids to do that deep inside they don't want to do?
- How do kids feel when (Acid 9, Bugging Bug) gets them to do something mean?

A fourth program offers Chicago Public School teachers a culturally-based social skills program.

### Culture and Lifestyle

**Appropriate Social Skills Intervention Curriculum (CLASSIC)** is a social skills training program designed to be offered in 15 hour-long sessions. Children learn to apply a problem-solving model that encourages them to approach difficult social situations with five steps (Relax, Set a Goal, Make a List, Check it Out, and Do a Plan). This system helps bullies (or would-be bullies) learn to meet their needs in social situations in non-violent, non-aggressive ways and helps victims (or would-be victims) learn effective responses to bullying acts of others.

### A Holistic Approach

Although educators tend to consider particular aspects of student behavior as the cause of bullying, successful intervention programs emphasize the inter-related impact of family, school culture, and students' neighborhoods. Appropriate family guidance, a pro-active school culture, and community involvement are all needed to implement the necessary components to combat bullying. Effective anti-bullying interventions require both individual (teacher, student, parent, administrator, community member) and systemic (family, school, community) action.

### Suggested Resources

#### Books

- Beaudoin, M.N., & Taylor, M. (2004). *Breaking the culture of bullying and disrespect, Grades K-8: Best practices and successful strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. ("Bugging Bug" and "Acid 9" activities)
- Dygdon, J. (1998). *Culture and lifestyle appropriate social skills intervention curriculum (CLASSIC), 2nd edition*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, Inc.
- Langan, P. (2004). *Bullying in schools: What you need to know*. West Berlin, NJ: Townsend Press. (Call 800-772-6410 to order copies for \$1 each plus shipping and handling)

#### Websites

- CPS Office of Specialized Services, [http://www.cps.k12.il.us/SafeSchools/Bullying\\_Prevention/bullying\\_prevention.html](http://www.cps.k12.il.us/SafeSchools/Bullying_Prevention/bullying_prevention.html) (Anti-bullying training information)
- Illinois Board of Education, "Safe School Activities," [http://www.isbe.net/pdf/safe\\_school\\_activities.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/pdf/safe_school_activities.pdf) (anti-bullying training information)



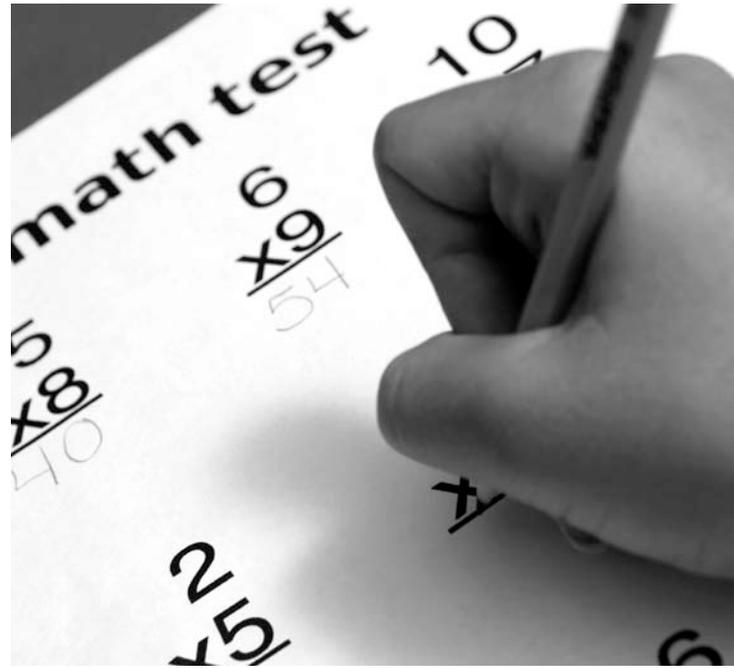
## Research Roundup

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### Girls Underestimate their Math Abilities

This study compares parents' and teachers' perceptions of students' academic competence with students' perceptions of their own academic competence. Over 300 children were included in this longitudinal study which rated their competency beliefs in addition to their actual competency skills in math and literacy. Girls outperformed boys in literacy skills from kindergarten through the end of the study and they generally acknowledged themselves to be better in that domain. But girls rated themselves, as did the adults, lower in math skills even when their actual skills were ranked higher than the boys. This was true with the youngest students, though math achievement tests have not generally revealed gender differences in performance in early elementary school grades. The implications for girls in future academic and professional achievement render studies such as this one very important.

Herbert, J., & Stipek, D. (2005). The emergence of gender differences in children's perceptions of their academic competence. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 26*(3), 276-295.



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## About the Initiative for Child and Family Studies

The Initiative for Child and Family Studies draws on the expertise of faculty at Roosevelt University who have scholarly interests in children's well-being to:

- Encourage students to learn about child development from an interdisciplinary perspective in our certificate programs.
- Promote efforts to improve the lives of children by facilitating volunteer work.

- Deepen the connection between the University and our community by sharing information with professionals who work with children.

The work of the Initiative reflects Roosevelt University's historic commitment to social justice and its mission to serve as an intellectual resource to the community.

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