

Building Community through Anti-Bullying

Dealing with Bullying is a complex issue for a School Administrator. Many factors, including location, student body demographics, faculty and staff demographics, parental attitudes, and pressures from state and government bodies all bear weight in making any administrative decision for public schools. Depending on which state we're discussing, many measures have been taken to initiate Anti-Bullying programs in public schools; much to the response of the death of Phoebe Prince back in 2010. In addition, your state may have passed legislation pertaining to bullying in the contexts of LGBT bullying or Cyberbullying (Wikipedia). While these initiatives show attention to a potentially life-threatening problem in our youth, the programs implemented by the Anti-Bullying initiative have created an unrealistic narrative for the bullying problem in public schools. Presenting bullies as a sort of "other" kind of student creates a dichotomy within the student body; you're either a bully or not a bully. The source of stigmatization is placed on this bully identity, rather than the act of bullying itself. What this means is that unless somebody who conducts bullying identifies as a bully themselves, they're not going to view their actions as inappropriate. Growing up in a small town myself, I was the target of bullying, and it was no secret that the other kids enjoyed to pick on me. The acts were very visible, and nobody felt they were inappropriate because there was no context for them to feel a stigma for these actions. If one student bullies on another student, and an observing student doesn't see the one initiating bullying behavior as a bully, then they won't associate their actions with bullying. One may ask as well, what would compel an observing student not to side with the bullied student? The process of Othering is when there's the perception that one way of

life is not “correct” compared to your own (Anthropology & The Human Condition). In our narrative of bully, observer, and target, if the target is seen as an “other” by the observer, there isn’t much incentive for intervention. Another issue with the current narrative is if the observer does intervene, according to the Anti-Bullying program, the bully will be removed from the scene. In reality, this doesn’t solve the issue of bullying; in addition the bullying student may feel othered himself and resent the school system for punishing him for actions he didn’t feel were problematic (Trowbridge). What this means is that the programs that are in play in many public schools today, while providing decent self-help education, are not addressing the core of bullying.

As an Administrator, how would you describe the community between your students? Is there a sense of camaraderie and understanding? The faces and people that enter the public school systems are always evolving, taking in new races, cultures and identities. As of 2010, most states have begun to adopt the Common Core program for education, which has transformed the school experience to become much more competitive (Kendall). This shows that the job of school Administration is never ending, having to adapt to not only new rules and regulations, but also to an evolving student body. It’s understandable then why bullying can be a difficult topic to re-open when there’s other priorities that directly influence funding and school rankings; especially if there’s already Anti-Bullying programs. As a reactionary program, the Anti-Bullying initiative was not one that was heavily researched and developed. Its important, like any program that goes “live” across the nation, to have not only the research and statistics to back up their plans but also the ability to be flexible with future changes. Without addressing the reasons why bullying exist, but rather ways to cope with bullying, the programs in place today are not sufficient. We don’t see, for example, the levels of detail and research done by programs such as the curriculum-based intervention programs conducted at Cambridge

(Stevens). Being responsible for bringing facilities and programs to the public school body, as a School Administrator, you should demand access to an Anti-Bullying program that can show results.

To establish a sense of community between students and their peers, it's necessary to establish a commonality between the student body as a whole. The proposal I set forth achieves this on several vectors that are needed to create this communal sense. The student body needs to recognize that every student has a right to a safe and respectful environment, where one should not experience othering under any circumstance. In addition, these students have to learn and appreciate other walks of life to not view them as others themselves. These ideals can be enforced and promoted by offering the student body a sense of community; where every student, faculty, staff, and parent can feel that they have a stake and belong to the public school system. This sense of responsibility and ownership within that community will create an incentive for respect and progression. Lastly, by gaining the support for these initiatives from the parental body will allow these ideals to carry over to the home. Without an alignment in understanding between school and home, it can make an individual student side to the way of bullying and discrimination. The implementation of these methods are designed to replace the current Anti-Bullying initiatives, removing this idea that a bully is a "other" identity of student; and rather would give the perspectives required to allow a student to respect one another. The integration of cultural and lifestyle education will broaden the contexts of learning items, and can create further interest in learning. The co-operation and community that can be established between student, parent, faculty, and staff will strengthen the support system a student can rely on when they are feeling troubled. And lastly, when the parents begin to see how insightful and

respectful their children are becoming, they can continue to foster these ideals at the homefront. Combined, these reforms can seek to end unnecessary bullying within the school systems.

When you think of bullying, what kind of reasons can you think of that cause bullying? According to our current Anti-Bullying programs, bullies are these entities that exist within our student bodies that autonomously create trouble for certain students. The students chosen to be bullied seem to be random; but are depicted in many different ways depending on which kind of bullying narrative you experience. In some cases, the target for bullying tends to look younger, be of a race that isn't caucasian, and is often approached by a bully that looks much older and scarier than the target. In other narratives, you see bullies that are more "normalized" targeting "normal" teenaged students. No matter what, the bully itself is easily identified, and is often presented as something to be stigmatized (Trowbridge). Exiting this narrative, we are left with ideas that we should learn to identify when we're being bullied, not to give the bully any further reason to harass us, and to seek help in either another student or an adult to make the bully go away. Everything described in the solution to bullying is for self defense, and has nothing to do with tackling the reason why bullying happens in the first place. The source of animosity can be linked to the concept of Othering, where a bully doesn't find some aspect of their target as normal to their perspective. We see this a lot in the narratives, where statements quantifying one's attributes (their race, age, intelligence, fitness, choice in fashion, sexual identity, or any other physical attribute or ideal) is mocked or threatened by the bully. This shows a lack of both respect for their fellow student as well as a lack of perspective. Bullies are not pre-programmed to pick out and bully other students, rather they have developed a propensity to do so through either some conception of what they view as normal or what they're allowed to view as different (Trowbridge). The first in ending the Othering in public schools is to provide education on what Othering is and how to avoid it. Students need to understand that they share a common space

with their fellow students, and that they're each peers of each other. They share the same aspirations and goals as each other, and they make up a whole generation together. In teaching against Othering, educators can also include in their lessons plans the effects of Othering when it comes to a social understanding of an event. For example, when teaching about the Civil Rights movements, it can be taught that the reason why people were hesitant and resentful to enact the laws to protect African Americans was because they were seen as an Other on a social scale; rather than a student get the perspective that these laws weren't passed due to the government in particular. Teaching Othering will broaden a student's perspective of historical presentism in the ways which peoples of different times viewed their world and each other. Through understanding the ways in which Othering has inhibited social relations and growth, and then tying it to a source of how bullying occurs their world, it gives a clear indication as to the dangers of Othering.

Teaching Othering is a great way to provide students with a reason to have a perspective, but without understanding the many parallel cultures and lifestyles in the world, a student will still lack the perspective required to understand their community. The stem cause of Othering comes from a lack of understanding; which is rightfully so because how can one expect to respect another person if they cannot understand them? Asking our students to not bully based on race, culture, or sexual orientation without giving educating them on what it means to belong to said race, culture, or sexual orientation presents a problem. The student may be inclined to simply ask themselves "Why?", and without being given the context as to why its unacceptable, they may not respect the authority and resent the seemingly baseless restriction on their behavior. I can remember growing up and being told by D.A.R.E to avoid drugs at all cost; but it wasn't until my mother sat me down and explained exactly what each drug was and what they did to my body that I respected the decision not to engage. The same

logic can apply to bullying. Integration of cultures and lifestyles means to provide education that brings other worldly ways of life into perspective. This can be achieved through asking students the significance of these different identities to topics in history, sciences, and even mathematics if worked correctly. This will also foster a broader sense of community as members of these different cultures, races, orientations, and etc. will see familiarity in what's being taught to them. Combined with understanding the implications of Othering, a student can respect and understand the significance of what it means to follow a religion or sexual orientation. These walks of life will no longer seem so alien or "other", and even if a student doesn't fully agree with that walk of life, they will be more inclined to respect it because they'll know that their fellow students have the same understanding as them. It'd be embarrassing for a student to mock another student with a base-less or inaccurate insult if the rest of the student body hearing it would then turn around and point out how their incorrect. Further diversity of the curriculum doesn't necessary have to be limited to addressing these topics directly; this would be a great opportunity to also integrate more Arts and Music into the education as well. As an Administrator facing many voices for educational reform, this appears to be a win-win situation because you would be addressing two "holes" in the curriculum; as long as when these Arts and Music topics are paired with their cultural or social significance.

Broadening the education to include perspectives of culture, race, walks of life, and Othering will provide students with a better sense of their world. This cannot, however, fully attack the issue of bullying. Too often, a student who is experiencing issues in school may feel isolated, despite being surrounded by fellow students, parents, faculty, and school staff. When growing up, the experiences I felt through bullying made me feel like a social pariah; both to the students and the staff who appeared to sit on their look-out chairs, holding the life saver, but never throwing it. Like finding other students who you can trust and befriend, students also have

to find the teachers and staff who they can befriend as well. As per the Anti-Bullying initiative, it's the public schools' responsibility to create a safe space for students to learn. Without fostering a sense of community between the student body, faculty, staff, and parents all alike, the sense of Othering can still prevail. Often, when we think of bullying, we think of student to student interaction. Often are forgotten the adult staff and faculty; not to say that they are bullying the students themselves, but they can be inclined to play "favorites" or show an overall apathy. This is not indicative to a sense of community for the public school system as a whole. Instead, what we are presented with is a situation where the school itself is seen as a system of communities, and whether you're a gay youth or Jewish girl, it's up to you to find the other students and adults alike that share your sense of community. Parents can make this more difficult as well if they tell their children not to associate with certain kinds of people; or given them this enfranchisement that they're of a separate class than the other students (or even staff). To remedy this, it's important to create a true community for the public school system. The school itself has to recognize its entire student body and involve them with each other in any way possible, giving each member of the school a real stake in their community. Bringing together the student body to share experiences, such as field trips, community service, field research, or any other way to create an active role can achieve this. Too, the parents, faculty, and staff should all participate to show their respect and involvement in that very same community.

Beyond the school grounds, it's hard or impossible to know what kind of influences will shape the attitudes or perspectives of the student body. One source, however, is linked to many students; their parents. A parent's view on society and cultures can be just as detrimental as those of who are viewed as "bullies". To bring more positive influences home, the school system itself should invite parents to involve themselves as much as possible in the school community. Through the integration of understanding different cultures, lifestyles, and the impacts of

Othering, a parent can see first hand the ways in which the students create a community between each other. In addition to showing this community, it would invite the parents to become stakeholders in upholding the ideals set forth by the school community to provide the safety and respect to all students. Parents could be given the opportunity to donate their time and energies to the school community, which might prove to be a valuable asset for the school itself. In future generations, the very students that saw their parents involve themselves in their own school's community may feel inclined to do so for their own children; creating a cycle which would promote parental and school system interaction for the sake of upholding the ideal environments on and off school grounds.

Like any great plan for change, there's opposition and challenges, many of which lie in the curriculum itself. For this proposal to have the most impact, the integration of Othering, cultures, and lifestyles into the curriculum will need to be developed and researched before deployment. Its imperative that, as an Administrator, to communicate and insist on the importance of such research and development of such programs. Another more recent hurdle to overcome is going to be reconciling this integration with the new structures of Common Core. With its rigorous benchmarks and controversy, Common Core has more than likely caused a significant addition to an Administrator's time and effort. The true challenge here is using Common Core's mission statements of 'flexibility' to allow the proposed integration. Lastly, parental opposition and pressure against the proposed addendum to the curriculum based on exposure to topics and ideas they don't agree with could pose a threat to this proposal. Overcoming these obstacles will not only provide a great opportunity to quell bullying in public schools, but would also stand as a testament to the public school systems' ability to adapt and integrate their curriculums for a more progressive society. In proving itself, a public school

system can also become a model for other systems to adapt and grow as well, setting the precedent of what it takes to be an American Public School.

Creating the proposed curriculum will require the efforts and expertise of several lines of studies to encompass an entire world view. The education would need to cover topics between race, religion, sexual identities, history, geographies, and Othering. This large pool of topics then needs to be modularized into components that can become integrated into the Common Core curriculum without distracting from the benchmarks. The collaboration would need to take place between several experts in each minority field, and may require development of further information for cultures that aren't represented by a student body. It could become troublesome for certain states that may be lacking in openness for these topics too; for instance, Texas legislation still prohibits public school representatives to discuss any matter of LGBT idea or issue. Additionally, there may be a lack of expert collaboration on certain identities or religions for certain areas in the country. Ideally, there would be a collaboration on the national level; but this in itself could pose as a greater challenge than using the local resources. While bullying continues to threaten the safety and integrity of the public school community, proper research and development cannot suffer from it. The proposed programs need to be developed carefully such that their integration can show the results needed to legitimize the costs involved in creating them.

With the ushering of Common Core as a state standard for the education model, its become much harder to be an educator and student alike. The new system requires benchmarks to be achieved for each student to progress to certain grade levels, in hopes to both increase the average performance of American students and to create more consistent results between states (Kendall). The burden of this lies on the teachers to figure out exactly

how to have the students reach these benchmarks; however, as advertised by Common Core, it does give the educators the flexibility to achieve this through whichever means they wish to promote diversity. There's a movement to integrate the Arts into education, using artifacts such as paintings and classic literature to teach students skills and concepts that relate to English and Mathematics. These could also be tied to integration of cultures and lifestyles; choosing artifacts that convey the identities and perceptions required to quell Othering. This would work nicely to solve the demand for Arts integration while also promoting the expansion of worldly perception. In addition, these integrations can help students by diversifying and making the material that much more interesting to engage in.

While the students may find the material engaging and interesting, the parents still pose a threat on this respect. Much like attempts to integrate Sexual Education into the public school systems, opposition to integrate certain cultures and lifestyles to the public school education could result in parental backlash. Being an American student doesn't guarantee any particular experience to be found in the school system; based on the geography of any given student, they may or may not be exposed to many concepts and ideals that parents may not wish their children to see. It's imperative to emphasize the importance for the student body in general to have a commanding grasp on the diversity of their world so that they can be empowered to make appropriate decisions when faced with these concepts. It's also the only way that we can promote students to hold a better respect for their fellow students who may or may not share in common their appearance, ideologies, or values. Even with a parent not wanting their child to be exposed to these experiences in school, it's a bit unrealistic that the student wouldn't naturally encounter them if they exist in their geography. This idea can further the logic that a student should have education on what their being exposed to in their daily lives, rather than abstaining from discussion of these topics based, because they're not going to disappear from

the student's world. With opposition of the curriculum change, it'd be best to state that these integrations coincide with integrating the Arts as well, to give the proposed change more value to the parent. It'd be most ideal as well if parents with these oppositions could be invited to experience how these proposed changes have a positive influence on their children.

As an Administrator of your public school system, it's your responsibility to provide an environment suited for learning that is safe, diverse, and competitive. With the continued awareness of bullying, and with Anti-Bullying programs not showing the results needed, it's time to create a new program that can work. Being the voice of command, it's imperative to demand programs that can be used in your school with cost effective results. The Anti-Bullying programs released since 2010 did not receive much in the way of research and development, and if you look to European countries, you can look at their research models that suggest and change in curriculum as well (Stevens). With the pressures of Common Core and the demands to bring more Arts and Music into the classrooms, as well as the daily challenges in running a public school system, it can be easy to understand how a topic such as bullying can be seen as a lower priority; given too that you're already implementing programs against it. By integrating cultural and lifestyle educations into the curriculum, however, you have the unique opportunity to solve all the aforementioned issues. If developed and implemented correctly, it will broaden the perspectives of your student body, create a sense of community between students, make the materials taught at your school become better received, and give an opportunity to integrate more Arts and Music into your school as well. The students would benefit from being more globally conscious, as well as holding a higher ethical code in our ever expanding, diverse world. The longer the current Anti-Bullying programs that exist now are left unchanged, the less respect the public school systems are going to command given all the opposition against their effectiveness, and the ways in which bullying is still seen as a prevalent issue. Action is required

now because the only proper way to end bullying is going to require the money, research, and development of these curriculums. Let's not repeat the ways in which we responded to Anti-Bullying - by shock culture and hastily implemented procedures.

Bullying is a global issue, and there are many perspectives on how to handle the narrative. Many sources are relating bullying more and more to LGBT issues; despite it being an issue of Othering ([Jstor.org](https://www.jstor.org/)). Through this proposal, there will be a solid definition of bullying, as well as a clear and direct mission towards quelling it in our schools. The building of community between students through a greater understanding of their peers is the only way we can guide the students to make more responsible and ethical decisions about the ways in which they socialize. By presenting a bully as an "other" entity that needs to be confronted and removed only suggests that bullying is a module of school culture that is unwanted. Bullying is much more complex than a simple mindset, it's a system of cultural expectations and misunderstanding that can only be remedied through proper education. With the combined efforts of School Administration and local governments, we can all set a precedent of a safe, discrimination free environment for our students to learn and grow. Lets work together to eliminate the Othering of bullying for our future generations.

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