



By Robyn Whelan

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The Anti-Bullying Club

Middle School is hard. Even harder for students who just don't quite fit in; and to be honest does anybody feel like they belong in middle school? I was especially concerned for the LGBTQ students in my class.

For the first time, I have LGBTQ students who are very open to their classmates. These students know who they are and are not going to hide it. I was very happy for them but not all of their classmates were ready to accept people who are different from them.

Jack, Jake, and Nate are paving the way for those who will follow behind them. First I noticed students calling them gay, and telling the transgender students that they couldn't be guys. The bullying among my students spread beyond issues of gender identity or sexualorientation. My students are bullied for the way they look, their size (big and small), their weight, the clothes that they wear, the language they speak, their gender identity and anything else that makes them unique. It is my duty as their teacher to stand up for the rights of all of my students, to be who they are inside, create a safe space, and to celebrate their uniqueness.

One afternoon a few of my students asked if we could have a group that meets after school to support anybody who feels bullied, and so the anti-bullying club was born. We decided we would meet once a week. As for the structure of our meetings, I was just winging it. During our first meeting my core group made posters inviting any middle school students to come and join us and delivered them to each middle school homeroom. At the next meeting, 8 members were present, and I enjoyed the quaint group and felt that if it stayed small we may really be able to get things done.



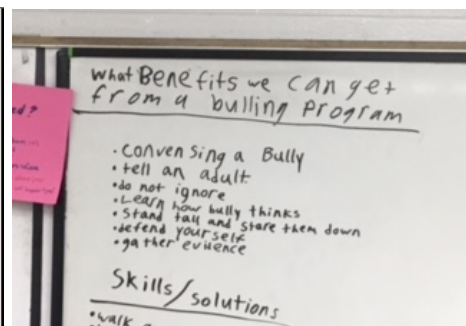
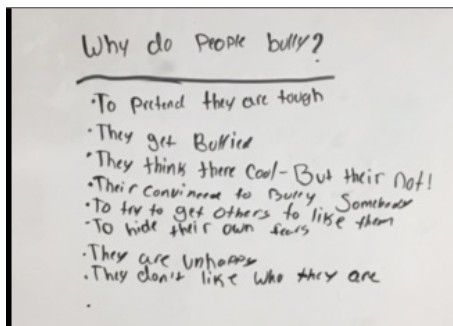
Making Posters: Elisabet Falcon Romero, Breana Cleary, Desiree Bush.

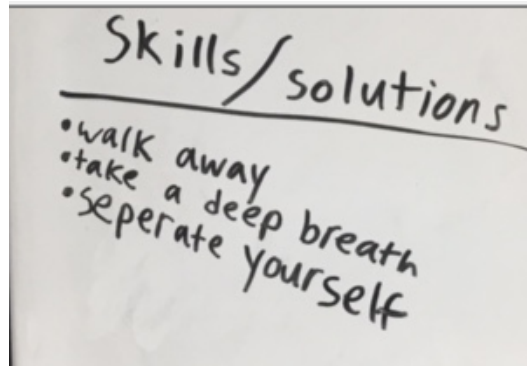
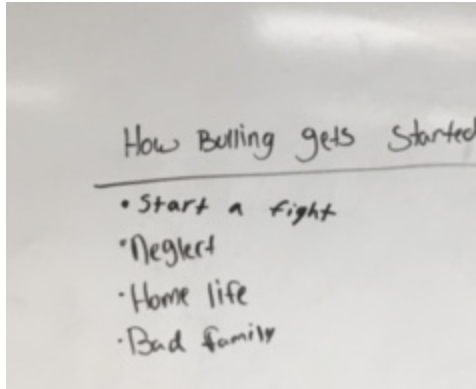


Front Row: Breana Cleary, Elisabet Falcon Romero, Desiree Bush, Nate Pfingston.

We started researching information about anti-bullying and how to make a change. I know the importance of providing data, so we wrote a survey to give to all middle school students. They found anti bullying programs for sale and anti-bullying speakers. Some of them were funny, some were juvenile, for elementary students. We sent emails to four of their favorites asking for quotes and prices and one stuck out, Keith Deltano. He was funny and to the point. I did not know how much guidance I would have to give but after this first meeting I realized that I was only a chaperone. My students knew what they wanted and were willing to work for it.

As weeks of researching and note-taking passed, we decided to build a presentation for our principal. We needed to convince him that our school needs help fighting bullies and changing the culture. We also wanted Keith Deltano to come speak at our school. This would not be easy but they were ready for the task at hand. I sat back and watched, making a slight suggestion every now and then, but they were passionate about making an effective presentation. They brainstormed what they wanted to include in their presentation.





One of the older students (we gained a high school student who was a former student of mine) said we needed to organize our work in a powerpoint. [Anti Bullying Club](#) We met with our Principal to tell him about our research and ask him to purchase a program. He was very impressed with everything they had to say. He said he will consider using one of the speakers and also suggested that as soon as school starts next year that these kids get trained to be peer tutors. He thought that everyone of them would make a great mentors and counselors.

Through this after school club, I gained something very valuable that was totally unexpected. I learned to step back and let my students take control and find their voice. To trust that they can learn a lot and make a difference without my direct supervision. I have always been a bit of a controller in my classroom, letting my students figure things out by my direct guidance. This process showed me what a student centered class could be, and I can't wait to try it out next year.

Robyn Whelan, teaches at Marion C Moore School, in Jefferson County Public Schools, and has taught for twenty-three years. Whelan is involved in mentoring new teachers, in modeling mathematical standards by using hands on activities, and demonstrating these activities at NCTM, and Classroom Teachers Enacting Positive Solutions (CTEPS). She earned a bachelor's in elementary education grades 1-8 from the University of Louisville and a master's in mathematics education grades 5-9 from the University of Louisville.