

Education Matters

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Handling Bully Behavior

3 Strategies to make your school safe for all students

By Jill Newell



Recently a colleague inquired how I used to handle bullying in my middle school classroom. My response did not impress me. And when I asked other educators about their experiences, as a whole, the responses that I received from them did not impress me either. “I call the parents” or “We have a form that we fill out” were two phrases that I heard, but they didn’t seem to get to the heart of the issue. Bullying today is not like bullying in the past. What used to be a playground problem now also includes online harassment. This more intense bullying is taking its toll on young people who are too often choosing suicide as their option to stop the torment.

I talked with Washington, D.C.-based child and adolescent therapist Angela Shields regarding bully behavior. We discussed why students bully others and how adults need to handle bully behavior.


Why Students Bully

Shields is adamant that most bully behavior is a symptom of pain or inner turmoil that the bully is experiencing somewhere else in life. It must be remembered that young people feel emotions as intensely as adults. Since young people don’t necessarily know how to deal with their traumatic situations and the emotions, choosing to bully another person is one coping mechanism

regularly embraced. They grapple within themselves to gain some semblance of control and equilibrium, and it is this pain and turmoil that lead a young person to create a role of control somewhere else in his or her life. That role is often manifested through bullying others. Shields explained:

“I think it may be hard for many of us to understand how hurting someone else brings somewhat temporary relief to someone. But I think that sense of control...to feel elated for a time or to feel success...gives the kid a sense of entitlement, power over someone. That they can evoke a certain reaction out of someone shows them that they have that ability to control something.”

“Many children who bully are modeling violence, patterns, and communication styles that they are experiencing regularly. Rarely do we see children who bully coming from a totally healthy, communicative home where they have a wonderful self-identity. It’s very much about bullies reconciling a lot of their own trauma, abuse, or violence that they’re experiencing in the community and in their own home.”



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to whom our students
and children
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Understanding reasons why a student might be acting as a bully does not make the actions permissible, but it certainly opens our eyes, and the extremes to which we are seeing bullied students “handle” their stress is not permissible. Adults must act.

Addressing Bully Behavior Effectively

Shields shared the story of a 13-year-old boy who was bullied at school. He told her that it didn’t matter if he went to the teacher about it because she was not going to do anything. This story was disappointing to hear, and not just because this child’s needs were not being met. Being realistic, I must admit it’s probable that a student felt this way when I was in the classroom—isolated with nowhere to turn.

We are the adults to whom our students and children should turn for help. We are to aid them in navigating what seems to be an increasingly difficult place to exist. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan pleads “Parents, teachers, students, elected officials, and all people of conscience need

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to stand up and speak out,” in a recent ten-page letter to schools and districts nationwide regarding bullying. Are we, the adults, creating safe places for students to turn when they need help? Are we setting the expectation of respect in our classrooms, halls, homes, and even online?

Shields suggests that there is a very specific role for teachers to play in curbing bully behavior. Teachers can do three things to make sure that an anti-bullying atmosphere is established in every classroom.

1. Be on the lookout—recognize that bullying is happening in the classroom. Many students report that a good amount of bullying occurs when the teacher is present and that many teachers do not actively work to curb it. Teachers need to be on a constant lookout for bully behavior. Set standards in the classroom for appropriate behavior. Model for the children that bullying is not acceptable.
2. Strike preemptively—talk about bullying preventively. The fact is that it’s going to happen. But folding prevention into the culture in the classroom and talking about appropriate peer relationships can stop a good number of issues before they start. Talk about bullying prior to things happening in your classroom, not as a result of inappropriate peer relationships that have occurred.
3. Address the issue—when a student does approach teachers, it’s not acceptable to simply remark “Okay, Anthony

stop saying that to Sara,” and leave it at that. Have an intervention where the students are utilized more is most effective. The teacher can intervene and talk to both students involved. The teacher must decide how to talk to Anthony about his behavior and talk a bit about what’s going on with him at home and how he’s feeling inside.

Taking time to understand the environmental makeup of the “Anthony” coming into your classroom really saves you a lot of work later. Of course, this could quite possibly require a trained professional’s help.

Once the bully’s behavior and actions have been addressed, the teacher must question how to open the issue to a broader classroom discussion. There should not be a highlighting of the students involved but a broad classroom discussion on what bullying is. If other children can hear the class discussing what’s appropriate and what’s not, it creates more of a culture for everyone to be on the lookout and to know what is expected of them.

While the goal is a “bully-free zone,” there is still the necessity of teaching students what they can say and how they can act when they are being bullied or seeing a classmate who is being bullied. During the class discussion work with students to identify key phrases that students can say to those who are bullying them. Also, identify with students the trusted adults who are appropriate people with whom students can share their concerns of being bullied. Provide them the safety tools to emerge successfully from a bullying situation.

While not promoting any one bully-prevention program, Shields does support the inclusion of bully prevention into the curriculum.

“We are doing a huge disservice by not folding it into the curriculum at the beginning of any school year. Involve the school social worker, the school counselor. Have them talk about it with students. But, more importantly, as a teacher, start learning to talk about it as part of the classroom culture. You set a standard in your classroom of how students should treat one another. Teachers should talk more about this in their classrooms.”

Home and Technology

Paramount to all that can be learned at school, there is the need to have a solid home base with a parent or other guardian.

“We cannot neglect the resources at home because home is where children are spending the majority of their time and learning,” says Shields. Their community and home is where they learn their value and relationship with the world.

It is from the support at home that an understanding of the appropriate use of technology can be taught, encouraged, and enforced. Whether a parent is using multimedia to communicate—manners can be taught. The plea is for parents to become involved and know what students are viewing online for the purpose of safety and propriety. Keeping a close eye on students at home could quite literally save a life.

While most bullying still occurs the old-fashioned way, technology has definitely played a big role in the increased bullying of students. Some students not only have to endure difficulties at school but also leave the school grounds and are inundated with



bully [bool-ee]
– noun

1. a blustering, quarrelsome, overbearing person who habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people.

Facebook posts, blogs, texts, YouTube, and live-streaming video that can make their humiliation more available to their peers—a teenager’s social nightmare.

Devastatingly, we see that this constant inundation of humiliation is pushing students over the edge. How much of this stress can be abated if there is a parent or guardian checking in with students regularly to make sure that they are feeling safe and free from torment?

If all adults involved in the development of students expect and teach civility and respect, students will know how to act. Let them know the expectations

for treating other human beings well—at home and at school.

They deserve to be included in a dialogue about what we expect of them concerning their actions towards others. The fact is that once the expectation is set, most students will willingly follow. But adults must take the steps to have those essential conversations.

In light of the recent devastating loss of life, please take a few minutes to reflect on how you handle bullying in your classroom or school. Do you address it as it comes or do you make a preemptive strike to end it before it begins? Do your students look at you as an adult to whom they can turn for assistance? ■

If you feel the need to expand your understanding of bully behavior, check out the following programs that can help address bullying in your school: Rachel’s Challenge; Stop Bullying Now; Olweus Bully Prevention Program.



Jill Newell is the director of professional development at the Association of American Educators. She taught English at the secondary level in suburban Utah and inner-city Southern California. Currently, she teaches Spanish at Northern Virginia Community College to fulfill her desire to be in the classroom with students.



There Is No “War on Teachers”

There is a growing bipartisan agreement on the importance of rewarding good ones By Eric A. Hanushek

No longer is education reform an issue of liberals vs. conservatives. In Washington, the Obama administration’s Race to the Top program rewarded states for making significant policy changes such as supporting charter schools. In Los Angeles, the *Times* published the effectiveness rankings—and names—of 6,000 teachers. Nationwide, the documentary “Waiting for ‘Superman,’” which strongly criticizes the public education system, continues to succeed at the box office.

All sides of the educational policy debate now accept that the key determinant of school effectiveness is teachers—that effective teachers get good achievement results for all children, while ineffective teachers hurt all students, regardless of background. Also increasingly accepted is

that the interests of teacher unions aren’t the same as the interests of children, or even of most teachers.

Until recently, the unions asserted that they spoke for teachers and that they should judge which reforms are good. Any proposal they didn’t like, they labeled part of a “war on teachers.” Their first response to the *Los Angeles Times* and to “Waiting for ‘Superman’” has been to drag out that familiar line. According to the American Federation of Teachers, “The film’s central themes—that all public school teachers are bad, that all charter schools are good, and that teacher unions are to blame for failing schools—are incomplete and inaccurate, and they do a disservice to the millions of good teachers in our schools who work their hearts out every day.”

What’s really going on is different. President Obama states that we can’t tolerate bad teachers in classrooms, and he has promoted rewarding the most effective teachers so they stay in the classroom. The *Los Angeles Times* published data identifying both effective and ineffective teachers. And “Waiting for ‘Superman’” (in which I provide commentary) highlighted exceptional teachers and pointed out that teacher unions don’t focus enough on teacher quality.

This is not a war on teachers *en masse*. It is recognition of what every parent knows: Some teachers are exceptional, but a small number are dreadful. If that is the case, we should think of ways to change the balance.

My research—which has focused on teacher quality as measured by what stu-

dents learn with different teachers—indicates that a small proportion of teachers at the bottom is dragging down our schools. The typical teacher is both hard-working and effective. But if we could replace the bottom 5-10 percent of teachers with an average teacher—not a superstar—we could dramatically improve student achievement. The U.S. could move from below average in international comparisons to near the top.

Defending bad teachers

Teacher unions say they don't want bad teachers in the classrooms, but then they assert that we can't adequately judge teachers and they act to defend them all. Thus unions defend teachers in "rubber rooms"—where they are sent after being accused of improper behavior or found to be extraordinarily ineffective—on the grounds that due process rights require such treatment. (In a perverse way, rubber rooms are good as long as it is not feasible to remove teachers that are harming kids; it is better to pay these teachers not to teach than to have more children suffer.)

So we are seeing not a war on teachers but a war on the blunt and detrimental policies of teacher unions. If unions continue not to represent the vast numbers of highly effective teachers, but instead to lump them in with the ineffective teachers, they will continue doing a disservice to students, to most of their own members, and to the nation.

There is a place for an enlightened union that accepts the simple premise that teacher performance is an integral part of effecting reform. As the late Albert Shanker said in 1985, when he was president of the American Federation of Teachers, "Teachers must be viewed . . . as a group that acts on behalf of its clients and takes responsibility for the quality and performance of its own ranks."

The bottom line is that focusing on effective teachers cannot be taken as a liberal or conservative position. It's time for the unions to drop their polemics and stop propping up the bottom. ■



Eric Hanushek is the Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. He has been a leader in the development of economic analysis of educational issues.

Cheaters Welcome?

Schools coddle cheaters and incompletes

By Alexandra Schroeck, AAE Communications Coordinator

What would school be like without "F"s or consequences for cheating? Students at West Potomac High School in Alexandria, VA are finding out, as their school has determined there is no need for the failing grades in their grading system.

Earlier in the school year, the school eliminated the mark for "failure," instead supplying failing students with the letter "I" for incomplete and establishing a policy that would allow students who cheated on exams the chance to make up the test with these "I" grades. What is the significance? For starters, the "I" grade allows students to redeem themselves throughout the year by catching up with coursework and ultimately receiving new marks at the end of the term.

Is this a strategy to

▶ AAE's Tracey Bailey, director of education policy, recently shared his concerns about the school's policy on the local Fox news affiliate.

help struggling kids or is this just another example of coddling underachievers and spreading the message that timeliness and success are not linked? After all, certain students could end up with the same grade as a student who earned an "A" on time and without an incomplete and a grace period.

Mary Mathewson, an English teacher at Potomac High, is not impressed with the new system; "Kids are under the impression they can do it whenever they want to, and it's not that big of a deal." She argues that taking away the failing mark "takes away one of the very few tools [they] have to get kids to learn," eliminating any sense of responsibility or urgency.

"What about the conscientious student who keeps up with class, studies until 2 a.m. and pulls an A on a math test?" one parent asked. "Should a peer who skipped class and flubbed the test two or three times get an



equal grade? With the new policy, the ultimate grade on a student transcript could be the same, even though the two students took very different paths."

Despite strong opposition, administrators are standing by the new policy. "If we really want students to know and do the work, why would we give them an 'F' and move on?" said Peter Noonan, assistant superintendent for instructional services. "I think the students who are struggling should not be penalized for not learning at the same rate as their peers."

Administrators are, however, backpedaling on the cheating controversy, allowing individual teachers to set their own policies. ■



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Rockin' the Standards

California teacher's educational rock band releases second album

By Michael Anderson

On Tuesday, November 30th elementary students, teachers, and parents across the nation rejoiced! Rockin' the Standards, America's educational rock band, released their second album entitled *Language Arts*. A follow-up to their chart-topping debut album *Math*, *Language Arts* promises to once again mix entertaining rock 'n' roll music with lyrics that help elementary students ace academic state standards. The album features many hard-hitting tracks including "Literary Devices," "Parts of Speech," "Fact or Opinion," and "Spelling Bee Champ."

Formed in 2008, Rockin' the Standards burst onto the children's music scene as America's only academic standards-based rock 'n' roll band. Veteran California elementary school teacher Tim Bedley initially started the band as a way to assist his own students with the California State Standards.

"I found myself answering the same questions over and over," explained Bedley. "I just thought there has got to be a better way. Then it hit me; people remember catchy songs quite easily, so why not write songs that cover the state standards?"

The idea quickly evolved into the band Rockin' the Standards. Bedley teamed up with his childhood friend and rock 'n' roll genius Ben Jacobs. Bedley wrote the lyrics and Jacobs added the music.

#1 on Amazon

After rolling out the first album *Math*, the band quickly found itself shipping CDs across the country and selling numerous downloads. In fact, *Math* has repeatedly hit #1 on the Amazon educational download charts over the past two and a half years and has sold more than 5,000 combined downloads on iTunes, Amazon, Digstation.com, and CD Baby.

Most importantly, though, Bedley personally saw a jump in the success of his students passing their California State Standards math exams. "My theory worked! I noticed numerous students mouthing song lyrics while thinking about difficult math questions. Test scores on questions addressed by the songs were extremely high, even from English learners and resource students."



Kate Cruikshank, an elementary teacher from Potsdam, New York, is convinced that music is the answer for many of her students. "As a fourth-grade teacher, I was looking for ways to help my students retain basic information. The traditional children's music available was not engaging or 'cool' enough to keep the attention of the 'tweens' in my classroom." Mrs. Cruikshank searched the Internet and soon found Rockin' the Standards. "My 4th graders loved the rock 'n' roll flavor and their math knowledge grew stronger immediately."

Don Mesibov, best-selling education author and founder of The Institute for Learning Centered Education, says "Music, as integrated in lessons by Rockin' the Standards, grabs the attention and involvement of students who otherwise turn a deaf ear to anything teachers are saying."

Bedley was surprised by the feedback his music has received. "We had parents, teachers, and kids begging for more. When my friends hear the new stuff, they're shocked to find out that it's kids' educational music." ■

Michael Anderson teaches third grade and manages the band. Learn more about Rockin' the Standards at their website www.rockinthestandards.com.



Sample

Parallel or Perpendicular (To the tune of *Do Your Ears Hang Low*)

Do you see parallel
Lookin' like a double 'L'
Lines that never cross
Never would as well
But when two lines come
together
Makin' right angles, we yell...
Perpendicular
Parallel, Lines that never cross
Or Perpendicular, Two lines when
they come together
Parallel or Perpendicular

It Messes Up My Fishing Time

Why American High School Teachers Don't Assign Research Papers

By Peter Wood

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) is pleased to present a long-suppressed research report on how American high school teachers avoid assigning research papers.

College faculty members are more and more confronted with the hard problem of trying to teach a higher education curriculum to students who don't know the basics. Large numbers of students are admitted to colleges—even very good colleges—unable to write at even a mediocre level. As a result, colleges and universities across the country have quietly swapped out their old freshmen English classes, which focused on reading some important literature, and substituted what amount to basic training in writing expository essays and research papers. However, even that doesn't solve the problem.

How did we reach this impasse? Why aren't our high schools doing a better job of preparing college-bound students to write?

The question was raised a decade ago by Will Fitzhugh, editor of *The Concord Review* and one of the great unsung champions of school reform in the United States. In 2001, at the height of the movement to reform schools by turning everything into a testable outcome, Fitzhugh recognized that “measure everything” mania could be further bad news for the kind of synthetic, discursive thinking that underlies the research paper.

Fitzhugh also recognized, however, that mere intuition about the problem wouldn't make much difference. He turned to the Albert Shanker Institute (named after the late president of the American Federation of Teachers), which funded a survey of whether and how history and social studies teachers assign research papers.

Censoring Results

The research proceeded, and in 2002, a report sponsored by *The Concord Review*

was written, but the results proved too awkward for the funder. In the end, the Albert Shanker Institute decided to let the paper gather dust rather than issue it and have to explain away why 62 percent of history and social studies teachers never assign full-length research papers (papers in the range of 10 to 17 pages). Fitzhugh, however, retained the copyright and he has now granted permission to make it public. (To download the report, click on this article at www.aeteachers.org/news-letter.)

That study is almost a decade old, but it has more than historical interest. The problems it brings to light are still today's problems. We at the National Association of Scholars suspect things have gotten worse, but, like Will Fitzhugh, we don't want to rely on intuition.

The NAS would like to build on his 2002 study and find out what is really happening in the nation's high schools when it comes to teaching children how to engage in disciplined historical inquiry and synthesis—and how to present the results in a meaningful, compelling way. To do so, of course, we will need to find another source of funding—and ideally one that won't flinch when the results come in. Our interest in this is part of our broader goal of rebuilding the basis for genuine liberal arts education in the United States.

In 2002, 82 percent of teachers found it

difficult to grade research papers, and 58 percent explained that they didn't assign long research papers because they took up too much time. In some cases, teachers expressed willingness to assign research papers but genuinely couldn't carve out the time because of the larger number of students they teach. Fitzhugh, commenting on this aspect of the report, tells of a meeting he had this August with teachers in Florida who were eager to assign research papers, “but all but one had 180 students in six classes. One had 210 kids in seven classes. They didn't have time to breathe, never mind to guide and assess serious term papers, but they wanted to try to help kids do them anyway.”

Teachers are daunted from assigning research papers because grading them consumes so much of their personal time. One explained, “It just takes up my free time after school...it messes up my fishing time.” ■



Peter W. Wood is Executive Director of the National Association of Scholars. This article used with permission granted.

What say you?

We'd like to hear your thoughts on this article. Join the conversation at www.aeteachers.org/blog.



On the move (and calm as a result)

A simple video that incorporates hand motions has been successful in getting children to focus.

When it comes time to get the second-graders back on track in Chanda McDonnell's class, the kids stand up and get moving.

It's all done with the help of a DVD that, with music and motion, helps quiet the students at St. Bridget's School in River Falls, Wisconsin. Often, it's the students themselves who ask their teacher for those few minutes with the program, called *MeMoves*.

The video itself is simple: On the screen, people of all ages and ethnicities, from young children to grandparents, are shown one at a time, slowly moving their arms in different patterns and keeping rhythm to a mesmerizing beat. There are three different sequences—joy, calm, and focus—and it is the latter that McDonnell typically uses in her classroom.

To read more about *MeMoves*, [click here](#).





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Edupundit Myopia

We forget that it is students' responsibility to learn

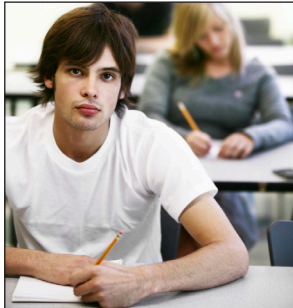
By Will Fitzhugh

Edupundits have chosen very complex subject matter for their investigations and reports. They study and write about dropouts, vouchers, textbooks, teacher selection and training, school governance, budgets, curricula in all subjects, union contracts, school management issues, and many, many more.

Meanwhile, practically all of them fail to give any attention to the basic purpose of schools, which is to have students do academic work. Almost none of them seems inclined to look past the teacher to see if the students are, for instance, reading any nonfiction books or writing any term papers. Of course all of the things they do pay attention to are vitally important, but without student academic work they mean very little.

I realize there are state standards in math and reading, and some states test for writing after a fashion, but no state standards ask if students have read a history book while they were in school or written a substantial research paper, and neither do the SAT, ACT, or NAEP tests.

Basic math skills are important, and current standards try to find out if those graduating from our high schools can do math at the 8th-grade level, and a similar standard is in place for reading. However, for the time being, higher education and the workplace are still not well designed for students with 8th-grade math and reading skills.



Students in Massachusetts who pass the state test for graduation, the MCAS, find out when they take their college placement tests that they have come up against a different level of expectation.

Colleges making up for high school shortcomings

In Massachusetts, more than 60 percent of those who go to community colleges have to take remedial courses, and 34 percent of those who go to the four-year colleges have to take remedial courses. As the Chancellor of Higher Education in the Commonwealth has pointed out, the state is now paying for high school twice.

The students have to learn to do in college what they should have learned to do in high schools.

Once they are allowed into college courses for credit, they encounter nonfiction books and term paper requirements which they hadn't been asked to manage in high school.

After college, there are tremendous efforts at remediation required as well. The Business Roundtable has reported that their member companies are spending more than three billion dollars every year on remedial writing courses for their employees, both hourly and salaried, in about equal numbers.

Students' responsibility

One of the sad and damaging consequences of this myopia among Edupundits is that everyone but students is imagined to be responsible for student academic work. As Paul Zoch has so regularly pointed out, the message that sends down the line to students is that their job is to get through high school with a minimum of work, while it is someone else's responsibility to educate them. The result

is that, whatever gets decided about dropouts, vouchers, union contracts, budgets, textbooks, teacher selection and training, school governance, curricula in all subjects, school management issues, and the like, our students are not working hard enough on their own education.

Of course there are exceptions, students whose teachers demand that they read history books and write research papers, and there are students who do that on their own, in independent studies, partly because they have become aware that they must meet more rigorous academic demands down the road, and they are determined to get themselves ready.

However, far too many of our high school students are waiting for someone else to set demanding academic standards, and when they don't, the students accept that, and get jobs, play sports, lead an active social life, spend hours a day on video games, and so forth. But after they slide through high school and emerge, they are mightily sorry they were not asked to do more and held to a higher standard for their own academic work.

We should not kid them about the need for serious reading and academic expository writing, and when we do, we are not educating them, we are cheating them. Edupundits should heed the old Hindu saying, "Whatever you give your attention to, grows in your life." The actual academic work of students while they are in school deserves a lot more attention than it has been receiving from them so far. ■



Will Fitzhugh is a Harvard graduate who taught for ten years at the high school in Massachusetts. He founded The Concord Review in 1987 and the National Writing Board in 1998 (www.tcr.org).