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MUSE 353

Adolescents Paper

Bullying: In and out of the Classroom

In today’s society, there seems to always be bullying. Whether seen or unseen, as educators, there should be ways to acknowledge, respond to, and understand what students could be going through. With the rise of technology, there’s also been a rise in cyber bullying. Cyber bullying could be completely outside of the school day and the bully might not even be a student. However, recognizing adolescent students as bully victims will help to better understand what kind of support system and guidance they need in the classroom.

For starters, reasons why victims are bullied can range from tiny details of behavior to obvious physical traits. And unfortunately, bullying is part of growing up for many students and has a number of effects on both the victim, and the bully. Holubcikova et al. collected research data to analyze how much bullying was caused by body image. This study covered data from both boys and girls, although girls were more than half of the data pool. 8,050 students were surveyed and 20% reported being involved in bullying (Holubcikova 1037). Female students reported more bullying for being overweight, while male students reported more bullying for being underweight (Holubcikova 1037). As an educator, this information is pertinent to teaching adolescents. For middle schoolers, adolescence is a time of growth and change, but it doesn’t happen at the same rate for everyone. Being able to promote inclusion and appreciation for all body types will help boost the self-esteem and comfort of all students.

Another research team surveyed approximately 600 students, once at the age of 13, and again at 16. Many of these students suggested the best way to intervene was to sit down and talk to those affected, either bully or victim (Frisen and Holmquist 123). This response was more common with the younger group, as well as more common with the female respondents. In regards to education, this response reveals that students feel it’s an authority figure’s position to handle bullying. For educators who recognize, and handle these conflicts, students will hopefully have a stronger connection and understanding of the other student, as well as the educator involved. As this past semester has shown, personal connections will also strengthen the student’s motivation and interest in the content being represented by that teacher.

Why should educators take a role in thwarting bullying? Because we are the role models for students and one of their support systems at a time when they are figuring out their own personalities. As Spitall says, “Teachers have tremendous power to inspire and encourage students, to become strong role models, and to make a decisive difference in students' lives. They also have the power to alienate them”(29). If an educator chooses to overlook bullying in the student body, then they are choosing to neglect the students they are responsible for inspiring. Although many teachers wouldn’t view it this way, teasing, insulting, or ridiculing, something seemingly harmless, can be viewed as bullying by the student ( Spitall 30). If we model that behavior for our students, that’s the behavior they will replicate.

In today’s society, another form of potential bullying is cyber bullying. For parents and teachers alike, this is even harder to depict and monitor. In Canada, a study was done with middle school and junior high to survey the amount of cyber bullying adolescents endure. The survey, taken before 2010, showed that nearly all students had a computer and used it for about an hour a day. Half of those students messaged friends online, and half of those students were unaware that items uploaded were accessible to many. Half of the students who were online for at least an hour a day also reported sharing their passwords with friends. More than half of the students surveyed reported that they had a cell phone and texted friends daily (Mishna et al. 362). If these were the number more than seven years ago, imagine what they are now. Even in schools where technology isn’t used in the school day, there are still potentially students who are affected by this. In another cyber bullying related study, results showed that cyber bully perpetrators most likely had their own mental health problems (Rice et al 66). It was also found that cyber bullies were more likely to be female (Rice et al 66). These results however showed that more than 80% of students didn’t experience cyber bullying in the past year (Rice et al 68).

In a Study in South Australia, teachers were surveyed to document their responses to bullying. The results showed that teachers were more likely to be more lenient for situations that were minor and less concerning (Ellis and Shute 654). Situations that were clearly more pressing, were treated as indicated by administrative legislation. As teachers, this kind of response is pretty much anticipated. For situations where students are simply having a bad day and picking a fight with someone may not necessarily mean they need an in-school suspension, or whatever the punishment may be.

In regard to teaching, these studies are valuable for educators and administrators to have a better understanding of bullying, bullies, and how students think these situations are best handled. For students, school is the majority of their social life and growth. Our social health can play a big factor in our mental health. For students who are bullied, their top priority is no longer on school work, but getting through the day without feeling ostracized or humiliated. For educators, being unafraid of making personal connections with students so that they feel at ease to reach out for help is imperative for their mental health. Additionally, students who bully can be found to have their own mental health problems which may need addressing.

Teachers should also be aware that handling a situation of bullying by ridiculing the bully will only result in more distress in the situation. Typically, following the guidelines provided by your administration will help, but also consider the responses from the students to possibly sit down and discuss the situation with those involved. As educators, we are the students’ models and inspiration. If we uphold the students to a higher standard with support and understanding, they will, mostly, respect that with their behavior.

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