

USING THE THEME OF BULLYING TO TEACH ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT. This article argues that bullying is a human rights violation and should be a social studies curriculum concern. It treats bullying not only as a school incident but also as part of any systematic, continuous violence in any context. There is a discussion of legal implications, applicable educational theory, and attempts to deal with bullying in Canada and foreign jurisdictions. Ten classroom lessons present bullying as a social studies issue for teaching about rights. The lessons include history and current events as well as local, national, and international concerns. A supplementary Internet resource section is provided.

UTILISATION DU THÈME DE L'INTIMIDATION POUR ENSEIGNER LES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DANS LE PROGRAMME D'ÉTUDES SOCIALES

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article soutient que l'intimidation constitue une violation des droits de la personne et que ce problème doit faire partie du programme d'études sociales. Il traite l'intimidation non seulement comme un incident qui survient en milieu scolaire, mais également comme un élément de toute violence systématique soutenue dans n'importe quel contexte. On y discute des répercussions juridiques, de la théorie de l'éducation pertinente et des tentatives d'apporter des solutions au problème de l'intimidation au Canada et à l'étranger. Dix cours en classe présentent l'intimidation comme un sujet d'études sociales pour l'enseignement sur les droits. Les cours incluent un historique et des événements courants ainsi que des préoccupations régionales, nationales et internationales. On y trouve également une section sur des ressources Internet additionnelles.

Bullying – a problem

Schools are supposed to be a protected environment in which children learn. But for some children, school is synonymous with hell; a place of torment, violence and viciousness of such magnitude that some try to avoid school, others have committed suicide (Coloroso, 2003, pp. xvii-xxi) or have been murdered (Martin, 1998, Tafler, 1998) and a few have retaliated with fatal results (Kass, 2000; O'Malley & Ali, 2001). This is because of bullying, and it ranges from individual to group provocations and from verbal abuse and

shunning to physical attacks and extortion. Now with modern technology, there is a new phenomenon: text bullying. Abusive messages and threats are being sent by cell phones using text messaging (McLellan, 2003). In the adult world most of these behaviours are criminal and can also result in civil litigation for pain, suffering, medical expenses, and restitution of property as well as court restraining orders to keep abusers away from their victims.

When these behaviours involve minors in school, however, there is a tendency for some to place them under the rubric of bullying and treat them with less alacrity and action than if they have been done to adults. It may be a belief that this is part of growing up and merely a passing phase, "not worth the bother," and that the schools will cope with it. But this is discrimination against children because their rights are treated as less important than those of adults. The downplaying of bullying also suits some administrators seeking to avoid negative publicity for their schools. Some victims of bullying will not inform the staff for fear of not receiving any assistance from them. This makes the situation worse as the victim feels more isolated (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, Short-Camilli, 1996, p. 4). Administrative complicity with bullying can occur when victims are re-victimized by the failure of administrators to take adequate measures against bullying.

Aside from violating human rights bullying can be detrimental to a child's learning. A child's cognitive development is affected by his or her emotional security. And the best learning occurs in a safe environment where peer and adult interaction are positive (Bergan 2002, 376-379). Bullying can also affect victims' mental and physical health (Salmon & West 2000), and learning disabled children appear to have an increased risk of being bullied (Mishna 2003).

Defining bullying

Bullying occurs when a victim is repeatedly and deliberately hurt by another who is more powerful than the victim (Garrity, et al., 1996, p. 7). Bullying can be physical, psychological, verbal (Pepler & Craig, 2002, p. 1) or relational (Coloroso, 2003, p. 14). But how can you differentiate between bullying and teasing? There is a difference between bullying and teasing noted in the literature as a matter of degree having to do with bullying attacks being persistent (Freedman, 2002, p. 5). However physical force, even as a form of teasing, should not be tolerated.

Bullying is a form of human degradation differing only in the scale of the exercise of power and the degree of degradation inflicted by the action, whether it is committed by a clique of school girls making life intolerable for a classmate or a Saddam Hussein intent on mass murder. As Paulo Freire notes, "Here I want to repeat – forcefully – that nothing can justify the degradation of human beings. Nothing" (1998, p. 93).

Instigation of bullying

In some cases victims might be accused of instigating the bullying with alleged provocative behaviour. This view should be rejected. It is an excuse for negative behaviour by the bully that goes beyond an appropriate response to a provocation. Thus, the victim is being blamed by the aggressor for what is an on-going, deliberate, situation of bullying, and the excuse that the perpetrator was being provoked is similar to the rapist who claims the victim's mode of dress "provoked" him. The lack of control and the inappropriateness of the perpetrator's behaviour are the cause.

Fear of reporting bullying

Other children who may witness bullying may not report it for fear of being labeled tattletales. In such cases children should be taught that there is a difference between "telling" and "tattling." The former is to help someone out of trouble, while the latter is getting a person into trouble (Pepler & Craig, 2002, p. 1). For some children this may be too sophisticated, since they will be getting the victimizer into trouble and be accused of tattling. There is a need to emphasize that such telling protects someone who is being harmed. However in schools where bullying is not properly dealt with, as noted above, this will have little value since reporting witnesses can also be at risk from bullies and may remain silent because of this fear.

Anti-bullying programs

Today we are seeing more interest in dealing with bullying and there are some programs that address the problem such as the Safe and Caring Schools (Government of Alberta, 2003). British Columbia has already instituted a prevention program and Quebec's former Minister for education and employment, Sylvain Simard, stated that by 2005 every school in Quebec was to have procedures in place for the prevention of extortion and bullying (*Montreal Gazette*, 2003). However, there is no hard research evidence that anti-bullying programs are effective. There have been other responses. In England cell phone companies will change harassed students' phone numbers without charge and student cell phone abusers can be expelled from school (McLellan, 2003).

The concern with dealing with bullying has been present for a considerable number of years. In Europe, for example, ways of reducing bullying were examined at the European Conference on Initiatives to Combat School Bullying (1998). The conference was attended by representatives of Austria, Belgium, England, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy [A recent survey of bullying intervention programs in Italy can be found in Gini (2004)], Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, and Spain. Keynote addresses, workshops, and poster sessions dealt with the issue of bullying. The poster sessions, in particular, provide interested readers with anti-bullying

initiatives in each of the participating countries.¹ England's poster session was of interest since it dealt with the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project under the direction of Peter Smith. It was claimed that bullying levels could be reduced in schools where there was involvement by the whole school for developing guidelines for anti-bullying. In addition to the poster session, readers interested in examining the results of the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project were referred to Sharp and Smith (1994a, 1994b). Yet in Europe, as elsewhere, bullying has proved difficult to deal with.

A study in Hong Kong (Wong 2004) noted, somewhat similarly to the Sheffield program, that a comprehensive positive approach to bullying involving student self-competence, social skills, and positive relationships with teachers and parents was a useful anti-violence strategy, rather than suppression, which was ineffective. In Australia, Rigby² (2003 Preface) notes that "... anti-bullying initiatives are unlikely to be effective without widespread support from the school community, that is from staff, students and parents." Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) also support comprehensive anti-bullying programs as being effective. Olweus (1997) in Norway claimed a 50% - 70% decrease in problems related to bullying using a comprehensive structured "core" program. However, regarding parent involvement in anti-bullying programs, it has been noted that domestic violence is a significant factor for children who are bullies (Baldry, 2003).

The most recent conference at the time of writing where school bullying was examined was "Tackling Violence: models and solutions" (2004) held in Moscow. Three presentations appear to be of interest in the conference symposium "Bullying: violence that change view"(sic) but the proceedings are not yet available³ It should be noted that there is an extensive literature on school bullying that is well beyond the scope of this article.⁴

Anti-bullying laws

At least one jurisdiction is taking very firm action. The City of Edmonton in Alberta, Canada has passed an anti-bully bylaw, effective May 1, 2003, that empowers police to enforce a \$250 fine for continued intimidation or harassment of someone under 18 years old (*Edmonton Journal*, 2003). This is in addition to any anti-bullying policies operating in city schools. The effect of this bylaw remains to be seen.

Canada's Federal Parliament has passed a new criminal youth justice act which, although it is not specifically aimed at bullying, could be used against habitual violent bullies at the behest of the prosecution and with the consent of the court. It empowers the court to extend adult sentences to 14 year olds convicted of crimes having a jail sentence of more than two years where the defendant has a history of "serious, violent offenses." Previously, 16 years was the lower limit for the possibility of adult sentencing (Dept. of Justice Canada, 2002).

An article in the *Edmonton Journal* noted that fifteen U.S. states had anti-bullying laws (Maclean, 2003). This data is valid to May, 2002.⁵ In the state of New Jersey, such legislation was passed unanimously by its assembly and senate (Ginsberg, 2002), (New Jersey statute 18A:37 – sections 13-19 [New Jersey Permanent Statutes Data Base, 2003]). The state of Oregon has also posted its anti-bullying law on the Internet and this law is worth examining for its comprehensiveness and comparative value (Chapter 617, Oregon Laws, 2001).

Bullying as a human rights issue

School and community programs dealing with halting bullying must be encouraged, but dealing with bullying should not only involve a special program and/or administrative school regulations and home involvement; it should be part of the curriculum. Bullying is a human rights issue and the elements of bullying and its impact on victims can be used for teaching about human rights. Indeed, the immediacy of bullying to the lives of the children and the school environment make it both relevant and motivating. Since human rights is a social studies topic (Kirman 2002, 104-108) social studies is an appropriate place to teach about bullying as a human rights issue.

Bullying: Current and historic, national and international

On the national and international scene both history and current events provide instances of bullying as a human rights issue for examination in class. National examples include incidents of mistreatment of Canadian aboriginal people such as treaty violations and various residential school abuses. Also included would be civil rights violations of minorities such as the internment of Canadians of Japanese origin during the Second World War and the internment of other Canadian minorities during the First World War, among others.

International examples are the destruction of the Armenians by the Turkish government early in the 20th Century and Nazi racism towards Jews and others, the Ukraine famine, Pol Pot's Cambodia, the racist era of South Africa and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, among other incidents.

Ultimate examples of bullying

These are examples of ultimate bullying in the exercise of power and destruction of human rights. Such situations meet the definition of bullying taken to its extreme. They are worthy of examination depending upon the topic of study and maturity of the students. An advanced study can deal with the use of power in general and what would be considered appropriate and inappropriate uses. This brings to mind Lord Acton's comment that "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Dalberg-Acton, 1887), a worthy item for examination and discussion.

Law based education

“Human rights are not laws. Laws protect human rights” (Koenig 2004). Thus, dealing with bullying as a human rights issue involves law-related education. The ideas noted in this article follow Cassidy’s (1998) view that a law-related curriculum should deal with issues and be conceptually oriented rather than mere memorization of legal details and facts (21). This includes “the relationship of law to fundamental human values” (22) and “that law is not removed from our everyday lives” (30). One might argue that there are other ways to deal with bullying, such as alternate dispute resolution where children might come to a resolution of a dispute without adult intervention (LeBaron & Robinson 1998). It is my opinion that bullying is beyond such strategies since it involves victimizing another through the exercise of physical or verbal abuse to cause harm and may not even be based on rational considerations. Bullying is not a conflict of differences subject to discussion; rather it is an assault requiring prompt intervention.

Educational theory and bullying in the curriculum

If bullying and human rights, which are part of law-related education, are to be included in the social studies curriculum it is important that there be a satisfactory link with educational theory. In this regard any such study must not only be valid and have the appropriate elements of knowledge, review and reinforcement, but must go beyond them into the areas of practice and application. Without practice and application the study is merely hypothetical and without substance. What is expected of a unit dealing with bullying is action to deal with human rights violations. An action based unit requires students to have the requisite knowledge to do the job, and do it properly. This is in keeping with Paulo Friere’s idea of empowering students so that “The world – no longer something to be described with deceptive words – becomes the object of that transforming action by men (sic) which results in their humanization” (1972, p. 74). It is also necessary to involve students personally so that they understand that what they are learning has relevance for them as well as others.

The sample unit on bullying below encompasses these ideas and builds upon a structure of knowledge, practice, and application that moves from a study of bullying to actually dealing with it in the classroom and elsewhere. This provides a viable theoretical foundation that engages the students in a real world situation and which has immediate relevancy to their lives and those of their friends. Their knowledge of the appropriate laws, how these laws can protect them, how to put the laws into action, as well as how to access authority for personal protection are empowering and valuable.

The social studies curriculum

Within social studies curriculum topics such as *my school, rules and laws, friends, family, rights and duties, responsible citizenship, multiculturalism and respect* are appropriate topics for teaching about bullying as a human rights issue and can act as reinforcement for school programs and regulations dealing with bullying. These topics are mentioned because most of them are usually found in North American social studies curricula and those that are not can be added for enrichment or supplementary activities including those jurisdictions lacking a distinct social studies curriculum.

Relevancy to students' lives

Many of the above noted curriculum topics are taught in schools, but there is nothing in the professional literature that relates them to bullying. It is this latter element that makes these topics relevant to the lives of the students. Relating them to bullying and drawing comparisons to incidents of victimization in the school and its locality takes these topics from the past and/or other areas to the familiar and immediate, making this a practical study. And this is the element that can reinforce school anti-bullying actions and, hopefully, encourage students to assist in stopping bullying behaviour. Teaching about bullying as human rights issues not only explores the area of human rights but, as noted, encourages counter-action to bullying and portrays bullies in a very negative light.

Relevance to teachers' lives – legal implications

As noted above dealing with bullying as a human rights issue is part of law-related education. We hope to teach the students about the legal aspects of this topic, among others. But there is another element to this: the law as it affects the teacher. Teachers are subject to at least two legal concerns regarding bullying, as well as ethical professional conduct expectations.

1. **PROVINCIAL SCHOOL ACTS.** The first concern is that of any provincial school act. Such laws usually spell-out the teacher's legal and ethical duty to the students. This can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. For example in Alberta there are 10 items teachers are responsible for, one of which is pertinent to human rights. This is stated as (Alberta School Act 2004):

- (f) maintain, under the direction of the principal, order and discipline among the students while they are in the school or on the school grounds and while they are attending or participating in activities sponsored or approved by the board.

In Quebec teachers are responsible for seven items, three of which are applicable to human rights. They are (Quebec Education Act, 1977):

- 1) contribute to the intellectual and overall personal development of each student entrusted to his care;

- 3) take the appropriate means to foster respect for human rights in his students;
- 4) act in a just and impartial manner in his dealing with his students

Such school acts place an onus of responsibility on teachers to protect their students and maintain a safe environment for them.

2. **TORT LAW.** The second legal concern is that of the teacher in *loco parentis*, that is, in the place of the reasonable parent. Guardians and parents have a right to expect that their children are in a safe and secure learning environment at school. Where this is not the case, as in bullying, the teacher and administration are duty bound to attempt to rectify the situation. Failing to do so places both the teacher and administration in danger of tort action for non-feasance or, where inappropriate action is taken, for misfeasance as well; e.g. the blame is placed by them on the victim, exacerbating the victim's anguish.

3. **TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS' CODES OF ETHICS.** In addition to the above, teachers might be subject to disciplinary action by their provincial teacher association for violating their association's code of ethics where unprofessional conduct regarding the circumstances of bullying can be proven. This can vary between provinces depending upon the content of such codes of ethics and the authority granted to the professional organization by the provincial teaching act and the nature of the alleged unprofessional conduct. An example of what is considered professional conduct that would touch on the human rights of students is found in the Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Professional Conduct (Alberta Teachers' Association 2004):

1. The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background
4. The teacher treats pupils with dignity and respect and is considerate of their circumstances.

Legal and human rights: Important and relevant on a daily basis

All of these legal and ethical implications should be raised with teachers and administrators as part of any anti-bullying program. It provides them with a protective forewarning to be on the alert for incidents of bullying and to deal expediently with them. This is a strong motivating element for teachers and administrators to do their utmost for anti-bullying programs, and emphasizes that legal and human rights are important and relevant on a daily basis in the classroom and in school related activities.

A ten-lesson unit: Teaching students about bullying and human rights

Here is a structured way to teach about bullying and human rights with ten lessons. The selection and depth of discussion in the lessons will obviously vary from younger to older students. With lower elementary children there is no need to go into the details of various laws and conventions. They need only know of the existence of them, unless they are very curious and want more information, and that these laws and conventions are there to protect people's human rights including their own. Younger children should also be spared dealing with graphic examples of violence. The unit should be democratic and inclusive, allowing all the student's voices to be heard and be recognized (Hooks 1994, 185).

Begin with rights

One way to teach about bullying as a human rights violation would be to begin with teaching children that they have rights. This would include defining a "right," examining various types of rights including human rights, and then gradually move to the issue of bullying. With the students' new background on rights they can relate them to a discussion of bullying and human rights.

Unit objectives

The students will:

1. Learn that people, including children, have human rights
2. Learn about examples of human rights violations
3. Study how these human rights are protected
4. Examine the definition and examples of bullying
5. Understand that bullying is a violation of human rights
6. Decide what they can do about human rights violations
7. Review anti-bullying procedures in their school
8. Act, where possible, to prevent local bullying and other human rights violations

Unit Sections

Aims

1. What is a right?
 - a. Define "right"
 - b. Do we need rights?
 - c. What are civil rights? (Those rights guaranteed by law⁶ [Vasan, 1980, p. 73]).
 - d. What are civil liberties? (The right to do what is not prohibited by law [Vasan, 1980, p. 226]).

- e. What are human rights? (Those rights protecting human dignity to which all people are entitled as a matter of justice [Kirman, 2002, p. 104].)
 - f. Can you think of other rights everyone should have?
 - g. How would the world be without rights?
2. What laws and documents protect rights?
 - a. Provincial (Provincial human rights laws and enforcement – For this item and the next one speakers are usually available from the federal and provincial human rights commissions)
 - b. National (Federal human rights laws and enforcement)
 - c. International (UN and Geneva conventions – UN Declaration of Human Rights in particular).
 3. What are my rights – at home, in school, in public?
 - a. How do I know what my rights are? (Discussion of rights such as personal safety, care, education etc. This must be balanced with a discussion of the responsibilities of the child.)
 - b. What do I do to protect my rights – at home, in school, in public?
 - c. Who is supposed to help protect my rights? (Rights of children – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, local and national legislation. Make sure that children know that they have a right to be free of harm and that there are laws and people to protect them, including their teachers.)
 4. Do others have rights?
 - a. What are the rights of other people?
 - b. Should I help others to protect their rights?
 - c. How do I help others to protect their rights: at home, in school, in public? (Intervening, reporting the incident to teachers, parents and guardians)
 - d. What are some groups that help protect the rights of others? (Discussion of such groups as Amnesty International, PEN, and Human Rights Watch)
 - e. How do we deal with people who violate the rights of others? (Rules, laws restraint and punishment.)
 5. Is it fair for only some people to have rights?
 - a. What does equality before the law mean?
 - b. What is the difference between a democracy and a dictatorship?
 6. What examples of bullying have you seen? (Use caution regarding student and family privacy, but be prepared to act on child abuse reports.)
 - a. What was your role in any bullying incident?
 - b. What do we mean by: perpetrator, accomplice, victim, instigator, bystander, rescuer? Who were you?
 - c. What should your role be in bullying?

7. How could the examples of bullying we have examined been prevented?
 - a. What do we do to prevent bullying?
 - b. How does reporting bullying and helping the victim help to prevent bullying?

8. How can we help make our school, neighborhood, and world bully-proof?
 - a. Do you know of any bullying happening now? (Begin with local concerns and move to the national and international scene.)
 - b. What should we do? What can we do?
 - c. Review and reinforcement

An ethic of responsibility

There is a need to go beyond this unit to teach the students that they have a duty to others to behave in a responsible and caring manner. This takes the unit from one dealing with bullying, per se, to that of a life-long personal ethic. However, such an ethic is not a one time teaching item, rather one that should be part of the classroom, and indeed, the school culture. It means that there is an expectation of appropriate behaviour with known standards.

For example, the Golden Rule would be one such ethic. But this may not be satisfactory for those in a secular or non-Christian environment. Nel Noddings' concept of Caring (Noddings 1984) would be yet another ethic, but mainly a secular one. The Ethical Factor (Kirman 1992) is a universal ethic that would be acceptable in both religious and secular environments. It consists of love, kindness, and respect for human dignity. Its principles and classroom procedures are found in the previous citation. But no matter what ethic is used, the key is to elevate the unit on bullying to one that involves principles to live by, for a better world, and encourages the children to live by them.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the suggestions in this article for introducing bullying into the social studies curriculum will not only help to counteract and eliminate bullying, but will encourage students to have a greater appreciation for human rights. However, using bullying to teach about human rights is a double edged sword. There is a need for an effective and enforced anti-bullying program in the school and it is critical that every report of bullying be followed-up by teachers and administrators. Having taught that bullying is wrong and a human rights violation, the teacher and school must follow-through with disciplining bullies and protecting the victims. If not, the teacher and administration will appear to be hypocrites. Lack of follow-through also encourages contempt and distrust for authority, vitiates the lesson on human

rights, vindicates bullying behaviour as apparently being acceptable and may expose teachers and administrators to legal action.

TEACHING RESOURCES

- Amnesty International Canada www.amnesty.ca
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
www.canada.justice.gc.ca/Loireg/charte/const_en.html
- Canadian Human Rights Commission (with hyperlinks to all provincial human rights commissions www.chrc-ccdpc.ca/)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm
- Declaration of the Rights of the Child
www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/25.htm
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – ECLA.org
<http://www.elca.org/schools/bully.html> This site contains links to Internet sites dealing with bullying. Accessed October 22, 2004.
- Human Rights Watch www.hrw.org
- PEN Canada www.pencanada.ca/frameset.htm
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/un/udhr.html

Items in the Sources Cited section below are also of value for background information on bullying, in particular Coloroso, Freedman, Garrity et al., and Pepler et al.

NOTES

1. The URL for the conference is <http://www.gold.ac.uk/euconf/>
2. Ken Rigby at the University of South Wales in Australia has published extensively on bullying. His list of publications is at <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/pubs.html>
3. The three presentations and the presenters are: “Educating for Living Together – A School-Based Program for Tackling Bullying” by Juan L. Benítez, Ana Tomás, Fernando Justicia of the Department of Educational and Developmental Psychology, University of Granada, Granada, Spain; “Bullying Victims: Psychological Profiles” by Kolodnaya T.M., Institute of Innovative Education, Perm, Russia; “Discussions on bullying as method (sic) of tackling violence in school” by Gorelov M.M., State University of Education, Novosibirsk, Russia.

4. Readers interested in pursuing further readings on school bullying are referred to the ISI Web of Science <http://ijo.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/48/5/537> found at the right side of this page under "Similar articles in ISI Web of Science," accessed November 8, 2004.
5. The author of the *Edmonton Journal* article informed me by telephone July, 2003, that the data was taken from an article in the *Dallas Morning News*, May 6, 2002.
6. The definitions of civil rights and civil liberties were simplified from their legal technicalities to make them understandable in a classroom situation. An examination of the full definitions will show that the ones in this article are true to the substance of the definitions cited here. The human rights definition was developed based on various legal definitions of "right" as a noun and an adjective, and "personal rights" (Black 1983, 687-8) since a search of the literature could not find a definitive definition for this term.

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