

Bullying and Poverty: Strategies for Prevention and Intervention

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A major issue in all schools today is bullying and aggressive behavior. It has infested the lives of many students through verbal abuse and technology such as social media and cell phones. It has devastated boys and girls alike, families, and teachers. It has claimed lives of friends, sons, and daughters. Bullying and aggressive behavior has become a serious matter in today's schools. The authors of the textbook state that high dropout rates, drug and alcohol abuse, gangs, and weapon availability have all played a role in school violence (Hoover, Johnson, and Olsen, 2012). Even though bullying is often the precursor to more violent behavior, it still has the power to debilitate.

One method of preventing bullying is to have a strong parent-teacher relationship (Hoover et al. 2012). Often times, home life is the basis for all violent behavior, so if a parent stops violence at home, it is likely it will be less evident at school. I have always been a strong proponent of bullying awareness and prevention. Even though I am not a teacher yet, I have done research on this topic with a focus on cyberbullying and spoken publicly on bullying prevention. I strongly believe that awareness is the first step in eliminating bullying, especially with cyberbullying. Giving students a basic definition, signs, and intervention tips will promote a positive school culture. Something I saw at Simle Middle School was a strategy called "Text-a-tip." Whenever a student saw bullying occurring or heard about an incident, he or she could anonymously text a number connected to school administration. This way, students were able to help their classmates without the fear of being targeted themselves. Because I am at the elementary level, this will not be the most effective strategy for me. In my practicum school, Grimsrud Elementary, the school counselor played a huge part in school behavior and interaction among students. Her effective method was called, "A bug and a wish." When the students felt harassed or targeted by another student, the student was to say to his or her peer, "It bugs me

when (insert negative behavior here). I wish you would (insert positive response.)” This allowed students to take responsibility and build their self-image at a young age. I see this sort of self-confidence influencing positive behavior in the future years of young students. In addition, the earlier a student becomes aware of bullying, the more powerful that student will be in the future fight against bullying. An effective strategy for the teacher that I noticed at Grimsrud was a “fix-it plan.” When the teacher saw negative behavior in the classroom, the perpetrating student was asked to stay in from recess and discuss a behavior fix-it plan. A few details of this plan included distinguishing where the behavior was coming from, such as the need for acceptance, power, or revenge, and what the student was going to do differently. The plan was then sent home for a parent to look over, sign, and return it to the teacher.

Cyberbullying is even harder to prevent with society’s continuous access to social media and the anonymity of fake accounts, texting, tweeting, and posting. A good strategy to prevent cyberbullying is for parents to monitor online activity. Parents working closely with educators to develop behavior expectations have shown success as well (2012).

Overall, even with proper parental supervision and teacher intervention, the best way to combat bullying is to train the front lines—students. Our students need to develop a positive self-image that relies heavily on personal values instead of peer expectations so when adversity hits, it is easily brushed off. With strong parent-teacher relationships, anonymous helplines for the older students, behavior intervention strategies for the primary grades, and simple self-image boosting techniques, I believe bullying can be greatly minimized.

Another apparent issue in America’s schools today is poverty. It is estimated that 230 students in the Bismarck community are homeless. Living in poverty and having a lack of money

affects every area of life (2012). Money buys healthy food. When students lack healthy food, they are often hungry, malnourished, stunted in growth. When students are hungry, they are unable to focus in school. Money buys decent, stable shelter. When students lack permanent shelter, they are constantly being moved from school to school. Lack of money causes stress and depression among parents that could end up in child abuse and neglect (2012). Money also buys transportation to and from school. Money even buys health care services for sick children. When money is lacking, every area of life is lacking.

The first step I would take in my help with homelessness is to make parents aware of the McKinney-Vento Act of 2001. Personally, I did not know there was such a thing before reading about it. There are many resources available through the Department of Health and Education. In addition to helping my students with homelessness, I want to offer help to the parents as well. If I can do this, I believe it will not only establish a good relationship between my student's parents and myself, it will positively affect my student as well. I never want my students to feel inferior because of their home situations. Liberty Elementary School in Omaha, Nebraska is the epitome of school success. Their emphasis on student empowerment and parent involvement has earned them a 99 percent parent involvement rate. The school sits at about a 90 percent poverty rate. The school offers a health clinic for students as well as parents, workshops on staying involved in their child's academic life, a food pantry for families, and a before-and-after school program that allows students to come early to school and stay late until parents are able to pick them up (<http://nelovesps.org/story/liberty-elementary-a-community-solution/>, 2014). If I could take the strategies of this school and form them into my future school, I would be extremely happy. Liberty elementary proves that money means nothing when it comes to a child's potential to learn.

Cultivating a strong relationship with parents and simply showing compassion is great start to helping families rebuild their lives. I strongly believe in educating the whole child which includes much more than just life in school.

## References

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