As this issue of School Climate Matters focuses on bully prevention, I am excited to contribute my experience with The Bully Play, an arts-informed strategy to engage and educate students about the effects of bullying.

First, picture this: A girl sits at her desk in the classroom, reading a textbook while the rest of her classmates stumble in from recess. She doesn’t lift her head when a boy and a girl enter the room and come to stand on either side of her.

“You’re ugly,” says the boy.

“Yeah,” says the girl. “You’re a dog.”

“Go home, doggy.”

“Bad dog.”

“Woof! Woof!”

“Good doggy. You’re sitting, just like a dog is supposed to sit.”

Another classmate enters the room, approaches the desk, gets right in the boy’s face and says, “Leave her alone.”

“You get out my face,” says the boy.

“Yeah, fall back,” says his accomplice.

Voices rise in volume, overlapping each other, and, as more students enter the room, yelling begins, noses are touching noses.

Then a bell rings, once. “Ding.”

The yelling stops and everyone turns towards a small, soft-spoken girl with a notebook and agenda in her hand. She says softly, “Class, I think they need peer mediation.”

She rearranges the chairs in a circle, and initiates the mediation process. It’s a disaster: the victim refuses to speak against the bullies, who refuse to cooperate and even manage to blame the victim. Nevertheless, they’re all thinking about this issue and trying to solve this problem. And by inhabiting other people’s lives, they’re practicing empathy. (Continued on page 2)
All of this action is the result of a process this spring at a middle school in the Bronx during which a small group of students, under my guidance, built a short play through improvisation. This activity was part of the school’s Bullying Awareness Month initiative, and the goal of the play was to inspire kids to think, question and express themselves about bullying.

The group assembled their play from episodes they experienced or witnessed in their own lives. We acted out each other’s stories, then discussed the pattern that arose across all the stories: a victim, at least one bully, a bystander, and, sometimes, an upstander, who would move from witnessing to speaking out or otherwise defending the victim. According to this basic pattern, we arranged characters around a classroom plot, and we had about 7 minutes worth of drama.

Next, we traveled to each class in the school, presenting the play right there among the seated students. Each time, when the performance was over, we asked the audience to watch the play again, and when they had a suggestion, a possible answer to the conflict, they would raise their hands and I would ring a little call bell to bring the action to a halt. A student would make a suggestion, and the actors would try it out, as described above, sometimes including the audience member in the scene. After each revision, the actors and I would facilitate a discussion of the success of the idea. It was during these discussions that the deepest feelings and struggles were revealed.

One boy told his class he was the victim of bullying, and he claimed that upstanders don’t exist. This led to a heated discussion in which he was able to articulate exactly what happens to him. Ultimately, the boy was visibly more confident for having had this forum. Other students came to their teacher and me after the event and told us that they, too, were being bullied. I could see that our storytelling, and the listening that followed, could be the start of new self-assurance for these children.

Teachers joined in the revised scenes, too, when called by their students. After the cheers subsided, an extensive conversation on the role of authority figures always followed. The consensus seemed to be that while such figures bring a temporary peace, they are nearly useless in solving the real, abiding problem (for more on this, read Bullying: It’s All About Control, on Pg. 7).

Thinking, questioning and noticing bullying are all necessary components of any lasting resolution. Such components, when they become habits, support a school-wide understanding and consensus about bullying among students and adults.

Most poignant of all of this exercise was the repeated scene of student actors listening and speaking directly to their classmates about issues that govern their lives, and not to pass a test or to get a better grade, but because it mattered to them very much. They were experts, and they had been given safe space and time to talk about a very real and influential aspect of school life.

Stephen Haff is an experienced teacher, journalist and theater director. He’s best known for founding the world-renowned Real People Theater with young people in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY.
Building Upstander Behavior in Your School: Developing a Peer Helping Network

Bill Eyman, Educational Consultant

Bullying can be subtle. After working directly with kids for over 45 years, I've learned that a lot of student crises play out in the unseen gray areas of bullying, such as exclusion, isolation and marginalization. Like more apparent instances of bullying—physical violence, very isolation and marginalization. Like more apparent instances of bullying—physical violence, very public verbal harassment—these subtle instances of bullying can be greatly reduced through school-wide bully prevention efforts and ongoing promotion of upstander behavior. However, in the subtler cases, my preferred method is a "softer" implementation, where we focus less on bullying and more on inexplicit exercises that promote empathy and compassion, all with an aim to empower students to become upstanders on their own.

This is grounded in the fact that teens often resist the direct approach, especially when we’re dealing with disparities in popularity or teasing that’s status-driven. When educators create the conditions for cooperation without naming bully behavior, they are wise in doing so: the result is often elimination of bullying and the organic development of upstander behavior.

One way of achieving this result is through the development of a Peer Helping Network where we link up kids from different groups to work together toward a shared goal. Here are two case studies exemplifying how this builds upstander behavior in ways that are student-driven and sustaining.

**CASE STUDY 1: The Boys’ and Girls’ Club: Promoting Social Support**

As you may know, the Boys’ and Girls’ Club is a national organization providing sports clubs and programs for youth in locations around the country. Rose, a Social Emotional Learning Consultant, recently worked with a local branch to reduce bullying and empower kids to be upstanders.

When she first joined the branch, she noticed the younger kids playing the new games paired with an older kid. At the end of the day, kids reigned. “cool,” and when the staff wasn’t around, the cool kids reigned.

For example, in sports class, the two best players always chose the teams. As a result, the “cool kids” were always selected to play, while the same unselected kids—collectively known as “the bench”—retreated to the bench to play Four Square or goof off. When the basketball coach, Coach Dave, first approached the “the bench” and asked why the unselected kids weren’t playing, they said they didn’t want to play. The cool boys went unchallenged, “the bench” got to mess around and Coach didn’t have to intervene. Problem solved, right?

Wrong. For Rose, this was a familiar situation—a subtle example of bullying, where Damian, Leo and other star players used their strength, skill and status to exclude “the bench.” The fact that “the bench” didn’t complain didn’t change the definition of bullying—much bullying is subtle, non-violent and in fact supported by the compliance of the targets.

To reduce bullying and “solve the problem,” Rose created a Peer Helping Network, where star players and “the bench” would work together toward a shared goal. Their shared goal would be to help younger kids learn and play new games. Rose’s goal was to empower the star players and “the bench” to help others, instilling within them a fresh sense of empathy and compassion that would carry over into the basketball court.

To that end, Rose amassed five “cool kids” and five “bench kids,” and distributed a handout of ten high-energy games that she proposed they teach to the younger kids. She told the kids, “you’re professionals now – learn the games and teach them to the younger kids. From now on, the younger kids come first.”

Rose introduced a group of ten seven-year olds who were easy-to-manage, sure to succeed and eager to participate. Each seven-year old was paired with an older kid. At the end of the day, she saw the younger kids playing the new games and having fun under the mentorship of the new coaches. The new coaches did an expert job, and during a debriefing session with them, Rose and the coach affirmed their work, chocking up their success to their social support and empathy.

Later that day, Rose noted the results of the exercise. During basketball, the new coaches were all seen on the basketball court together—spontaneously, without any prompting from her or the coach, the “cool kids” were coaching “the bench.”

Rather than appropriate the work away from the kids, Rose let the kids own this change. In subtle instances of bullying, we often drive kids away with attention and praise. In this case, Rose did her job behind the scenes, setting the stage for empathy and social support.

In this case study, the purpose of creating a Peer Helping Network was to empower kids to make a real change. Is bullying solved forever on the basketball courts? It’s not likely, but Rose and the coaches have established a ritual that may become a habit—a ritual making an immediate, visible impact. Indirectly, they’ve also provided a group of younger kids with positive role models to exemplify when it’s their turn to hit the courts.

**CASE STUDY 2:**

**Developing a Peer Helping Network for High School Students**

For the second Case Study, visit CSEE’s blog at http://blogs.csee.net.

**Bill Eyman** is a member of CSEE’s consultant staff. He’s spent over 45 years in public education and children’s mental health as a classroom teacher, alternative school director, co-founder of community-based program and educational consultant and trainer.

**share your experience**

What bully prevention activities do you have in place? 

Email newsletter@csee.net so we can share your work with other schools dedicated to improving school safety in our next newsletter.
What is Cyberbullying?

Adolescents have been bullying each other for generations. The latest generation, however, has been able to utilize technology to expand their reach and the extent of their harm. This phenomenon is called cyberbullying, defined as: “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.” Recent research has found that cyberbullying leads to negative emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration, embarrassment, or fear, which have been linked to delinquency and interpersonal violence among youth. It has also been tied to low self-esteem and suicidal ideation, school difficulties, assautitive conduct, substance use, carrying a weapon to school, and traditional bullying offending and victimization.

Schools & Legal Issues

When youth use technology to harass others, it can occur in two primary ways. First, cyberbullying can take place on campus through the use of school-owned technology (such lab computers or school-issued laptops and the wired or wireless network on campus) or through personal devices used on school grounds (cell phones, personal digital assistants, etc.). In these situations, administrators have full authority to address the misbehavior if it violates school policy or otherwise detracts from the purpose, intent, and goals of the school.

Second, cyberbullying can happen away from school using home computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices and a non-school Internet connection. With the latter situation, administrators are often reluctant to get involved. While this is muddy legal water and courts typically support free expression rights of students, some cases have upheld the actions of school administrators in disciplining students for off-campus actions. In these cases, schools must show that the misbehavior substantially or materially disrupted learning, interfered with the educational mission or school discipline, utilize school-owned technology to harass, or threatened other students or infringed on their rights. In general, school officials can place educationally-based restrictions on student speech “necessary to maintain an appropriate school climate.”

School Strategies for Responding to Cyberbullying

Hopefully you have laid the necessary groundwork for an effective response by educating your community about the relevant issues. (For example, students should know that cyberbullying is inappropriate and that all bullying behaviors are potentially subject to discipline.) Then, it is critical to be thorough in your investigation of the incident so that you can direct resources and, if necessary, discipline to those who require it. You may want to enlist the support of a school liaison officer to help investigate allegations of cyberbullying—especially those that involve a possible threat to the safety of your students or staff. Once you identify the offending party, develop a response that is commensurate with the harm done and the disruption that occurred. We encourage school administrators to work with parents to convey to the student that cyberbullying behaviors are taken seriously and will not be tolerated. Moreover, we recommend that schools come up with creative response strategies, particularly for relatively minor forms of cyberbullying that do not result in significant harm. For example, students may be required to create anti-cyberbully-
ing posters to be displayed throughout the school. Older students might be required to give a brief presentation to younger students about the importance of responsibly using technology. The point here, again, is to condemn the behavior while sending a message to the rest of the school community that bullying in any form is wrong.

**SCHOOL STRATEGIES for PREVENTING CYBERBULLYING**

Use this set of guidelines to prevent cyberbullying in your school:

1. **Formally assess the extent and scope of bullying within your school district.**
   
   Once you have a baseline measure of what is going on in your school, specific strategies can be implemented to educate students and staff about online safety and Internet use in creative and powerful ways.

2. **Specify clear rules regarding the use of the Internet, computers, and other electronic devices.**
   
   This can be done through specially-created curriculums, or through more general information sessions such as assemblies and in-class discussions. In addition, Acceptable Use Policies tend to be commonplace in school districts, but these must be enhanced to cover online harassment. (Some districts are also creating comprehensive formal contracts specific to cyberbullying, or introducing clauses within the formal “honor code” to reduce cyberbullying among peers. Posting reminders or signs in school computer labs, hallways, and classrooms to pique consciences may also be beneficial.)

3. **Implement blocking/filtering software on your computer network.**
   
   Most (if not all) school districts have implemented blocking/filtering software on their computer network to prevent access to certain Web sites. While implementing blocking/filtering software has its merits, a tech-savvy student can often find ways around these programs, making the next step even more important.

4. **Educate students about cyberbullying and its causes.**
   
   We believe that education and awareness efforts more proactively address the fundamental causes of cyberbullying and other inappropriate online behaviors than simply blocking websites and banning activities. For example, the utility of peer mentoring—where older students informally teach lessons and share learning experiences with younger students—has been demonstrated to elicit success when dealing with traditional bullying. We believe it is also of use when attempting to reduce cyberbullying among students.

5. **Finally, it is essential to cultivate a positive school climate.**
   
   Research has shown a link between a perceived “negative” environment on campus and an increased prevalence of cyberbullying offending and victimization among students. In general, it is crucial to establish and maintain a school climate of respect and integrity where violations result in informal or formal sanction. We will discuss this in further detail in a future article.

**FAST FACTS about Cyberbullying:**

- Approximately 15-35% of students have been victims of cyberbullying
- About 10-20% of students admit to cyberbullying others
- Girls are just as likely, if not more likely, to be involved in cyberbullying as boys
- Involvement in cyberbullying seems to peak in the middle school years (grades 6-8)
- Most victims of cyberbullying know, or at least think they know, who the cyberbully is (from Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying)

For more about identifying, preventing, and responding to cyberbullying, please visit the Cyberbullying Research Center at www.cyberbullying.us, directed by Dr. Sameer Hinduja (Florida Atlantic University) and Dr. Justin W. Patchin (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire).
More Bullying Resources

We have more articles, activities and resources for you! Please visit the blog http://blogs.csee.net to pick up more information and share in the dialogue about reducing violence and bullying in your school.

On the Web

Cyberbullying: http://cyberbullying.us/
Research, stories, cases, fact sheets, tips and strategies, current news headlines on cyberbullying, plus downloadable materials for educators and parents to use and distribute.

Bullying UK: www.bullying.co.uk/
Largest anti-bullying resource on the Web with prolific educator, parent and student resources

Stop Bullying Now: http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/
Government-backed website with learning modules and tips for kids

Bully Police: http://www.bullypolice.org/grade.html
Learn how your state’s bully law (or lack thereof) is graded and pick up best practices from other states and schools that make the grade

National Mental Health Information Center: http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp
Resource-rich portals for students, educators, caregivers, mental health professionals, and community organization members

Teaching Tolerance: http://www.tolerance.org/index.jsp
Free curricular kits and educational materials

Bullying PowerPoint Presentations: http://facs.ppsst.com/bullying.html
Free presentations to tweak and use in the classroom

Programs

Breaking the Bully-Victim-Bystander Cycle: Strategies to Reduce Bullying and Support Caring, Connected and Responsible School Communities
CSEE’s program is designed to support schools in developing comprehensive bully prevention programs. Visit www.schoolclimate.org/programs for more information.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: www.clemson.edu/olweus/
A comprehensive program designed to reduce and prevent bullying. Visit for more information.

National Crime Prevention Programs: http://www.ncpc.org/programs
Provides school-based campaigns for improving safety and reducing crime

Steps to Respect: http://www.cfcchildren.org/issues
Bully prevention program designed by Committee for Children

Hotlines

Hopeline: www.hopeline.com
24-hour national suicide hotline that is private and confidential

The Trevor Project: www.thetrevorproject.org/
24-hour crisis and suicide prevention helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth

Boystown: www.boystown.org
24-hour crisis hotline for prevention, depression and school issues

Books


Feature Grant Opportunity

LOWE’S TOOLBOX FOR EDUCATION

Lowe’s is donating up to $5,000 to individual schools focused on school climate improvement. Apply for the grant by 10/16/09, and use this funding for both baseline assessment with the CSCI and targeted bully prevention efforts: http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/
Bullying Behavior: It’s All About Control

Dr. Clete Bulach and Dr. Allan Beane

A culture has been created in most schools where control issues are a major factor. Boards control superintendents, who control central office, who control principals, who control teachers, who control students. It’s all about control—and one of the greatest fears of any educator, whether teacher, administrator, or board member, is to lose control.

For some students, bullying is a way to rebel against this power structure in school (and, more often than not, power struggles at home). Most school bullying is largely unseen by teachers and administrators. It occurs in the areas of lowest adult supervision—bathrooms, playgrounds, locker rooms and school buses—where we can’t always be. A staggering statistic is that 57% of students who witness acts of bullying do nothing to help other students who are being bullied.

In a way this is understandable. Most schools do not encourage students to intervene. (Bullying can often become dangerous and threatening; understandably we want to keep our kids safe.) However, students are more often than not the only ones present during instances of bullying. We may be able to fill bathrooms and buses with adult supervision sometimes, but there will always be the times when we can’t be there. And during those times, there is the student expectation that they shouldn’t do anything—this is in the realm of teacher control. I venture that, in some form or another, we must rely on students to intervene. If we want to reduce bullying, we must empower our students.

The secret to doing this is to give control without giving up control.

**TAKING ACTION:**
Empowering Students to Control

We wanted to test what would happen when teachers empowered their students to be more socially responsible and to control their own behavior. How would students respond to this? Would this have a positive effect on student behavior and bullying?

To run this experiment, we gathered a group of teachers together and asked them to record the amount of times they had to control or redirect student behavior. One teacher said she had to redirect students 150 times a day. Other teachers only had to do this 30-50 times a day, but a great deal of time and effort was involved. Each redirect was time away from teaching and learning only to be spent on bullying break-ups and classroom distractions.

57% of students who witness acts of bullying do nothing to help other students who are being bullied

After counting redirects for five weeks, teachers came up with an average number for each class. Each teacher introduced that average to the students, and asked them to help reduce the redirects. A benchmark of redirects was set; if that benchmark was met all students would get a reward (such as free time, extra recess, no homework, a dropped grade).

The culture changed. Students were now empowered to control their own behavior—and to control their classmates’ behavior. If there was classroom bullying, students were now free to confront the class and redirect attention back to the whole whereas, in the past, there was the unspoken belief that that control belonged to the teacher.

Over time, teachers reported that the students loved the new culture and went about negotiating classroom behavior with gusto. Each teacher achieved at least a 50% reduction in redirects, and in commenting about the experiment the teacher wrote the following: “They were strongly motivated not to let each other down; I could not believe the improvement in their behavior.”

More often than not, empowering students to be socially responsible in the classroom reduces classroom bullying. The real question is whether this inside-classroom empowerment transcends into outside-classroom empowerment, and whether it can help to reduce bullying at the school level if rolled out school-wide. In order to test this, I (Bulach) am working with a school district that plans to implement this process throughout all of their schools’ classrooms during this upcoming school year. (Stay tuned for more updates on CSEE’s blog, http://blogs.csee.net.)

The fight for control will always be a daily battle for our students. However if we engender students with the ability to stand up for the good of the whole and take social responsibility, we can make the power structure work for students in a way that reduces bullying and improves our kids’ learning.

Dr. Clete Bulach is the CEO of The Professional Development and Assessment Center (PDAC), and an author and educator about bully prevention and school climate.

Dr. Allan Beane is a former classroom teacher, is an internationally recognized expert, speaker, and author on bullying, as well as a nationally renowned consultant and educator.
CSEE is an organization that helps schools integrate crucial social and emotional learning with academic instruction to enhance student performance, prevent drop outs, reduce violence, and develop healthy and positively engaged adults.

For more than a decade, CSEE has worked together with the entire academic community—teacher, staff, school-based mental health professional, students, and parents—to improve total school climate.

We continue to help translate research into practice by establishing meaningful and relevant guidelines, programs and services that support a model for whole school improvement with a focus on school climate.

CSEE’s vision is that all children will develop the essential social, emotional, and intellectual skills to become healthy and productive citizens.

CSEE’s mission is to measure and improve the climate for learning in schools to help children realize their fullest potential as individuals and as engaged members of society.

CSEE achieves this through:
- Advocacy and policy
- Measurement and research
- Educational services