

Students learn about bullying as they act in film

By KEVIN ABOUREZK / Lincoln Journal Star
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Three girls and a boy walk through a classroom at Irving Middle School.

As they pass another girl getting up from her desk, one of them deliberately bumps her arm, forcing her to drop her books.

The offending girl walks over the books as they fall to the ground.

Wait.

That didn't look quite right.

"No, no, no. Start again," says Christopher Faull, an Australian film producer working with the eighth-grade performers Tuesday.

He turns to face the young actress playing the bullying girl.

"You have to do it with intent. Look at it when you're doing it."

For the past six weeks, Faull has been working with 27 Irving students on a film that will be used to teach others about the causes and effects of bullying.

The students helped write the film's plot, which centers around a girl new to a school who gets bullied by another girl because of a boy.

On Tuesday, Faull and the Irving students rehearsed the film, which they'll begin shooting today through early next week at the school.

The 20-minute film will be used as part of an educational project called "Stories of Us," which Faull is creating with the help of bullying researchers at U.S. universities. The film and accompanying educational resources, including study guides and lesson plans, will be used to educate others about bullying.

Among the researchers who have been helping Faull is Susan Swearer, an associate professor of school psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

At a conference two years ago in Melbourne, Australia, she encouraged Faull to visit the United States to produce an American version of a bullying film he made in his home country.

"It will raise awareness and hopefully come up with some solutions about what kids and teachers and parents can do about bullying behaviors," she said of the video, which is set to be released March 28.

She said the film also will teach the Irving student performers about film production.

Louis Root, 13, who plays a student who is bullied, said the project has taught him a lot about timing and the need to make situations appear realistic.

It also has taught him what it's like to be the target of bullying.

"It's not good to be the victim, but it's good to help out," he said.

As Faull and the students wrapped up rehearsal on a scene Tuesday, Faull complimented them on their hard work and prepared them for filming today.

"The difference between what we did just then and what we're going to do tomorrow is, unfortunately, it's going to be more laborious tomorrow."

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