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Local school, U. of I. professor, part of anti-bully film debuting March 28

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CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — It started with an Australian filmmaker, Chris Faull, who had produced short films with Australian children, telling about their experience with bullying. Then came a connection with U.S. researchers on the topic, one of them Dorothy Espelage at the University of Illinois.

With encouragement from those researchers, and support from their respective schools, Faull decided to move to the U.S. and shoot a series of similar films with American children. The first film was developed and shot at Franklin Middle School in Champaign, the second at a school in Lincoln, Neb.

The result of this international collaboration, on a very personal topic, will get its public debut at 7 p.m. on March 28 at the Virginia Theatre in Champaign. The event is free and open to the public.



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Photo by Craig Chamberlain

Australian filmmaker Chris Faull brought his crew to the U.S. to shoot a series of films with American children, after connecting with Illinois professor Dorothy Espelage, an expert on bullying.

Titled "[Stories of Us.](#)" the film-based prevention program is valuable because it is authentic, says Espelage, a professor of [educational psychology](#), who served as a consultant on the project.

"Typically, what happens in most (anti-bully) programs is that there's little input from kids," she said, and it shows. "They're just not real-world for what the kids are dealing with." Many also can tend toward lecturing students, which is ineffective, she said.

Faull's work with the Franklin students, and specifically 28 eighth-graders in a class taught by Shameem Rakha, began early last fall. He spent several weeks talking to the students about their experience with bullying and working with them to develop a script. The same students also filled the acting roles and assisted in other ways on the filming.

"The filming part of it's almost easy once you get to it," Faull said. The essential part is the weeks leading up to it, and developing trust with the students through that process, he said.

"They have to know that you are listening to what they are saying and not doing what adults often do, which is reinterpreting it from their own perspective. Not judging them. Not trying to be one of them either. And being sensitive to their needs and their perspective."

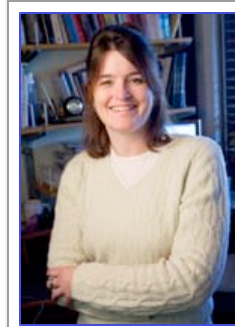
What comes from that perspective, Espelage said, is mostly stories that don't include teachers. "For the most part, it shows that all this bullying stuff is done when adults aren't around," she said.

It also shows that bullying is not just physical, but social, she said, and includes the use of cell phones and the Internet.

Faull, who also is working on a teacher's guide to accompany the films, said he hopes the project will play a part in changing the environment that encourages bullying.

"I just think that it's not acceptable behavior," he said. "Yes, in life people are going to treat each other badly, and one has to learn how to deal with those things. But it doesn't mean that you have to become, sort of, damaged in the process."

The "Stories of Us" Web site includes clips from the two films, as well as student pages in which those involved describe their experiences with bullying and with the project. Faull also is developing resources to support those who want to make their own films.



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Photo by L. Brian Stauffer

Dorothy Espelage, a professor of educational psychology, served as a consultant on "Stories of Us," the film-based prevention program developed and shot in Champaign and Lincoln, Neb.

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