
Film Effort Hopes to Put Headlock on Bullies

Educators Hope New Film Will Curb Bullying Activity in Schools and Cyberspace

By LIZ MARLANTES and TOM GIUSTO

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Like most students, the 8th-graders at Franklin Middle School can tell you a lot about bullying.

"Between 2nd and 5th grade, there was a kid who would hit me, and he would throw things at me," says one boy. "I kind of felt like I was weaker than him. And I was scared a lot."

"They'd talk about me all the time. They'd whisper little things, and think I can't hear them," says another girl. "I'd get really mad and I'd cry all the time."

When asked how many of them have experienced bullying at some point, every student in the class raises their hand.

But these kids aren't just talking about bullying. They're making a movie about it.

The project is the brainchild of filmmaker Chris Faull. Real kids tell their stories and turn it into a narrative. Called "Stories of Us," Faull made several versions of this film at schools in Australia before coming to the United States.

The finished film will be sent out to other schools, along with workbooks for teachers.

It's a creative approach to tackling an age-old problem **one** that educators say is getting harder to address.

"Every school has problems with bullying," says Franklin's principal, Angela Smith. "Adults can't put their hands around it. They can't grasp what it looks like **it** looks so different, and it mutates so often."

Tools like cellphones and BlackBerries have opened up a whole new realm of bullying in cyberspace **which** means, for some kids, home is no longer a refuge.

"A conflict that may have started in the school can escalate overnight through a computer," says Dorothy Espelage, an educational psychology professor and researcher on bullying at the University of Illinois.

In the wake of school shootings like Columbine, at least 33 states have passed laws requiring schools to take steps to combat bullying.

But Espelage says there's little evidence these programs are working. Many of the workshops were devised by adults who, she says, don't really understand how bullying happens.

"We have not actively engaged kids in the process," Espelage says.

Faull says his approach is different.

"Firstly, it's not having an adult standing in front of the room telling them things," he says.
"Secondly, the kids are the ones that know what's going on."

One of the students most enthused about the project is 8th grader Carolyn Muller who was stung a few years ago when classmates began spreading false rumors about her.

"It did make me cry a couple times, and I would get, like, really moody," she says.

She learned to cope through humor and just generally keeping her chin up.

"I've kind of developed a thick skin," she says.

She hopes the film will not only give students like her a chance to share their stories, but will make other kids think twice about the impact of what they say.

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