Eliminating Identity-Based Bullying in Schools: A Community Involved Approach

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Bullying as a Relationship Problem

¬ Traditionally, definitions of bullying have focused on three elements: (1) aggression with the intent to harm, (2) repeated occurrences and (3) the presence of a power differential

¬ More recent thinking has characterized **bullying as a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions**, rather than an individual deficit in controlling or responding to aggressive behaviour

¬ children who bully are learning how to use power and aggression to control and distress another using individual attributes (greater strength or age), higher social status or through systemic power differentials (gender, race, class, sexual orientation or other differences)

From PREVNet factsheet 'Bullying: Definitions." Retrieved from: http://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/fact-sheet/PREVNet-SAMHSA-Factsheet-Bullying-Definitions.pdf

Types of Bullying and Examples

¬ **Physical bullying:** hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property

¬ **Verbal bullying**: name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, humiliating or threatening someone, racist comments, or sexual harassment

¬ **Social bullying:** rolling your eyes or turning away from someone, excluding others from the group, gossiping or spreading rumors, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging friendships

¬ **Electronic or Cyberbullying:** use of email, cell phones, text messages, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships

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Identity-Based Bullying and Schools

¬ When bullying targets aspects of a person's identity, it is referred to as **identity-based bullying.**

¬ Identity-based bullying may be based on bias about appearance, race, culture, gender and gender expression, language, religion, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, sexual orientation or other attribute of an individual or group of individuals

¬ Often, identity-based bullying serves to denigrate members of a whole community, not just an individual, and strives to maintain existing stereotypes, prejudices and power structures

¬ Majority of bullying that occurs in schools has been found to be identity-based bullying, yet bullying prevention programs tend to take a generic approach to bullying prevention

¬ Schools are a big part of the problem, and often serve to reinforce existing gender norms, ability bias, and other power structures and tend to adopt **value neutral policies** concerning aspects of identity such as sexual orientation, gender identity and race

A Social Justice Perspective on Eliminating Identity-Based Bullying

¬ Traditional approaches to multicultural education in schools have focused on curriculum reform and have focused on content that merely attempts to present a broader range of people

¬ The traditional approach has not challenged the stereotypes and prejudices that students, teachers and administrators may hold toward people with different identities

¬ Neither do traditional approaches consider how these social norms may lead to privileging certain groups and to the marginalization of other groups (Brinkman, 2016)

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Goals for an Anti-Oppressive School Curriculum (adapted from Banks, 2006)

¬ (1) Recognize and respect all forms of diversity

¬ (2) Promote societal cohesiveness based on the shared and equal participation of members

¬ (3) Maximize equality of opportunity for all individuals and groups

¬ (4) Facilitate constructive societal change that enhances human dignity and fosters citizenship

Identity Based Bullying Scenario # 1

¬ **Scenario #1: Lukas is a third grader and he has two Moms. Everyone knows he has two Moms and it seems like he's the only one in school with a family like his. On Mother's Day, Lukas asked if he could make two cards and was told no and everyone laughed at him. Lukas often gets called bad names and kids tell him his family isn't "normal." He is afraid to go to school and sometimes pretends he is sick to avoid it.**

¬ 1. How is the student being bullied?

¬ 2. What part of their identity is being targeted?

¬ 3. How do you think the person being targeted feels?

¬ 4. What actions can be taken by the target, bystanders, teacher or school?

¬ Scenario is taken from Anti-Defamation League (2014), The current events classroom: Identity-based bullying., Retrieved from: http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/identity-based-bullying.pdf

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Identity Based Bullying Scenario # 2

¬ **Scenario #2: Hala is a fourth grader who is Muslim. She wears a hijab (head covering) to school as does her younger sister and cousin who also go to the school. When she was younger, kids asked Hala questions about her hijab, the food she ate and her religion. But lately, they try to pull off the hijab at recess, telling her she shouldn't wear it, calling her a terrorist and making fun of the food she eats. She has started to throw her lunch out rather than deal with the bullying.**

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¬ 3. How do you think the person being targeted feels?

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¬ Scenario is taken from Anti-Defamation League (2014), The current events classroom: Identity-based bullying., Retrieved from: http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/identity-based-bullying.pdf

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Summary

¬ Need to rethink our approach to bullying prevention and school curriculum to include social justice perspectives and anti-oppressive practices

¬ Recognize how oppressive societal structures are replicated in our schools and change them

¬ Engage our own communities in a process of self-examination and reflection that identifies our own biases, stereotypes, and prejudices and work to eliminate them

Resources For This Presentation

- Books:
- **Banks, J.A. (2006). Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching (5th edition). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.**
- **Brinkman, B.J. (2016). Detection and prevention of identity-based bullying: Social justice perspectives. New York: Routledge.**

- Websites:
- **Anti-Defamation League**. http://www.adl.org/about-adl/
- **Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN).**
- http://www.glsen.org/
- **Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet).** http://www.prevnet.ca/about
- **Rethinking Schools.** http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml
- **Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity.** http://nationalseedproject.org/about-us