

Time to Call Off the Anti-Bully Witch-Hunt

By Robert Catlin, teacher and trainer of Bullies2Buddies

The wisest words spoken at the recent hearings on the Governor Patrick's bullying prevention act came from a high school student named from Munson named Mindy Blankenship. She was quoted in the Gazette as saying "I think there needs to be more of a focus on the victim." I sincerely hope that our legislators will recognize Mindy for her wisdom and expertise.

On April 20, we will mark the 12th anniversary of the Columbine massacre, the event that gave rise to the most massive witch-hunt in human history, the anti-bully movement. In our zeal to prevent further Columbine-type events, our society has decided to target "bullies," in the naïve belief that such a campaign will prevent these horrible acts. Most states have adopted school anti-bullying laws, mandating the reporting of very minor incidents of social exclusion, insults, and scuffling. Administrators and teachers are becoming overwhelmed with their job of adjudicating and reporting. Adults have become the Bully Police! Yet bullying appears to be skyrocketing, despite our interventions and prohibitions. Could it be possible that the anti-bully philosophy, and increased legislation and enforcement have actually led to an increase in bullying? In fact, around the world, research has been showing that most anti-bullying programs have no benefit or make the problem even worse. We are teaching our children the wrong social skills, and turning them into what Izzy Kalman, the creator of the Bullies2Buddies program calls "emotional marshmallows".

Promoting Hatred and Revenge

Why does school violence continue, despite ten years of anti-bullying education? Well, what can

we expect, when adult “experts” have been teaching kids in school how terrible bullies are...that bullies shouldn’t be tolerated...that bullying is a terrible crime...that bullying causes kids to kill themselves and others? Are kids who hear this message supposed to think, “Bullies are no big deal; I won’t let them bother me”? Of course not! They are being encouraged to fear and hate their perceived bullies. When schools promise kids that they will protect them from bullies and inevitably fail to fulfill that promise, should we be surprised when victims of bullying decide they have no choice but to take violent action, either against others or against themselves?

The Anti-Bully Movement is a Witch-Hunt

Bullying is a fact of life, and will never be eliminated. It occurs among adults as well as children. Kids naturally do it more as they develop their social identity. Real-life bullies, like accused witches in the past, look just like anyone else. In fact, the evil bullies are not other people; they are us. So trained experts come into our children’s schools, instructing kids how to recognize their classmates who are bullies, to realize how terrible they are, not to be like them, to have no tolerance or respect for them, and to turn them in to the authorities to be exorcised. We are becoming pretty successful at ruining the lives of those who get accused of being bullies.

Last year, after Phoebe Prince’s suicide, fake websites were set up to post anonymous comments about the four girls accused of bullying her. These sites mock, threaten and insult the four girls, heaping abuse at the alleged abusers. The cycle of violence is continuing because we have been teaching fear and hatred, not tolerance and respect. And when we demonize others, we become the demons ourselves.

After the Columbine massacre, our experts determined that because school shootings were

being committed by victims of bullying, the cause of the school shooting epidemic is bullies. If we would only eradicate bullies, they concluded, our schools would become happy, victim-free places with no one wanting to shoot up anyone else.

However, school shootings and suicides are not committed by bullies, but by people who feel like victims. Bullying is an inevitable part of life and we all need to learn to deal with it and, unfortunately, most people never do. That's why most of us have others—usually family members—who are bullying us, and all of our efforts to make them stop fail. In fact, the things we do to make people stop bullying us actually makes them continue! *“No!” “shut up!” “I’m going to tell on you...”, pushing or hitting, etc.*

Today, though, it is politically incorrect to suggest that victims have anything to do with the way they are treated. So, rather than dealing with the real problem, which is not knowing what to do when people bully us, we are blaming bullies and trying to punish them out of existence. Society is trying to solve the wrong problem with the wrong solution, so the bullying problem escalates, violence continues, and the witch-hunt gains momentum and becomes mandated by the law.

-This is based upon the work of

Izzy Kalman, Director and founder of Bullies to Buddies Program.

The Official Promotion of Fear

But the fear of bullies is good business not only for the media. It brings money to everyone involved. Politicians get the votes of their constituents by fighting for anti-bullying laws. With bullying becoming a crime, police forces have more work to do, which means they get more funding from us, the taxpayers. Lawyers on both sides of anti-bully lawsuits make money. And the mental health professions get financial support, too. With the government often looking to cut expenditures by doing away with non-essential services, school mental health professionals are constantly at risk of having their positions eliminated. The public fear of bullies give school mental health professionals a new lease on life, since they are usually the ones given the responsibility for implementing anti-bullying programs.

What about the findings that these [anti-bullying programs usually don't help or lead to an intensification of bullying in the schools](#)? No one cares. The same researchers who find the programs don't work recommend the programs anyway. You can't blame them for wanting to preserve their source of income, can you?

How many years will it take society realizes that hunting bullies only makes the bullying problems worse?

When a school takes on the responsibility of making kids stop bullying each other – which literally requires getting them to behave like saints – not only is the school doomed to fail, the bullying situation worsens. Why? It's quite simple. If you and I are kids in school and you upset me, then I inform the school that you bullied me, are you going to like me? Of course not. You will hate me and want to beat me up after school, or you will try to get me in trouble for bullying you in some way. So the next incident - and probably a worse incident - is created. With the teacher and principal playing investigators and judges between us, my parents and I want them on *my* side. You and your parents want them on *your* side. So the hostilities become more frequent and intense. The more bullying that goes on between students, the less the students can learn. And the more time a school spends on eradicating bullying, the less it spends on teaching academics.

To make the situation worse, anti-bullying laws turn schools into easy prey for lawsuits.

Individual schools have had to pay as much as [four-and-a-half million dollars](#) to parents for

failing to stop their child from being bullied.

Recent research has been showing that the “self-esteem” movement has been a failure, and that anti-bullying programs usually have no benefit or make the problem worse. Nevertheless, schools continue to make self-esteem and bullying high-priority concerns, and we continue to wonder why it’s so hard for schools to improve their academic standing. Our government in its wisdom has passed the “No Child Left Behind Law,” as though a law is going to improve school functioning. Certainly there are some school districts that have found creative ways to improve their students’ learning, but their greatest creativity has been in fudging the data to make it *appear* that their schools are improving.

Replacing Wisdom with Science

Aristotle explained that science is the best tool for *making things* – for *technology*. And he explained that the best tool for figuring out the best way to conduct our lives is not science, but *philosophy*, which means *love of wisdom*. You can be conducting the most intensive experiments, but if the basic assumptions of the researchers is foolish, the results are going to be foolish. Despite all the research being conducted on bullying throughout the world, the researchers are getting no closer to solving the problem because they all believe that it is the school’s responsibility to protect victims from bullies.

All wisdom from all over the world – as well as traditional psychology - is about getting people to take responsibility for their own lives, handling the difficulties of life, and solving their own social problems. The basic assumptions of the anti-bully movement are irrational, yet intelligent social scientists continue to promote them while wondering why bullying continues to escalate in our schools. It is because they have replaced wisdom with science - and not very good science, at that.

In any country with tens of millions of students, it is inevitable that several students a year will take their own lives because they couldn't handle the misery of being bullied. I recently read that residents of the Far East, because of their cultural values of honor and personal responsibility, are six times more likely to commit suicide than Westerners. Yes, it is horribly tragic when it happens, but it is inevitable nonetheless. No country is immune. It is a shame, though, that the Japanese have to undermine esteem for their own culture because they have adopted the foolish Western belief that ***children are legally entitled to go to school without experiencing bullying.***

“Experts on bullying (in Japan)say the fact that [bullying] appears to be increasing and growing more violent suggests that the next generation is absorbing the message that it is acceptable to mistreat those who express different views, or even look slightly different.”-VOA News, March 26, 2007

Didn't the author of this article read his own words – that Japan has been intensively sending the message that bullying is *not* acceptable? How did students receive the message that bullying is acceptable when they have been taught otherwise throughout their school history? Doesn't the author see the contradiction? No, he doesn't. Because when it comes to bullying, logic flies out the window.