

QUDWA 2017

Teacher Talk in collaboration with OECD

“Tackling in-Person and Online Bullying in Tomorrow's Schools”

Sunday, October 8th, 2017, 3-3.40pm

- **Christian Williams**, STEM Leader, St. Michael's Primary School, Australia
- **Najd Benwahhood**, Head of Faculty, Al Khaznah School, UAE
- **Dr. Michele Borba**, Educational Psychologist, Michele Borba Inc, US

Moderated/Facilitated by **Alfonso Echazarra**, Analyst, Policy Advice and Implementation, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD

On average, about one in five students in OECD countries is the victim of an act of bullying at least a few times a month. How can teachers foster a school culture that helps curb bullying?

Schools can adopt a zero-tolerance approach of any bullying behavior, but the truth is, children will bully one another. Some 68% of session attendees said they witness verbal bullying and intimidation on a weekly or daily basis in their schools. Accepting this truth, getting out in front of it and educating all involved before incidents goes a long way to being prepared for when they happen.

First, the tone must be set and modeled by teachers. Anything that involves showing a lack of respect for another human is “terrible” and shouldn't be tolerated, argued Williams, whether it's a child sticking out their tongue at another or making a hate page on Instagram.

“We need to say ‘these are the expectations: we are showing respect and tolerance for one another and anything that goes beyond that is unacceptable’,” said Williams. “In my eyes, every incident is just as serious because little things turn into big things if you don't deal with them right away.”

It's also essential that schools adopt a definition of bullying that everyone can understand, argued Dr. Borba, who suggested: “Bullying is a pattern of repeated aggressive behaviors with negative intent, directed from one child to another with a power imbalance.”

The different types of bullying include verbal, then emotional, physical - a favorite of younger children. There is sexual bullying, harassment and cyber bullying. The worst years are 10-12 and most of it happens when teachers aren't around.

“Each one of us has seen a case of bullying at school,” said Benwahhood. “It doesn’t matter what background you come from. Any part of the world has to deal with this problem. I have seen hundreds of cases of students, hundreds of cases bullying or being bullied.”

It is important to educate children about what to do when a case of bullying is happening, because in 50% of case studies, when a bystander steps in or creates a diversion, the incident is over within a minute, said Dr. Borba. It’s also essential that the bully not be “branded” as such, because that can lead to further problems - even a greater tendency to criminal behavior - when they grow up.

“I think the important distinction we make is, if you say one mean thing you are not a bully,” said Williams. “You made a poor choice and you don’t want to be labelled a bully. You made a poor choice, don’t do it again, don’t rush to say because someone bullied they are a bully.”

Basically teachers need to have the topic of the safety of their students front and center at all times.

“Every single day, every conversation you have, you need to know who you are talking to, to make sure they are safe physically and emotionally,” said Williams. “It’s safety first, it’s all those different domains of the human person. Because when we focus on that we can create a safe space for everybody.”

After a teacher in the audience shared her experience teaching teenage Syrian refugees in Lebanon - and how she doesn’t know how to handle it when they fight and show aggression - Dr. Borba mentioned a successful program in Oakland, California, where many kids have suffered trauma not as a result of war, but of gang violence. Basically counsellors at the beginning of class lead the students in five minutes of mindfulness, breathing, meditation or “just vegging out”. Suspensions dropped and test scores rose since the program was implemented, said Dr. Borba. “What we’re failing to do is teaching kids another way,” said Dr. Borba. “They learned to cope by being like this and it actually requires their whole brain system. They learned to cope, and they can use this the rest of their life and it doesn’t cost a dime.”

Main Takeaway: The most effective way to reduce bullying is to teach children who witness it to how to stop it.