

Reviewed by Thomas J. Doyle
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“The story of Tyler Clementi brings tears to the eyes. The Rutgers University freshman jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge after a video of him having sex with a man was posted on the internet, probably by a classmate. Not only did a promising young life end—it’s 2010, and event college students still exhibit anti-gay bias...In 2007, there were about 42 million Americans aged 15-24. The self-inflicted death rate for this group was about one in 10,300. That comes to roughly 4,000 suicides a year by those of teens-to-college age – a horrible figure. That suicide is a leading cause of death for young people is itself, horrible (Easterbrook,
Bullying is a cancerous and deadly epidemic sweeping the country.”

Phyllis Kaufman Goodstein, a Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW), and former elementary and middle school counselor, provides a useful and interactive blueprint for preventing, lessening and ending bullying. The text employs social architecture theory to create a foundation based upon the facts about bullying, while simultaneously providing practical classroom and school application of the theory.

In the Preface, bullying is defined as a relationship issue that can be effectively dealt with using social architecture theory and the social scaffolding theory. Social architecture is defined as “the opportunity to structure children’s peer groups to promote positive peer experiences and to minimize or deconstruct negative peer experiences” (p. 63). Social scaffolding is the “supports required to provide children with the skills capacities, and social cognitions to move out of the bullying and victimization roles” (p. 63). These two theories are further expanded upon in Part Two of this book.

Part One addresses the five W’s of bullying—who, what, when, where and why—and lays the social foundation for an understanding of the impact of bullying. Part Two shares practical ideas on how social architecture can be used to prevent, lessen, and end bullying. Peppered throughout both Parts One and Two are tangible activities that can be carried out in the classroom, school, family and the community. These activities are easy to implement. Also, extensive bibliographic information gives the reader websites, books, and organizations that have resources available to the teacher, administrator, student, parent, or community leader who is passionate about eliminating bullying in the classroom and the school.

The text highlights alarming statistics that illuminate the toll bullying takes on the classroom, the school, and society. Ms. Kaufman Goodstein likens bullying to a cancer where effective “educators can be the
chemotherapy that removes the malignant, life squeezing growth from their schools” (p. 5).

The author provides examples and non-examples of bullying. Bullying is placed into four categories: physical, verbal, relational and cyber-bullying. Bullying equals power and the only way to deal with the power is to develop relationships between the bully and the one being bullied.

Many useful facts about bullying are provided. These facts include, but are not limited to the location and the social underpinnings of bullying. These social reasons can be found in the social hierarchy of the school and the dominance theory. “Hierarchies then develop because some children have more influence while others have less” (p. 19). Ms. Kaufman Goodstein uses Uri Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological theory to demonstrate the many social layers that impact the bullying experience. Dangerous myths about bullying are moreover, listed to provide the reader with an understanding of behaviors and attitudes that promote antisocial behavior.

The consequences of bullying include PTSD, lowered self-esteem, and suicide. “Bulicide” is the term used throughout the book to refer to students who have committed suicide because of bullying. Young people choose bulicide when they believe that their life is hopeless and they have no way of escaping the bullying they are experiencing. The author provides a list of 27 young people who ended their lives in 2010 because they could no longer deal with the pain of bullying. The consequences of bullying on society include poor school attendance and a heightened drop out rate. Ms. Kaufman Goodstein then demonstrates the interrelationship between the consequences of bullying on what she refers to as the “bullying web of harm” (p. 38). This web of harm is used to describe the physical, social, self worth, anxiety, and psychological impact of bullying on the victim/recipient. The signs of bullying are identified for teachers so they can be proactive in dealing with bullying.

Part 2 focuses on using Social Architecture theory to prevent, lessen, and end bullying in the school and
classroom. In the first Chapter of Part 2 the author provides practical application of social architecture theory and social scaffolding as the blue print for social change.

The teacher is a role model for his/her students in developing relationships that will demonstrate respect and an anti-bullying presence in the classroom. A strong classroom management system will promote pro-social classroom behaviors. Practical suggestions for developing effective classroom management strategies are provided at great length. Of great importance is the establishment of rules that are stated positively so that they can be reinforced positively. A bullying incident report included in a table provides the teacher with a tool for annotating and monitoring bullying episodes as they occur within the classroom. Finally, helpful hints for developing seating and grouping assignments that will foster growth in developing positive peer relationships are shared.

Bystanders are those individuals who observe, ignore and thereby passively support bullying. “Upstanders” are those who stand up for the student who is being bullied. A good portion of the book provides helpful tips on how to create upstanders out of bystanders. Upstanders challenge the power of the bully, while bystanders reinforce bullying behavior.

“Friendships are essential to children’s healthy growth and development” (p. 142). The author lists the building blocks of friendship as examples for promoting healthy friendships in the classroom. Friendship busters are examples of behaviors that will damage the chances for developing positive friendships. Activities are provided for the teacher to help students develop positive friendships. The author sees building friendships as an important part of the social architecture theory in action and the basis for curbing bullying. Peer support programs are an extension of friendships. Peer support programs provide social scaffolding for young people who are experiencing the perils of bullying. These peer support programs include clubs, small groups, class meetings and circle time. All of these strategies are practical suggestions to give the reader methods for successfully carrying out programs of support.
Empathy is essential in promoting pro-social behaviors. Empathy is defined as the “ability to place oneself into another person’s shoes and feel what he or she is feeling” (p. 166). Activities and learning experiences are provided to demonstrate how empathy can be integrated into the everyday life experiences in the classroom.

The author states that teachers should battle bullying with incompatibility. This theory states, “bullying declines when teachers use incompatibility to alter their classes’ social landscapes” (p. 176). Some of the methods used to promote inclusion and to battle bullying include kindness campaigns both within the classroom and in the school, bullying related art projects, setting high expectations for students, volunteerism and service learning.

Intervention is essential in combating bullying. Teachers and administrators must act when bullying occurs. Inaction by the teacher is in reality condoning the aggressive behavior. In this spirit, the text/author explores tangible methods for intervening appropriately to stem the tide of bullying in the classroom and school. Collaborative support for anti-bullying from teachers and parents is essential. Kaufman Goodstein, provides suggestions for gaining the support of parents. Parents are given the tools to determine whether their child is being bullied or bullying and what they can do to develop pro-social skills in their children.

The final chapter completes the blueprint for a program of anti-bullying in the classroom and in the school. The author concludes with a discussion of the “Broken Window” theory of social scientists James Q. Wilson and criminologist George Kelling. “If a broken window is not fixed more windows will be damaged, the theory contends because an object left in disrepair sends a signal that no one cares and no one is watching. Fix it and vandalism and other crimes will stop” (p. 214). The teacher’s job in living out the social architecture for stopping and curbing bullying is to fix the “broken windows” by modeling pro-social behavior, supervising students, adding anti-bullying information into the curriculum, supporting friendship building, and fostering cooperation with the school and parents while
enlisting community involvement. This book is a prized handbook that every P-12 teacher should own. Many research-based strategies are provided that will help teachers stem the tide of bullying in the classroom and in the school.

References


About the Reviewer

Dr. Thomas Doyle is a Professor of Education in the Teacher Education Department at National University, where he teaches early childhood ethics, multiple and single subject methods and supervises student teachers and interns. He has taught grades 1-9, served as Principal of a P-8 school and as a counselor for high school youth. His research agenda is in the area of gender equity and gender non-conforming behavior. He is also active in the LGBTQ community in working toward social justice.