Article Critique: Bullying

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Article Critique 1, Bullying


In their article, *Bullying and Discrimination in Schools: Exploring Variations Across Student Subgroups*, authors Susan Swearer and Shelley Hymel assert that although the phenomena of bullying and discrimination have been studied extensively, we, the educators, are failing to defeat these societal ills. Swearer and Hymel state “…why bullying and discrimination happen is no longer a mystery. However, translating research knowledge to real solutions is proving to be more mysterious than researchers could have predicted.”¹ I found it disappointing that after starting their article in this manner, the authors shied away from any meaningful attempt to address the issue they just identified, and instead chose to simply document some of the complexities that continue to contribute to the disturbing practices of bullying and/or discrimination. Although logically presented and persuasively argued, this article simply added to the body of research (that the authors already found to be sufficient) and fell short of providing actionable solutions (which the authors found to be lacking).

Swearer and Hymel cite numerous research studies, and the article does support their early, framing claim that “Results of these studies underscore how peers matter, individual differences matter (race, sexual orientation, and disability), educational context matters, and measurement matters.”² The article then goes on to discuss each
of these four main bullying/discrimination dynamics (peer interactions, individual identity/perceived differences, educational placement, and methods/limitations of measurement) contribute to these two vexing behavioral problems.

I found the authors’ argument to be well-presented and compelling. It was equally and readily apparent that the subject of their article, bullying and discrimination, is unfortunately every bit as relevant to today’s classroom as these disruptive behaviors have ever been. Bullying and discrimination have plagued our educational systems for a long time, and they continue to do so today.

Most regrettably for me personally, was that the authors come dangerously close to refuting their own thesis when, in the article’s final paragraph, they state “Not surprisingly, reviews and meta-analyses regarding the impact of antibullying efforts over the past few years have shown some reductions in overall rates of bullying…” I have difficulty reconciling this assertion that there have been demonstrable reductions in bullying rates, with the authors’ earlier lament about how mysterious “translating research knowledge to real solutions” was proving to be. The article’s final statement, while perhaps trite, is certainly inarguable: “It is only when we fully understand the complex nature of bullying and discrimination, and work collectively and compassionately to create a culture of acceptance of all individuals and groups, that such interpersonal violence might cease to exist.”