



Coloroso says bullying and conflict are being confused

By Jon Thompson

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Bullying is not the same as conflict and a new focus is needed to understand the difference, educators heard on Tuesday.

International best-selling author and speaker Barbara Coloroso spoke to educators on her approach to bullying, addressing what she sees as mistaken conflict resolution methods that are common in schools. Her newest book, *The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander* condemns bystanders as complicit in bullying and offers the tools to transform standing by into active intervention.

"What is discipline as opposed to punishment, which is what the country is dealing with in terms of juvenile justice right now. I propose a form of restorative justice but not in terms of conflict resolution. We assume conflict and bullying can be handled the same or we confuse the two."

Her argument rests on the contempt the bully has for his or her target. Forced apologies are meaningless, she said, because the bully lacks respect for the target. No mediation can correct bullying without not only the emotional commitment of both parties but their willingness to change.

When authorities have not witnessed bullying, Coloroso has no problem "wiring them up," fitting students with iphone listening devices to record bullying to play for parents and bullies.

"They're caught in the act. If an abused spouse couldn't tape it without his permission, he's calling you every name under the sun. The courts recognize when it's an assault, you don't need permission. If they don't allow it in court, we at least know it's happening."

The restitution needed is demanding the bully change behaviour, addressing the target by his or her given name and it's incumbent upon the bully to move seats, chase down rumours to correct them, and adopt online behaviour that will change the relationship of the target in the community.

Further, Coloroso's list of seven steps includes monitoring media consumed by bullies, taking explicit aim at video games. She told the story of a young man who told his mother, 'don't worry mom. We're only killing aliens,' not recognizing his mother had not given up the citizenship of her birth country and was in effect, an alien in the country.

"It's not because (video games) cause mean but because they help a kid swim in a culture of mean. There are positives but the probable negatives bother me greatly. It creates neural pathways that connect violence with pleasure and rewards rather than sadness."

The greatest hurdle to correcting behaviour is the self-identification both bullies and targets take on. Changing the way fellow students perceive bullies and the bullied takes active intervention and persistent behaviour changes to foster trust in a school community. She pointed to Henry Winkler, famous for his role as Arthur "The Fonz" Fonzarelli on the program Happy Days. Despite having written 16 children's books and an accomplished career as a Shakespearean actor, audiences still saw The Fonz.

"The problem is with the bully, not you," she said to the targets. "Just as the bully becomes a character actor, so can anyone."