

## **U. S. History: Bullying and the Cold War**

**by Antonio Lupo**

The Cold War / Bullying U.S. History unit was started about five years ago when ASA and NEIU began their collaboration on infusing real life issues into the classroom. The Curriculum Infusion of Real Life Issues (CIRLI) had its genesis at NEIU and was put into practice at ASA. The idea is to link life issues that students experience on a daily basis to topics that are normally covered in class content areas. In this case, the Social Studies department decided to link the issue of bullying to the Cold War. The thought was, instead of just teaching the Cold War as a series of historical events, why not allow students to make connections between the bullying they experience daily to Cold War history. We hoped and have come to believe that the more students relate their own experience to a class subject the more likely they are to learn the material. In this way, the events of history are no longer something that happened a long time ago but rather become relevant topics that students can apply to the world around them.

Our unit focused on teaching history but also engaged students in defining and acknowledging the bullying in their lives. Many students initially believed that bullying does not happen anymore like it used to. But when they were asked to journal about bullying and consider the events that they witness or partake in everyday they realize that bullying is a continuing, real problem. In fact, they slowly realize that the actions taken by governments during the Cold War are not very different than those in their own environment.

Another goal is to help students realize that bullying does not just occur and affect two people. Many people are involved as bystanders with many negative effects. Students are taught behavior prevention strategies that can assist them in making better choices when it comes to risky behavior. Their broader understanding of bullying contributes to the quality of student work on their class research project. Students are required to pick a political leader of the Cold War era and research the leader's impact. Students analyze the role of the leader and decide if she/he was a bully, victim, peacemaker or bystander. Student response to this unit has been mixed, but the majority of students have stated that they are better able to understand the Cold War when it is related to their life experience.

Overall this unit has allowed the Social Studies department to build academic as well as social and emotional skills which our students need.