Columbine High School Shooting Essay, Research Paper

On April 20, 1999, two high school students by the names of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold carefully and maliciously planned a massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. They killed fifteen people, one being a teacher, and left twenty-three in need of hospitalization before finally turning their guns on themselves. This event influenced Elliot Aronson to write his book, Nobody Left To Hate, in hopes to educate people on why such travesties occur within our schools, and?most importantly?what we as a society can do to prevent not only these acts of violence themselves, but to seek out the root of the problem by addressing what has led students of today to feel so neglected and misunderstood that they believe the only solution is to retaliate violently against their peers. Aronson applies a combination of his scientific research and his personal experience as both a teacher and a parent to contribute to the ?national dialogue on this issue?.

Time magazine recently reported that an average of twenty percent of teenagers attending high schools are taking medication to treat either depression or another psychiatric disorder. Latest government findings show that one out of five adolescents have seriously considered suicide, with one out of ten having actually attempted it. This statistic reveals a 400 percent increase since 1950. A main focal point in Nobody Left To Hate is to stress the fact our schools can and must play a crucial role in the prevention of student depression by creating an environment that both deters violence and helps to develop students? characters as well as their intellects. Schools need to become a more inclusive and caring community for all students.

Aronson points out two kinds of intervention: root cause intervention and peripheral intervention. An example of peripheral intervention is installing metal detectors or implementing stringent gun control. Such intervention is certainly useful, and has no reason to not be utilized. Unfortunately, such ?cures? are, more often than not, based on emotion, wishful thinking, and political expediency than on solid evidence. Immediately after the Columbine killings, Congress voted to tack on an amendment that gives states the right to permit displaying the Ten Commandments in public schools, and many teachers began to require their students to refer to them as ?sir? and ?ma?am?. But these are not solutions! This is called a scattershot strategy, trying several possible interventions at once, in hopes that one or more will do some good (page 14). Yet no matter how obediently such rules are followed, they cannot possibly cure the true problem, which lies deep within the adolescents of today.

Youngsters need to be taught as early as possible specific ways to gain control over their impulses and actions and how to get along with others in preparation to solve interpersonal conflicts once they arise. Classrooms need to be structured to promote cooperation and not competition, and evidence shows that classrooms that practice such methods actually enhance the students? academic performance. To create a classroom atmosphere where there are no losers is the premise to Aronson?s book.

Aronson relies on his rule of thumb, called Aronson?s First Law: People who do crazy things are not necessarily crazy. We as social animals have a tendency to assume that negative or nasty behavior distributed by another is caused by the person they are, rather than the kind of situation they are in. People fall into the trap of condemning others on so-called ?personal qualities?, and not on situational constraints.

Eric Harris was seeing a psychologist regularly and being treated for depression. Interestingly enough, he did not consider Eric to be prone to overt violence and was shocked to hear about the school shootings. As for both Eric and Dylan, they came from families described as ?stable, comfortable, and middle-class with both parents in the home?. The Harrises and Klebolds were ?model citizens, from all appearances?, and good parents. No one expected this type of overt violence from either boy. FBI statistics conclude most students who shoot their classmates are not maladjusted loners, but do rather well academically and have not been identified as problem students by faculty or school officials.

As a society, we have a responsibility to educate students in compassion, tolerance, and empathy. Once students are taught to appreciate differences, they will come to view them as ?sources of joy and excitement, rather than as automatic triggers for aggression and rejection? (page 72). Aronson stresses that armed guards and metal detectors will indeed reduce the number of mass shootings within our schools, but will not reduce the magnitude of emotional and social problems found at the root of the shootings. Metal detectors will not make our schools a happier place for students who feel rejected and excluded on a daily basis. The shooting themselves are not the problem, they only serve to alert us to the underlying problem, and often times how a topic is learned is more important than the content of what is learned.