Students from the Education and Social Work departments observed author and speaker SuEllen Fried as she spoke with students at Randolph Elementary School Thursday. Ms. Fried is the founder of Bully Safe USA, a bullying prevention program started in 2002 (www.bullysafeusa.com). Ms. Fried has co-authored three books on the subject, and a book of activities designed to teach empathy and compassion.

Ms. Fried spoke to 5th-grade students about what bullying is, and how a person who bullies should not be labeled a "bully," but a person who has made choices that hurt others. She used the word "witnesses" instead of "bystanders" to point out that those who see bullying happening should not just stand by, but tell the truth. She also encouraged the use of the term, "targets" instead of "victims."

The session ended with an opportunity for students to apologize to others they had hurt. Some apologized to peers; some apologized to teachers. Some took the opportunity to ask their classmates for help, and to explain to peers what they struggle with. After the sessions at the elementary school, Washburn students took the opportunity to ask questions and further process with Ms. Fried what they had observed, and what they will take from their experience.

After seeing SuEllen's interaction with the elementary students, it was clear she used questions and conversation with them to build their trust. It seemed like an interesting conversation on the surface, but SuEllen let Washburn students know that it was very deliberate and planned. The sequence of her questions was crucial to building rapport and trust with the children so they felt safe enough to do something as risky as telling everyone they had done something to hurt someone, and to apologize to that person.

Washburn Social Work and Education students came away from the experience with new tools and a new perspective on the topic of bullying thanks to Ms. Fried.

-- Elizabeth “Betsi” Jackson, MSW Student