Awareness Before Action: Addressing Cyberbullying via Educating the Educators

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Abstract

Awareness Before Action: Addressing Cyberbullying Via Educating the Educators

Lissa Albert

The need to educate students on the topic of cyberbullying, its signs, definitions, prevention and reactive strategies, is a key need in our growing technological society. Current research shows that cyberbullying remains more esoteric than its manifestations; without definition and knowledge of its basics, it cannot be prevented by victim or bully, parent or teacher. Yet, more often than not, the attempts to stop cyberbullying begin with actions such as removing or restricting the technology. The bullying continues despite those actions. Therefore, this study will endeavor to show that in order to curtail or prevent cyberbullying, it must begin with awareness, in attempting to answer the question, "why raise awareness to prevent cyberbullying?" However, before students receive any education, it is the educational institutions, the people directly responsible for these students during the weekday hours, which need the awareness. Through the use of an awareness program, given to educators, in the form of an interactive self-directed program, this study will show that informing those in charge of our youth is the first step needed to help with an understanding of cyberbullying, its definitions and manifestations, the roleplayers, and impact of bullying upon others.

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Introduction

Cyberbullying is a fast-growing problem in society, and especially among our student population. Various studies report an alarming number of bullying incidents among young people, utilizing technology of one sort or another. In September and October alone, the topic became internationally covered in news media due to a wave of teen and pre-teen suicides which were caused by the children's being incessantly bullied. It is my belief that education and awareness programs are the first step to preventing the problem. Banning the technology would be ineffective. "Schools already address sex, drugs, and alcohol safety – all activities that occur off-campus but can cause harm to young people – cyberbullying should be added to this list. Schools are key to providing the community leadership necessary to bring educators, parents, students, and other community members together to address these concerns." (Willard, 2006, p. 12) In fact, bullying itself is addressed, but cyberbullying must be included now as well. Mishna et al. (2009) state that "[a]lthough cyber bullying constitutes an alternate method of bullying, cyber bullying must be examined not only in the context of traditional bullying. Rather, to understand cyber bullying the context of the cyber world must be taken into account." (p. 1225)

What is Cyberbullying?

The topic of cyberbullying is an important one to address. It manifests in myriad ways, from harassment to stalking. No longer is bullying a strictly-school-hours occurrence; as long as the victim has a cell phone or computer, the bullying continues

24/7. No longer is bullying a private matter – it has permeated the internet, cell phones and other media where mass communication is facilitated, giving bullies access to their victims' private spaces as well as opening the bullying incidents to a potentially worldwide audience. Because cyberspace offers an "infinite audience" (Shariff, 2008, p. 33), it can escalate traditional (face-to-face) bullying as well as create a new conflict. That vast audience increases the power imbalance between bullies and their victims by invoking bystanders who can "support perpetrators instead of victims." (Shariff 2008, p. 33) There are documented cases of suicide (Megan Meier, 2006, Ryan Halligan, 2003) directly linked to incidents of cyberbullying. In 2003, Ryan Patrick Halligan took his own life at age 13 due to depression as a result of being cyberbullied (http://ryanpatrickhalligan.org/, 2009). On the website devoted to his son, and to educate others about cyberbullying, Ryan's father states:

> *It's one thing to be bullied and humiliated in front of a few kids. It's one thing to feel rejection and have your heart crushed by a girl. But it has to be a totally different experience than a generation ago when these hurts and humiliation are now witnessed by a far larger, online adolescent audience.* (ibid.)

In 2006, after an online flirtation turned horribly cruel, Megan Meier – also 13 years old – hanged herself in her closet. An investigation revealed that the boy to whom she had been speaking via MySpace, the social networking tool, had told her "the world would be a better place without you" (http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/story/, 2007). On the heels of struggling with depression, this relationship had begun to raise Megan's self-esteem. When it resulted in a sudden and unexplained turn of attitude, Megan's parents discovered that the boy in question had never existed, but had been fabricated by a neighboring adult, Lori Drew,

who "had pretended to be 16-year-old "Josh" to gain the trust of Meier, who had been fighting with Drew's daughter, according to police records and Meier's parents." (The Seattle Times, 2007) While the case garnered international attention, Lori Drew was prosecuted on a minor terms-of-use misdemeanor, and acquitted. And while the case has been linked to cyberbullying in virtually every news story about it, no other action has been, or can be, taken, given as how cyberbullying is not – yet – a law written into widespread legislation.

Sexting is a new form of cyberbullying, defined as "the sending or receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive images or video via a cell phone." (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010, p. 1). Teens are now using their cell phone cameras to take nude or topless photos of themselves and sending them to romantic interests; when those photos fall into the hands of others – i.e. when they are distributed without permission – it is then seen as a form of cyberbullying. A very high-profile case in Ohio resulted in the suicide of Jesse Logan, 18 years old, whose ex-boyfriend distributed nude photographs of her, via cell phone, to a large portion of the school population. She was the victim of name calling and verbal cruelty; that, and her humiliation drove her to suicide. (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010, p. 1). Hope Witsell, 13 years old, sent a topless photograph of herself to a romantic interest, who also redistributed it to many other cell phone users in their school. She was called "slut" and "whore", relentlessly, also driving her to take her own life (ibid).

There are many consequences of all forms, ranging from abject humiliation and low self-esteem to severe depression. The victims might become bullies and the cycle repeated. Many people – young students, as well as adults in all walks of life – are currently experiencing bullying in one form or another taking place in cyberspace, and

one problem that exists with this subject is that there is very little awareness – on the parts of both adults and students - on the topic.

The many cases cited in literature on the subject (Shariff, 2008, Willard, 2007(1), Willard, 2007(2), Kowalski et al. 2008, to name a few) are reason enough to prompt a call to action. As with any unknown, the first step must be awareness.

But what *is* cyberbullying?

Part of the problem is that the perception of cyberbullying is so varied and unclear. When asked to define the term, "most students seemed to equate it with 'bullying via the Internet' or they mentioned Internet practices they regarded as examples of cyberbullying" (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2008, p. 500). Vandebosch and Van Cleemput found that definitions of cyberbullying did not render its characteristics, rather an esoteric list of examples and partial descriptions of its manifestations. Therefore, it is important to first set a definitive characterization of cyberbullying and educate based on that. They suggest that "true" cyberbullying includes the criteria of: "intend[ing] to hurt (by the perpetrator) and perceived as hurtful (by the victim); be part of a repetitive pattern of negative offline or online actions; and be performed in a relationship characterized by a power imbalance…" (p. 499) These criteria are supported by other researchers (Belsey, 2000, http://cyberbullying.ca/; Hinduja and Patchin 2009, Olweus, 2003). However even other researchers, well known in the field, do not include all the above criteria in their own definitions (Willard, 2007) and another prominent researcher in the field, Dr. Shaheen Shariff, includes 4 pages of definitions culled from various sources (2008, pp

28-32). Researchers must agree on a definition in order to illustrate the concept with any authority and basis.

It is this very uncertainty of the definition of cyberbullying where awareness must begin. Previous attempts to stop cyberbullying (filters, removing or confiscating technology) have been ineffective. In Melbourne, Australia, filters were installed, by the Federal Government, to stop pornography from being accessed. A 16-year-old boy hacked through the filter in a matter of 30 minutes, and broke through a second installed filter in a 40-minute time period. The boy, Tom Wood, stated, "filters aren't the bigger issues anyway…Cyberbullying, educating children on how to protect themselves and their privacy are the first problem I'd fix." (Higgenbottom and Packham, 2007 as cited in Shariff, 2008, p. 87).

"Why raise awareness to prevent cyberbullying?"

Cyberbullying is not understood mainly because of its new entry in our lexicon as well as in society. There is little known about it, the statistics of its existence and depth, its myriad manifestations or how to identify it. Li (2007) states, "…before we can tackle this problem, a better understanding of the issue is necessary." (p. 1778) She cites Bill Belsey (2004) in stating that "many effective techniques to combat cyberbullying and bullying are the same. These techniques include teaching students to report incidents and building awareness of the problem" (p. 1787). Campbell (2005) states "[o]ne of the first steps in any prevention program is to ensure that people are aware of the problem." (p. 4) She cites the myths commonly associated with bullying in general (as a "right (sic) of passage…normal part of growing up, or that it is just teasing and playful." (p. 4). These

5

myths must not only be dispelled, they speak for the need to raise awareness of the realities of bullying and cyberbullying.

Because of the many ways in which cyberbullying can occur, awareness and understanding are vital to helping students avoid these incidents. Without the knowledge of what constitutes cyberbullying – rather than a list of its symptoms – it is impossible to teach prevention. While there are many different ways in which cyberbullying can manifest, there is an agreed-upon set of characteristics which, when presented in a coherent and teachable fashion, can become part of a student's schema. Once that is achieved, the student can begin to recognize cyberbullying as, or before, it happens, creating a stronger possibility that the incident can be avoided, or dealt with in an efficient, effective manner.

Awareness also consists of making adults aware of the concept itself, but before that, parents and educators must become aware of how students are using technology. Shariff (2008) compares the adult mindset toward technology with that of the adolescent. She states that adults tend to use technology as a means to an end, while adolescents "use computers, blackberries and cellphones to communicate, even when their peers or siblings are in the same or neighboring rooms" (p. 124). Because of this "digital disconnect" (Shariff, 2008 p. 124), adults cannot fully comprehend exactly what their children are engaged with online, and therefore cyberbullying is a concept utterly foreign to them. Shariff states that "[t]he world has opened up to children and young people in vastly different ways from what it did for their parents and teachers" (p. 125) and as such, adults must be schooled in the ways of social networking on both computers and handheld devices. Any awareness program must be designed to reach adults, in order to

present this new world to them in terms that will relate the risks as well. In fact, as it is adults who teach the students on a daily basis, and are the first step to imparting any sort of organized curriculum material, it is vital that the educational community be the first to receive programs which raise awareness of cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) not only recommend that "…[e]ducation should occur through training workshops and seminars, as well as formalized continuing education initiatives for all members of the school community…" (p. 125), they recommend a prevention program for "Internet safety modules [to be] devised and implemented in Grades K-12" (p. 125). With those modules increasingly becoming more of a reality, it is vital that the educational community be aware of cyberbullying in all its forms, tools used, definitions and all related issues, in order to be appropriately aware and prepared for questions that will, undoubtedly, arise in their classrooms and offices.

The program outlined in this proposal is aimed at those adults. Teachers, primarily, however principals, guidance counselors, support staff should all partake of its information. Indeed, anyone with access to students should be made fully aware of cyberbullying and its elements. It is essential for our children to learn about cyberbullying, but before that happens, the people in charge of them throughout the school year should be educated. Should a child be offered any extra-curricular sessions teaching cyberbullying, and have any questions – either of an informative or, more likely, a personal nature – s/he must be in the presence of adults who can offer appropriate answers and strategies to these questions. Between educators, parents, bystanders, students and lawmakers, Hinduja and Patchin (2009) write, "…we feel it is the educator who serves to link all these stakeholders together in a comprehensive response strategy."

(p. 160). That is why an awareness program designed for educators should be first on the list.

Given the topic and how little-known its specifics, given the general lack of education or training given to teachers at any level regarding this topic, my question to research was:

What is the perception of educational personnel as regards the benefits of a cyberbullying awareness program?

How does this study contribute to the literature?

There have been studies on cyberbullying which have emerged in recent years. Yet, it is still a fairly young field. In 2007, Li called cyberbullying "new territory" for exploration in research (p. 1778) but just 4 years later, we are encountering more studies on the topic as well as research into the implications of unchecked cyberbullying behavior (Cloud, 2010; Franks, 2010; Maag, 2007; Stelter, 2008;). Li (2008), Yilmaz (2010) and Bhat (2008), all studied the perceptions of teachers and pre-service teachers vis-à-vis cyberbullying and its definition, manifestations and occurrences. Their findings conclude that teachers must be prepared with knowledge about cyberbullying to be better equipped for when students are involved in such incidents. They also portray teachers as agreeing that cyberbullying is a problem and should be dealt with by all stakeholders – students, parents and the school. Li's study (2008) found that pre-service teachers identify cyberbullying as a concern and agree that it impacts children, yet do not feel it is a problem in schools. Li points out that this is paradoxical to the other studies which show that teachers do believe cyberbullying to be a serious educational problem

8

(Bamford, 2005; Campbell, 2005 as cited in Li, 2008, p. 10). This shows that there is a severe gap in the awareness of educators where cyberbullying is concerned.

Another important finding in Li's study is that "a vast majority of our pre-service teachers do not feel confident in handling cyberbullying, even though the level of concern is high" (p. 10). This proves, Li states, that "it is important for teachers to develop knowledge and skills about cyberbullying, which in turn, will increase their confidence." (p. 10)

Li's study found that "less than 4% of the participating pre-service teachers…received training to manage cyberbullying." (p. 10). As Bill Belsey corroborates, "many educators have never taken a professional research-based course about bullying, either during their studies at university, or during their teaching careers in the classroom. This would be like having nurses and doctors who cannot help people with the flu, yet this is exactly what is happening in education." (Personal email, October 2010).

This study contributes to existing research by elaborating on the conclusions of the aforementioned studies, showing that teachers perceive cyberbullying awareness education as not only important but significant in curriculum as well as professional development. In fact, the findings of this study extend the conclusions of other research by examining the perceptions of educators as to the benefits of cyberbullying awareness education. This was achieved by questioning educators' perceptions of cyberbullying, exposing them to a program where they learned about various cases and facts about

cyberbullying behavior, and then surveying their feelings about this program becoming a tool for professional development.

Methodology

The program referenced in this research was an online informational, interactive curriculum, a self-guided proactive tool designed to be given to educators and staff in elementary and secondary schools.   Kowalski et al. (2008) suggest that cyberbullying is more prevalent among 8th-graders, but that it has been reported at the 6th-7th-grade levels as well (p. 80).   If we are to attempt to avoid the problem at those grade levels, awareness must begin earlier, when youngsters are beginning to use social media on computers and other technology as communication (cell phones, iPod Touch or iPads, for example). Parry Aftab's website – Wired Kids (http://wiredkids.org/wiredkids_org.html) – contains help and information for kids beginning at age 7; this goes to show that today's youth, informed and savvy in the usage of technology, are just as vulnerable as teens and must be targeted for awareness as much as, if not more than, the teens who are more commonly bullied and bullies. Therefore, there is no one group of educators who should receive awareness training over another; all who interact with youth of any age should be properly trained in recognition of cyberbullying.

Research Design

"Evaluation research seeks to answer questions about target audiences for a program or campaign…" (Rice and Atkin, 1989, p. 125). This study takes an evaluation research

approach with an emphasis on formative evaluation in order to assess the effectiveness of the product and gather feedback for its improvement.

The purpose of the product was to see if presenting material relevant to cyberbullying, with various types of content (from videos to information to quiz questions in order to self test) would raise the perceptions of educators as to the benefits of having such a program for professional development, and to inform practice in the classroom. Therefore, a formative evaluation was conducted.

Formative evaluation is a qualitative method of evaluating instruments of instruction. Smith and Ragan (2005) describe it as a method for the designer to "evaluate the materials to determine the weakness in the instruction so that revisions can be made to make them more effective and efficient." (p. 327). Michael Scriven first distinguished the differences between formative and summative evaluations, and in his Evaluation Thesaurus (1991) he states that formative evaluation is used during development of a product or program in order to gain insight for further improvement (p. 181).

The ways in which formative evaluation can be carried out are numerous; in this project, survey questions after the participants completed the program were geared to answer not only the research question but to gather feedback about the program itself, the technology, and participants' perceptions of its general usability. Those perceptions are included in the findings.

Procedures

Product Development

The original design was to create a face-to-face workshop; there is a lot of information to offer and a face-to-face workshop was planned in order to invite discussion and questions. Due to time of year, that was impossible, therefore the program became online-only. In order to incorporate interactivity as well as information dissemination, a program called Quiz Creator™ was used. The program allows for flash-based quiz questions, with a variety of question types available as well as insertion of flash video, and straight text- or image-based information. It was important to provide a self-directed aspect to the program, as educational personnel are usually facing time constraints in their everyday tasks. There was no time limit imposed on the progress through the program, nor was there a test score based on time taken to answer questions. The program offers test scores at the end, but they were used only as a self-measure and are built into the program by default.

Included in the curriculum were slides offering definitions, tools, manifestations, and videos culled from the Internet which depicted interviews with parents whose children were victims of bullycide as well as news stories about bullycide (Megan Meier, Ryan Halligan, Jesse Logan, Tyler Clementi). Interspersed with the videos were slides of informational caliber, and questions based on the slides. The participant had no option to hit a "back" button which is a default of the program itself.

Content

Topics addressed in the program included:

- What cyberbullying IS and what cyberbullying is NOT;

- How is cyberbullying manifested? Tools of the cyberbully;

- Cyberbullying and the element of Power;

- Issues specific to cyberbullying;

- The bystander problem;

- How does cyberbullying affect people?

- How is cyberbullying relevant to the school environment?

- Possible responses to cyberbullying situations – both immediate and long term;

- How can educators effectively teach about cyberbullying in the classroom?

There is also a panel with links to additional resources on cyberbullying.

I.   What is Cyberbullying?

Belsey (2000) coined the term "cyberbullying" because "If memory serves me correctly, I made a post about this topic to www.bullying.org in April of 2000. In March, 2000 I was reading postings from youth in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and parts of Asia to www.bullying.org that described being bullied online. I borrowed a little from Canadian Science Fiction writer William Gibson, who coined the term "cyberspace". I thought that if this was bullying happening in cyberspace, that the term "cyberbullying" seemed most appropriate." (Bill Belsey, via personal email received December 7th,

2009). This section addresses cyberbullying, its definition, manifestations, examples, how to identify it, and issues specific to cyberbullying (such as anonymity, disinhibition and lack of visual cues). It also addresses the bystander problem and how that manifests as regards cyberbullying.

II.   How Does Cyberbullying Affect People?

In this section, the effects of cyberbullying are outlined. Along with videos which highlight cases of cyberbullycide (suicide caused by incessant and intolerable cyberbullying incidents), it is stated and shown that, while cyberbullying happens mostly outside of school, its effects are widespread and profound on a student's academic and social life at school. Implications and ramifications of cyberbullying, in the school setting, are addressed.

III.   How Is Cyberbullying Manifested?

This section discusses the various ways in which cyberbullying can manifest, including cell phones, cell phone cameras, websites, "slam" or "bash" sites, polls and survey sites, identity theft, Facebook and MySpace hacking, "happy slapping", and various other ways in which the technology allows bullies to target their victims. It also addresses the term and concept of "netiquette", basic rules of etiquette for online communication.

IV.   How does cyberbullying affect the school environment?

This section introduces the effects cyberbullying has on students, from psychological effects (low self-esteem, for example) to academic effects (students who

are worried about being bullied, or those who deal with it already do not perform or focus on academia). It provides concrete examples of such effects to illustrate the facts provided.

V.   Possible Responses to Cyberbullying Situations

This section identifies the various responses educators can offer when faced with cyberbullying situations. Beginning with short-term , immediate responses (such as teaching students not to respond to harassment online, telling an adult and capturing the evidence via screenshots, saved emails and preserved chat logs), the section provides many tips on how to advise students in cyberbullying situations. Various quiz-type questions illustrate the types of responses advisable to students. Long-range responses are also offered, including such actions as stating and reiterating school policy on cyberbullying and how it will be handled if it occurs, making sure victim and bully are always separated and that conflict resolution is not the way to handle cyberbullying.

VI.   How can educators effectively teach about cyberbullying in classrooms?

This section gives ideas of curriculum-integrated ways in which cyberbullying can be covered as a topic in classrooms. Video examples of student-created public-service announcements are offered, as well as bullet-point lists of ideas on how the topic can become part of classroom learning.

Format

Each of the above topics is presented in panels which advance when the
participant clicks a "next" button. Following the informational panels, quiz questions are
given. Various formats for the questions are used, in order to provide a range of activities,
both for the participant's sustained interest and the ability to test for recall as well as
recognition. Multiple choice, multiple response, matching, fill-in-the-blank, short-answer,
true-false questions can all be provided, depending on the type of question. Following is a
short example of each type of question.

- *Multiple-response example question:*

  How does the element of power manifest in cyberbullying? (check all that apply)

  1. Anonymity

  2. Knowledge of the technology and how to effectively use it

  3. Smarter kids are bullies

  4. More popular kids tend to bully the less popular one

  (answers 1 and 2 are correct)

  This question type also lends itself well to screenshots depicting various types of
  cyber-activity, with cyberbullying activities depicted as well as innocuous

incidents. Participants were asked to click on the graphics that best described cyberbullying.

- ***Multiple-choice example question:***

The following text is received by a student one evening: *You're getting ur face broken after school tomorrow. Watch Ur back!* How do you advise a student to respond?

1. Turn off the phone

2. Reply "please stop texting me"

3. Reply "Bring it."

4. Tell parents

(4 is the correct answer)

Matching question example *(for the example's sake, the definitions are posted across from their mates); shapes will not be boxes, but puzzle-piece shaped for easy clicking into place and pieces are randomly arranged each time)*

Match the following to its definition:

Anonymity	Cyberbullies can hide behind screens and pseudonyms

Evidence	Screenshots, printed emails, saved chat logs

Viral	A single cyberbullying incident can be widely distributed to an audience of millions within seconds

Disinhibition		Cyberbullies will say things to their victims they would never say face to face

- *Fill-in-the-blank example question: (blank has been filled in)*

A passive observer in a cyberbullying situation is referred to as: (bystander)

- *True/False example question:*

If a photo has been posted on the Internet, but taken down after complaints are received, the victim is no longer at risk for being cyberbullied.

○ True

○ False

(False is the correct answer)

- *Image map*

Four images of cell phone screens with text messages are shown. They say, respectively:

- o You're so silly
- o Party at Katie's tonite – 8 p.m.!
- o I know, math's hard for me too
- o Party at Katie's tonite – don't tell Jenna!

Participants are asked to click on the graphic with the cyberbullying behavior (last example given). A spinning wheel is placed over the chosen graphic and when the participant clicks "submit", feedback is given.

Feedback for each question answered is provided as the participant goes along, on a question-to-question basis. After entering the answer, the participant clicks a "submit" button and receives immediate feedback as to the result of that answer. Each wrong answer is met with a feedback box that offers a chance to go back and try again, with topic-related feedback. For example, "Incorrect. Responding to a harassing email will encourage the bully. Try again." Positive feedback for correct answers also offered topic-related information, such as: "Correct. Saving and printing each email preserves the evidence of cyberbullying incidents."

Context

While the reasons for cyberbullying are as important for us to address as the behavior itself, this product addresses those reasons by way of illustrations; it is more important at this juncture to identify the behavior, its signs, and coping and prevention strategies, while raising awareness in a secondary fashion as to the motives for the bullying. The motives are very important in understanding prevention strategies and educators should become aware of them if they arise in school even unaccompanied by bullying behavior. However, this program is specifically focused on the behavior, and therefore the motives are revealed via exposition in the multitude of examples and resources provided.

Product Testing

After the initial product was completed, I self-tested to ensure quality and accuracy. It would have been preferable to have been able to pilot test my product. However, when trying to recruit participants for my study (see next section), I was met with difficulties. I had attempted to gain access to the entire educational population of a high school but that proved futile when nobody volunteered to either liaise with me or to participate at all. Therefore, pilot testing was out of the question, in this population; as it was, I was not successful in procuring willing participants for my sample; it was unlikely the population would have yielded any willing test subjects for the product.

It would have been feasible to test the product with a student population in the Masters program of Educational Technology at Concordia University; however, with time running out, this never occurred. Had I been able to conduct alpha tests, it is probable I would have received valuable feedback as regards the content, the technology, perhaps even ways in which to shorten the length of the program. In hindsight, this is what would have given me a more complete idea of my product's validity and quality, and in future research, it is the route I will then take.

When I had completed my own assessment of the product, it was uploaded to a website as well as to the file-storage site, Dropbox. The latter option, a stand-alone flash player was available to anyone who had difficulty accessing the website.

Participants

Participants were enlisted via a contact at a local school board, who – along with her own participation – was able to procure three other volunteers via emails sent to a number of teachers. While all four were initially interviewed, only three completed the program. It was apparent that time of year and exam schedules were hindrances in the process. However, a fourth volunteer was procured through separate direct contact, who completed the process. Ava, Charlene and Brandon were enlisted through the email; Marlee was contacted directly by me.

Ava is a former high-school teacher who holds a position at the school board as an itinerant educational technology teacher. She is also integral in having designed, planned and begun implementation of the school board's Digital Citizenship Program.

Brandon is a pedagogical I.T. consultant at the school board level. He has no teaching experience but is familiar with curriculum, mission statements, and basic issues surrounding education at the primary and secondary levels.

Chantal is a high-school teacher who has many years' experience. She teaches French and Ethics at a large suburban high school.

Marlee is an elementary-school teacher who teaches English to grade-5 students. She has been teaching for more than 20 years and taught grades 3-6 throughout her career.

Data collection began with semi-structured interviews held by phone with individuals who had agreed to participate; in order to determine the participant's

knowledge, perception and experiences regarding cyberbullying, questions (Appendix A) were devised as an information-gathering exercise.

After the phone call, participants received an email with a download link for the stand-alone product, and an online link where it had been uploaded. The product was then theirs to explore for as long as they wished; when they clicked the "finish" button on the last panel, they were redirected to a webpage with a 10-question survey to complete (Appendix B).

The responses to the end-of-program survey, along with their comments in the pre-program interview, are what comprise the data for this thesis.

In analyzing the results, the comments from the both the survey and the pre-interview were grouped into themes. As those comments seemed to veer toward the same themes of Prevention/Awareness and Curriculum Integration, those – along with the responses to general perception of cyberbullying as well as perceived benefits of the program – are discussed below in my findings.

Findings and Discussion

Perception of Cyberbullying

Each participant was fairly familiar with cyberbullying, though their knowledge of how it manifests ranged from limited ("On Facebook, girls who mostly exclude others" – Charlene; "texting but it evolves as technology evolves" – Marlee) to more expansive ("live chatrooms, emails, social networking, text messages, cell phones" – Brandon), and even veered into a list of those who bully ("workplace amongst colleagues, supervisors and workers; students against teachers" – Ava). Each was of the

strong belief that cyberbullying is a problem that must be addressed. This seems to be a trend in surveying educators in other studies done on the topic. All have heard of cyberbullying, many understand at least several ways in which it manifests, and many believe it to be a serious problem that must be undertaken as a topic of discussion.

Participants recounted some limited direct experience with cyberbullying, either personally or with students, and described how the incidents were handled. Both before and after interacting with the program, each participant agreed that there is a need for awareness in their positions, and that they could see availing themselves of a program to teach them about cyberbullying. One participant stated, "We need to try whatever tools are out there to learn about this topic and how to prevent it from happening." (Charlene). This is supported by researcher Sheri Baumann (2007) who believes that the best way to include all stakeholders in the cyberbullying problem is to examine and address all conflicts. However, she continues, "this needs to be done by educators who have been properly trained and that "...educational intervention will encourage more students to report problems to concerned adults." (p. 17)

Prevention/Awareness

As stated by Mishna, Saini and Solomon (2009), today's youth "unanimously depict adults as oblivious to the cyber world and to the phenomenon of cyberbullying." (p. 4) As adults are not likely to learn about cyberbullying from their students or their children, it is vital to raise awareness through training and education programs. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) state that "the most important preventative step that schools can take is to educate the school community about responsible Internet use." (p. 3) Participants in

this study unanimously agreed that the first and best method of handling cyberbullying is the proactive route. "Preventing cyberbullying just makes sense. It can be too late once it's already happened." (Marlee) Brandon says, "cyberbullying spreads, we should be proactive first. Kids telling kids what they should do is also a good idea, it puts the onus on them." The participants who had experienced cyberbullying amongst their students had encountered it when it migrated from the online venue back into the classroom. It was stated in the pre-program interview, by one participant, that there is "probably cyberbullying occurring on a regular basis but that teachers are unaware of it or how serious it can be." (Marlee) Kowalski et al. (2008) suggest training "all administrators, faculty and staff….in the best practices in bullying prevention and intervention." (p. 37). This cannot happen without incorporating awareness of all nuances surrounding the topic of cyberbullying. One participant reinforced this by stating, "...this program would be beneficial, something that goes into the whole school and targets the entire staff." (Charlene) Prevention was addressed in the lament that "cyberbullying comes to teachers when it has already escalated." (Ava) Willard (2007) says, "To increase the potential of reporting, it is necessary to educate adults about these issues so that they can respond effectively and provide greater education to students…" (p. 50) This supports Ava's statement and the perception that more awareness is needed for educators in order to begin the process of appropriate prevention and response.

Curriculum Integration

Smith et al. (2008) state, about the need for adults to understand cyberbullying: "An obvious step is to include cyberbullying explicitly in school anti-bullying policies and

anti-bullying materials, and in teacher training materials for anti-bullying work" (p. 384).

Without exception, in the interviews with participants, all agreed that cyberbullying

education not only can be integrated, but that it must become part of every school

curriculum. They also agreed that they would be amenable to a program on cyberbullying

awareness would be beneficial to them in their jobs. Their responses to questions on the

program itself, particularly the material provided and the self-testing aspects, they

showed a strong continuance of this belief. This is supported in research as well. As

stated by Walker (2011), "[c]hoosing a curriculum which is grounded in research and

addresses cyberbullying as part of a long-term systemic change can be a good start

toward creating new social norms in a school." (p. 139) . Hinduja and Patchin (2010)

agree as well, stating that it is "therefore important to discuss issues related to the

appropriate use of online communications technology in various areas of the general

curriculum." (p. 4)

Participants agreed that cyberbullying should be handled proactively first ("stop it

at the roots" – Charlene). Kowalski et al. (2008) state that "[b]ullying prevention

programs should include a class component." (p. 38). According to the participants of

this study, proactive approaches to cyberbullying leads to "prevention which can avoid

legal and ethical consequences of cyberbullying." (Ava) One participant specified that

"we would like to approach the topic in our classrooms but we have no idea how to begin

talking about it or what to cover. Sometimes it's frustrating to think that maybe we could

have stopped the incident before it escalated." (Marlee) Li (2008) strongly suggests that

"…we need to consider cyberbullying when developing educational programs." (p. 11).

From the comments here, that is a belief of these participants as well.

Kowalski et al. (2008) believe that cyberbullying education should be taught alongside the other topics surrounding the appropriate behavior of students (such as conflict resolution, drug prevention and health class issues) (p. 127). When asked if they could see integrating cyberbullying awareness into their curricular activities, the participants in this study answered "yes". Charlene, who teaches French and Ethics, stated that she would definitely tailor her units to include cyberbullying awareness with the students in her classes. Marlee, an English teacher, was already beginning to formulate ideas for a theme about cyberbullying. "Writing activities should be relevant," she says, "I would give my students the topic and have them write in different formats about cyberbullying." She added, "It would be a great beginning research topic too." Her ideas are supported strongly by Kowalski et al. (2008) who suggest "…writing assignments where students take the perspective of someone who is experiencing bullying or cyberbullying behavior and discuss their reactions to the bullying behavior." (p. 136)

One participant states: "cyberbullying should not be taken lightly. It's a serious topic. It is beneficial for teachers to have training, as well as training for parents who need and want information." (Ava) They all agreed that consequences are "band-aid solutions" (Charlene) and should only be implemented as a last resort but, if possible, turned into "teachable moments which can turn the consequences into a positive lesson." (Marlee). As with any educational issue, prevention of negative behavior or practices is a key to stemming the flow of these behaviors. This viewpoint is supported by research. Citing Nigam & Collier (2010), Jenny Walker (2011) states that "[s]chools which accomplish long-term prevention will most likely be those which take up the task of

creating new social norms" (p. 137). In this new world where technology is used to access the cyber-world – especially by youth most vulnerable to its pitfalls – new social norms are being examined. One participant is engaged in designing and helping to implement a Digital Citizenship Program, a curriculum-based topic, beginning in the Province of Quebec this fall, for the first time in the Province and among the first few across Canada. This program recognizes that our youth are growing up in the digital world, and must be taught accordingly; the first step is to "make sure every teacher is on top of it. Technology is changing all the time." (Marlee)

Many books and research studies on cyberbullying outline steps to follow or guidelines on how to respond to or handle cyberbullying. Kowalski et al. (2008), Coloroso (2008), Shariff (2008, 2009) and a new collection of essays on preventing and responding to cyberbullying edited by Hinduja and Patchin (2011). How, one may ask, do educators learn about the steps to follow if they do not avail themselves of the literature? The answer is contained in this study: bring cyberbullying awareness to the level of professional development so that educators can gain confidence in their understanding on the topic and successfully integrate it into their curricula. The only way students will thoroughly gain knowledge of cyberbullying, how to recognize it and respond to it should it not be preventable, is through education

Perceived Benefits of the Program

Participants were generally positive about the program in general as well as its perceived benefits. One comment in particular stated: "I can really see putting this on our website so that teachers, administrators, counselors and even parents can use it to learn

more about what cyberbullying is and how they can deal with it when it occurs" (Ava)

One comment addressed the length of the program ("with so many videos, educators might not stick around to see the end of it" – Brandon), which was echoed by Ava who said, "I think that teachers might find it a little long to go through – perhaps if it were made into two separate sections?" Along the same lines, another stated that "it's long but if you can't attend a workshop, this is the next best thing. Doing it on my own time was good." (Marlee)

Charlene felt that the program would be effective as a professional development tool but would prefer, at least in part, a face-to-face workshop format to give discussion time to those who need and benefit from that interaction. Her concerns are valid; Mason (2008) suggests some free resources found online that could be used by educators to aid in cyberbullying knowledge and prevention programs (p. 336). However, the problem with online resources is exactly what Charlene found: there is no ability to discuss, ask questions, learn face-to-face, or have issues clarified. The same could be said for books and articles on the subject; without human interaction as regards a topic that may be new to so many people, questions may remain, and that might hinder prevention/awareness programs implemented in schools, or provide faulty information to students who need to learn as much about the topic as the educators.

Charlene also stated that she believes support staff should be included and would benefit greatly from exposure to a program such as this. Trolley and Hanel (2010) offer checklists for assessing incidents of cyberbullying in schools, and how they were responded to or reported. How can educators begin to know how to respond to this fairly new form of bullying without comprehensive training on how to recognize it? Marlee

states, "texting is the only form of cyberbullying we cover. I need to learn more about what the kids are doing so I can be aware of what to look out for." Even those fully versed in digital citizenship found the program beneficial: "I'm not an expert in cyberbullying and I need programs to help me understand the topic." (Ava)

The videos included were well received, on the whole. "The [videos] make it hit home and [help me] realize how serious this issue is." (Charlene) "I thought they were extremely effective to really understand the emotional impact that cyberbullying has on all the stakeholders involved. It really opened my eyes to how serious this issue is." (Ava). "I never knew there were so many different ways cyberbullying happens; seeing the videos and the personal stories made me understand that there is a lot to learn about this topic and educators have to be on top of it as soon as possible." (Marlee). One participant stated, "the videos were good initially but I think there were too many with the same message in this lesson." (Brandon). All participants found the questions to be challenging without ambiguity, and the variety of questions was well received. "The questions reinforced my learning." (Ava) "I liked the variety in the ways flash was used for questions" (Brandon), and Marlee said she "got ideas for questions to ask my students in the Fall, when we start talking about the technology-usage policy."

Wright et al. (2009) used virtual simulations/scenarios to raise awareness of cyberbullying among adolescents. Their study not only identifies the need for cyberbullying awareness education throughout the educational community such as "teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, school counselors, mental health professionals, students, parents" (p. 35), it presented a unique and engaging way for cyberbullying to be portrayed and responses to be gauged within a safe environment. The

study supports the use of web-based environments such as the one in this research to be disseminated easily, accessibly, and with the ability to change or add to components as learning progresses, technology changes, and new issues arise. Brandon, whose perspective is from the Information Technology outlook, states, "Overall, I like the idea of this program."

Critiques

Some of the participants mentioned the lengthiness of the online program. Comments ranged from "I think teachers might find it a little long to go through; perhaps it if was made into two separate sections?" (Ava) to Brandon ("Getting through this took a lot longer than I thought it would. With too many videos saying more or less the same message, I suspect that a number of educators would not stick around to see the end of it.") This is easily addressed by returning to the original design of a beginning face-to-face workshop in which the topic is introduced via some of the videos, discussion, answering questions from the participants and holding break-out sessions where participants are given scenarios to discuss and for which to devise the most appropriate responses. Not only would this significantly cut the length of an online component (which could get tedious, causing loss of attention or even loss of interest), it would provide more data to inform the online program as well as post-session interviews. With in-person workshops, grounded researchers can find more emergent themes, more interactivity providing more categories and definitely more *in vivo* coding.

A face-to-face workshop also ensures a larger sample, which would provide more material as well. Charlene states "I found a few questions unclear; it could just be that English is not my first language. I would have much preferred discussing." This speaks to the benefits of in-person training as well. She liked the idea of a program completed on one's own time but mentioned, more than once, the in-person dynamic being a preference.

As the program was originally designed to incorporate both in-person and online components, these comments are consistent with the initial intent and validate that design. As outlined in future projections below, this is being planned for implementation at a later date.

Conclusion

In reviewing the results of this study, it is apparent that the educators who participated are keen to receive training and education on cyberbullying awareness. Overall, the results yielded positive feedback on the content, the aim of the program, and the program itself. In her "Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats" (2007), Nancy Willard believes the "'triage' approach" is sufficient in terms of dealing with the problem. She believes that only those who would be directly in contact with cyberbullying incidents ("…disciplinary administrators, counselors, school resource officers, librarians, and computer lab coordinators" p. 12) would require awareness and "ways to detect, review and intervene." (p. 12). She believes that only those teaching directly about cyberbullying would require "insight into the concerns and how to

motivate safe and responsible behavior. All other staff likely require only general awareness." (p. 12)

However, based on this study, even within its limitations of a small sample group, it was unanimously maintained that *all* staff, from support staff to educational personnel, should receive awareness education of cyberbullying and its concerns. The sample in this study consisted of teachers in both high school and elementary, a pedagogical I.T. consultant, and an educational technology teacher at the school board level. All have experience with various levels of educational institutional personnel and their answers speak loudly for across-the-board education no matter the exposure to cyberbullying itself or education thereof. In fact, the statements calling for integration of cyberbullying awareness education into curricular activities speak loudly for this perspective.

While the sample was small and the feedback limited to the number, it is clear that there is an interest from the educational community in receiving more information about cyberbullying. From the group in this study, and their personal accounts as well as their projections about colleagues, it is apparent that more work is required in this field in order to help the educational population understand the seriousness of cyberbullying and all its nuances. I believe that this group is representative of many, if not most educators who deal with technology-savvy students on a daily basis and who, most likely, are already dealing with cyberbullying on a smaller scale. The danger of waiting until cyberbullying escalates into full-blown clashes could mean the difference between emotional and academic breakdowns at best, and – at the very worst – the difference between life and death.

Will we ever be able to stop cyberbullying? I don't believe so; human nature almost assures that it will continue. Can we prevent it? With the right programs, I believe so. "It almost goes without saying that school districts must educate both students and staff about the harmful nature of online aggression. School administrators should take the time to learn about these issues and pass this important information along to teachers and counselors." (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008, p. 131). I would venture further and provide cyberbullying awareness education for each and every member of the educational community; if this could be achieved on a wide-ranging scale, educators could then integrate cyberbullying awareness into their curricula, and pass along this knowledge to the students they see on a daily basis. If that could be achieved, lives could be saved, kids could feel safer and the bullying that has pervaded the most private corners of our children's lives could be contained. We owe it to our future generations to see cyberbullying awareness education take its rightful place alongside other safety and life-skills measures we teach our students to keep them safe, happy and healthy. Inevitably, any education given to the educators will benefit their students. Hinduja and Patchin (2008) provide this: "As an educator you will eventually – if you haven't yet already – face a cyberbullying incident that affects a student, staff member, or your entire school. It is crucial to have a solid idea of possible courses of action to pursue…" (p. 181). As the majority of participants in this study had already encountered this situation at least once, it is almost certain that the educational community at large has as well. Action begins with awareness. We can never be too aware; and cyberbullying is clearly a topic in dire need of educational awareness.

Future Projections

- The product is flexible; it could easily be amended to the youth level, for all ages, to be used as a tool in schools and independently;

- The Webquest is a popular educational lesson involving the use of the Internet to research questions and topics within a theme. Webquests could be developed for use at all levels, from adults/educators to students of all ages. A would-be scavenger hunt across the Internet is a common method for webquests; using the Internet to research cyberbullying not only gives awareness a new strategy of learning but provides a positive and responsible, as well as fun, way of using the Internet.

- A website could be created, with this product uploaded to it, incorporating the ability to add to the material – both resource material and questions/quizzes, and containing sections including a moderated discussion forum/bulletin board to provide educators (and students, for the student-aimed program) with peer mentoring in the subject of cyberbullying. Once again, using the Internet as a base for research about cyberbullying provides a positive framework for online activity.

- Training programs for both educators and students such as:

  o Using Social Media Safely and Responsibly;

  o The Do's and Don'ts of Texting;

- Cybersafety (including password savvy, form fill-ins, clearing cache and history on public or shared computers);

- Sexting – awareness of the behavior, why it pertains to cyberbullying, and how to teach students about its dangers;

- Web-based personal publishing (including Facebook, websites, and blogging)

• Training programs for educators specifically to address technology-based issues facing our students where it has a direct effect on teaching, learning, and the atmosphere of the classroom and schools – Ribble and Bailey (2007) discuss the elements of Digital Citizenship and how schools must now embrace the reality of technology as a way of life. A Digital Citizenship Program being instituted in the fall of 2011, in the schools at the Lester B. Pearson School Board addresses this concept;

• A long-term study based on awareness programs for both educational staff and students, to determine successful outcome, and to determine correlation between education and cyberbullying incidents.

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1. Are you aware of what cyberbullying is?
2. Can you name the ways in which it manifests? (they can provide tools, venues, or wording)
3. Have you ever been cyberbullied?
4. Do you believe cyberbullying is a problem, either in or outside of school, with adults and/or youth?
5. Have you ever had to deal with cyberbullying in your teaching experience?
   a. If no – go to next question
   b. If yes:
      i. How did you handle it?
      ii. How would you have liked to have handled it?
      iii. Were authorities (principals, parents, possibly law-enforcement) responsive to your report?
      iv. What would you have liked to have seen happen?
      v. What, if any, actions/consequences were taken as a result of your experience with cyberbullying?
6. Can you see yourself using this type of program to further your own knowledge of cyberbullying? If not, why not?
7. If this program were to be developed for usage with students (i.e. language and material written to age-appropriate levels), could you see yourself using it or encouraging its usage with your students? If not, why not?
8. Do you believe cyberbullying education should/can be integrated into your curriculum? If so, how would you do so? If not, why not?
9. How do you believe cyberbullying should be handled? (pro-actively, reactively, consequence, teachable moments, etc)

1. In a word, how would you describe this session?
2. What were your key expectations of this session?
3. How did the session meet your expectations?
4. What parts of the session were most helpful to you personally?
5. Do you feel this sort of program would be effective as a professional-development tool?
6. Keeping in mind that a good portion of this program is ideally meant for face-to-face workshop sessions, with discussions and activities, how do you rate:

1	2	3	4	5
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor

The quality of material presented (videos, information?)

The variety of questions/activities?

The quality of questions/activities?

Overall satisfaction?

Please comment below.

7. What worked best in this program?
8. What needed improvement most?
9. Please check the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree

o This program would be relevant to my work.
o This program covered the material in detail
o Graphics used were well placed or videos well utilized
o The program is easy to use
o I felt the questions were challenging enough without being ambiguous

Please feel free to comment below