

Addressing Cyberbullying in the Educational Setting
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Introduction

One of the issues stakeholders in education are faced with is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has historically been hard to define, but its key attributes are as follows: The perpetrator has constant access to the target, and the audience can be huge in scale. The bullying behavior is repetitive in nature, and the power imbalance is altered from in person bullying since there does not need to be a physical or social power imbalance for the bullying to take place (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016). The negative impacts of cyberbullying are wide ranging, as they can lead to suicide, but while suicide is the most severe result of cyberbullying, it is not the most common result. Other results of cyberbullying include mental health issues in students, impacted academics, a negatively affected feeling of well-being for students, maladaptive and self-destructive behaviors, and absenteeism (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016). It is in the best interest of schools to battle cyberbullying, but there are many obstacles that make this a steep challenge. Some of the problems that are commonly referenced when it comes to fighting against cyberbullying are the difficulties in defining cyberbullying itself, handling cyberbullying when it happens, and unclear objectives in cyberbullying prevention programs. Many of the digital citizenship instruction programs and preventative measures are still in their early stages and have not evolved to keep up with the technology use of students (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016).

There are solutions to solving many of the problems cyberbullying presents in schools. One of them involves establishing a climate in schools where cyberbullying is seen as a whole community issue, and all stakeholders and students do their part to prevent it. School leaders should encourage a “telling atmosphere”, where students feel empowered to be honest about incidents of cyberbullying and know how to identify it when it happens, whether they are a victim or a bystander. This includes clearly defining cyberbullying and providing clear examples of it. Educators and school leaders can do their part by supporting students and encouraging

victims of cyberbullying to seek support from adults and document relevant evidence, like screenshots, when there are instances of cyberbullying. Another solution is prevention through instruction. Educational technology leaders in schools should promote awareness of acceptable use policies in schools, and promote the positive use of technology (Webwise.ie, 2018). They should also make sure that digital citizenship and responsible use curriculum is not only present throughout the entire educational experience from primary to secondary education, but also update curriculum so it is relevant and current. Educational technology leaders need to update their own perception of what cyberbullying is, and keep their “ears to the ground” so they can stay up to date on how student communication outside of schools evolves. Also, they should discuss and inform students about personal safety issues in a developmentally appropriate way, with a scaffolded curriculum that builds on itself year after year.

Solving these issues related to cyberbullying is important for the well-being of students. Establishing a community where students feel safe and empowered to report cyberbullying is important and the first step to fixing the problem. According to research from 2012, 40% of students in grades 7 to 12 would not report cyberbullying to anyone, and only 10% would tell an adult about the problem. Starting with an approach that centers around the climate of the institution and tackles the reasons why students do not feel empowered to report cyberbullying makes sense, and has long term implications that far exceed the scope of handling cyberbullying on a case by case basis. Providing aid to teachers and giving them real strategies they can use to battle cyberbullying would empower them to be problem solvers in their own institutions as well. Preventative education, while still in its infancy, can help students understand what responsible use is, and help them identify cyberbullying when they see it. Adequate education on the institution’s acceptable use policy can help reduce instances of cyberbullying, as some students

do not have a full understanding of their acceptable use policy (Garland & Tejada, 2013). It falls on educators and stakeholders to properly educate students on acceptable use, digital citizenship, and cyberbullying.

While preliminary findings on the efficacy of digital citizenship curricula in relation to the prevention of cyberbullying are not far reaching as of yet, they provide some promising results that point to a need for a robust education on responsible use. Also, establishing a climate that simply does not tolerate cyberbullying is something all administrators and educational technology leaders should strive for. As long as cyberbullying exists, it presents a threat to students, but it can be prevented with these solutions.

References

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