International Perspectives
on Cyberbullying   *Part 2*

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In the previous issue of *Education Technology Solutions,* part one of this two-part article introduced readers to cyberbullying and reported on the opening address from Professor Peter Smith, who suggested that it is necessary to learn from the past in order to look to the future. In this issue, the discussion is concluded with a report on keynote addresses from Dr. Michele Ybarra; Dr. Barbara Spears and Professor Phillip Slee; and Professor Donna Cross.

Issues in capturing a universal understanding of cyberbullying

Dr. Michele Ybarra, president and research director of Internet Solutions for Kids (www.iSolutions4Kids.org), reported on the issues of language and frequency in measuring cyberbullying, and outlined prevalence rates for use of technology and the benefits of using technology from the Growing Up with Media study, a two-year national longitudinal survey of adolescents in the USA: ninety per cent of twelve to seventeen-year-olds use the Internet; seventy-one per cent have a cell phone and forty-six per cent of eight to twelve-year-olds have a cell phone; with twenty-five per cent using the Internet to look for health information in the last year, and forty-one per cent indicating a change in behaviours because of information found online.

In posing such questions as should a definition or a list of behaviours be given to determine prevalence and what impact does the timeframe have, some of the issues associated with defining cyberbullying, as distinct from defining traditional bullying, become evident.

How is a universal definition agreed upon if technology and the behaviours associated with it continue to evolve? Ybarra reported on fourteen different studies between 1999 and 2008, where prevalence rates ranged from six to seventy-two per cent, clearly indicating some real concerns with determining how much and what kind of cyberbullying is occurring. Timeframes varied from unspecified ('ever') to 'ever in the past year' through to 'used this semester', making comparison of findings difficult. In sum, there appeared a lot of variability in measurement, with self-selection of having been cyberbullied being associated with higher rates, and random sampling with lower rates. Behaviour lists (for example, someone made a rude or mean comment to me online), however, yielded higher prevalence rates than did definition-based measures (for example, we say a young person is being bullied when…), suggesting that how the question is asked is of utmost importance. As will be evident shortly, Cross also raised these same issues, suggesting that youth are responding differently to the ways the questions are posed, but are responding similarly in both cultural contexts.

Dr. Barbara Spears of the University of South Australia and Professor Phillip Slee of Flinders University reported on insights and issues derived from an Australian qualitative study into covert and cyberbullying: Behind the Scenes: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspx). Outlining the role that the National Safe Schools Framework has played in Australia's approach to bullying and school violence, the role of student voice in informing definition, measurement and intervention was emphasized. Young people's lived experiences and understandings of cyberbullying provide important messages which may be distinct from those put forward by adults, and derived from times past. Young people are the ones involved, and they are the ones whose perspectives of this phenomenon inform understanding. Whilst adults can design surveys, which either list behaviours or provide a definition, young people must be encouraged to become co-researchers, where meaning is co-constructed with adults, so that their lived reality and actual experiences of cyberbullying are revealed, and effective, safe and supportive strategies are put in place to protect them as they navigate this parallel technological and socially important universe.

Young people in this study deemed cyberbullying behaviours to look and sound both covert (hidden gangs; silent; anonymous; manipulative), which reflects what is known about indirect aggression and bullying behaviours, and overt (texting, filming, setting up websites), which clearly describe types of technologically related behaviours which would not be evident in traditional forms of bullying. In describing their feelings about it, unsafe, inescapable and threatening, they capture the impacts of cyberbullying on individuals. These are not dissimilar to those experienced in traditional bullying across the globe. Students also reported that cyberbullying reflected the existing definition, but was enacted through technology; it was harder to determine intent, due to the lack of non-verbal cues, voice expression and gestures; anonymity enabled more individuals to assume power and engage in bullying behaviours; and that repetition was an issue, with some incidents only occurring once, but having impact across wider circles, beyond the immediate friends. Qualitative research is becoming increasingly important internationally in terms of providing an authentic understanding of cyberbullying from the perspective of those involved. The lived realities and core experiences of young people capture their contexts and shed light on a universal understanding of cyberbullying as technology changes around them. This is important in the broader international perspective, as the combining of those voices across differing contexts serves to inform how a phenomenon is defined and eventually measured.

Donna Cross, professor of Child and Adolescent Health from Edith Cowan University, reported on the ACBPS (Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study) and, again, the need to include student voices in any quest to understanding the phenomenon of cyberbullying was highlighted. In summarizing her interview findings, cyberbullying was deemed by young people to be an adult term, not usually used by them, but one they recognized was becoming commonplace due to the media's use of the term www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspx). The students understood the term cyberbullying, but specifically preferred to refer to types of technology and the behaviours used (for example, texting nasty messages; sending cruel pictures through social networking sites). They identified many behaviours, reflecting those found elsewhere around the world, highlighting the universal nature of the behaviours emerging here and internationally: for example, sending derogatory/threatening text messages; bombarding a person with emails/messages; forwarding private information to others; posting derogatory comments in a chat room/online; setting up a derogatory website; excluding someone from a chat room/

online; using someone else's screen name or password, pretending to be them to do harmful things to those whose identity they had adopted; posting pictures or videos and sending someone a virus.

Comparison of quantitative findings from the ACBPS reported different prevalence rates across grades four to nine from 106 Australian schools: using both global and specific behaviours (10.3%); yes to any of the specific behaviours (7.3%) or global definition only (4.5%), offering clear support for the need to ask the right questions of young people if prevalence is to be determined. This supports the message given by Ybarra earlier: is a global definition or lists of specific behaviours used, as each will provide different outcomes? In sum, the major findings from this study were that the vast majority of grade four to nine students reported they had not been cyberbullied; however, of those who had, slightly higher rates were found among secondary students from non-government schools; age differences were evident regarding the mode of technology most prevalent for cyberbullying; more Internet-based bullying through social networking sites was reported than through mobiles phones, especially as students got older; and cyberbullying appears to be related to age and access to technology, with older students more likely to engage in cyberbullying than younger students.

In conclusion, the international perspective on cyberbullying draws attention to the following: issues concerning cyberbullying are similar across different continents, both in terms of how to measure and define it, and what the experiences of it are. In some countries, however, there is no word for bullying, so one has to be devised. In Europe and the UK, many countries are actively pursuing greater understanding about all aspects of this phenomenon, just as was done for traditional bullying, and are pooling their individual expertise and knowledge. In the US and Australia, prevalence rates differ according to whether a definition, a set of behaviours or both are provided, and to which age groups.

Cyberbullying is everyone's problem. It is a social relationship issue, facilitated by the advent of new and emerging technologies which provide platforms through which individuals and groups can interact with each other across time and place. As these technologies converge, and Web 2.0 progresses to the next iteration, greater understanding of all behaviours in relation to technologies is required. ∎

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