Chapter 46

"A Large Can of Worms":
Teachers' Perceptions of Young People's Technology Use

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology use is increasingly impacting on the lives of young people. To gain a deeper understanding of the perceived impact of young people's digital technology use, 2 focus groups were conducted with 14 teachers recruited from 2 schools. The focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The analysis revealed three themes: changing social dynamics, risk and (ir)responsible behaviour, and disclosure and reporting of cyber bullying. Participants discussed how digital technology was shaping young people's social identity and impacting on established norms when interacting in the social arena. A number of benefits were attributed to technology use but participants also recognised young people's naivety and tendency to anthropomorphise the internet. Finally, there was a perception that young people underreported their experiences of cyber bullying and some of the challenges faced when tackling cyber bullying were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

For over 40 years, numerous studies have examined the short- and long-term consequences of young people experiencing face-to-face bullying. Together, these studies have reported that experiencing higher levels of face-to-face bullying are associated with higher levels of loneliness, depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and suicidal ideation (Allison, Roeger, & Reinfeld-Krikman, 2009; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Gibb & Abela, 2008; Jackson & Cohen, 2012; Lund et al., 2009; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Singh & Bussey, 2011). However, more recently, the changes in digital technology has meant that new forms of technology are increasingly being used to bully others. Despite variation in the reported

prevalence rates of cyber bullying from 6.5% (Jones, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2012) to 72% (Juvoven & Gross, 2008), a number of high profile cases of young people committing suicide following cyber bullying (Moerno, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e) has prompted concern amongst researchers and educational practitioners. The majority of the research conducted to date has examined young people's experiences of cyber bullying; however, teachers' perceptions of these experiences are somewhat unclear. Therefore, the current study addressed this issue through conducting focus groups with teachers to examine their perceptions of young people's digital technology use and cyber bullying.

Similar to experiences of face-to-face bullying, cyber bullying has been associated with elevated levels of distress, loneliness, depression, psychosomatic symptoms, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Li, 2010; Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2007; Sourander, et al., 2010; Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010). In addition, despite the potential for cyber bullying to extend beyond the school day and occur at any time (Anderson & Sturm, 2007; Slonje & Smith, 2008), experiences of cyber bullying have also impacted on young people's school adjustment. For example, a population based study of 13- to 16-year-olds from Finland reported that those young people who reported experiencing cyber bullying also reported feeling less safe at school (Sourander et al., 2010). Moreover, research with American 10- to 15-year-olds found that those who reported experiencing frequent online harassment were more likely to have missed school and had more detentions and suspensions over the last year than those who had experienced no or infrequent online harassment (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007). Similarly, more recent research with young people from New Zealand found that experiencing cyber bullying via text messages was associated with a greater propensity to avoid school (Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja, & Williams, 2010). However, Huang and Chou (2010) found no link between cyber bullying and academic performance in Taiwanese junior high school students.

Parallel to the concern about young people's technology use and cyber bullying, there is also recognition that schools are also increasingly using technology to deliver and facilitate the curriculum (Shariff & Hoff, 2007). Some schools are now providing their students with lap top computers and other forms of technology to allow them to complete in school and homework tasks (Underwood et al., 2010). Other examples of technology use impacting on the curriculum include using mobile telephones during the teaching of English in the Netherlands (Sanberg, Maris, & de Geus, 2011), portable web based technology to teach environmental studies to Taiwanese students (Chang, Chen, & Hsu, 2011), and the internet to enhance American students' reading abilities (Jackson et al., 2006). Therefore, given this increase in technology use for learning, it is important that young people are aware of appropriate etiquette when using digital technology (Valentine, Holloway, & Bingham, 2002).

An emerging line of research with educational practitioners has begun to explore their perceptions of the impact of digital technology and cyber bullying on young people. For example, 55% of the 206 teachers working with 11- to 16-year-olds in the UK, reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that unwanted comments posted online are a problem faced by young people (Sharples, Graber, Harrison, & Logan, 2009). Moreover, approximately 80% of trainee teachers reported that they believed cyber bullying was a problem in school and just over half reported that they felt confident in identifying cyber bullying (Yilmaz, 2010). In contrast to this concern and the confidence in detecting cyber bullying, just under half of the trainee teachers reported feeling confident in dealing with cyber bullying. Conversely, a more recent study reported that 25% of high school teachers believed that cyber bullying did not have any long-lasting negative consequences but rather prepared young people for later life (Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, & Ferrin, 2012). Similarly, when compared to face-to-face bullying, trainee teachers reported that cyber bullying was less serious (Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011). Therefore, through the use of focus

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