Chapter 13
Cyber Gangs inside the Classroom

Evelyn Martinez
School Teacher, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Students in classrooms face challenges of which teachers and adults are either unaware or simply do not notice. Jonathan's parents nor his teachers knew about the difficult situation Jonathan was experiencing with his classmates. Like so many parents and teachers, they did not have any reason to suspect that ten-year-old Jonathan was a victim of a cyber gang's activities occurring right in his own living room and inside his classroom.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been a push since the late '90s to make technology accessible to as many people as possible in order to eliminate the gap between those with the resources to access technology, and those lacking the resources; but no true balance or equalizer has been found as yet. And for those who do have access, once students click on that Internet browser icon, a new world opens up before them; a world which might not be the best thing for their life. In fact, today's generation has adopted a new set of standards when it comes to issues surrounding the use of technology. Activities such as illegal downloading, jail breaking mobile phones, and cheating using handheld devices present just some of the challenging technology-related issues we

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-492-5.ch013

face today. While there is a tremendous push to integrate more technology into the educational curriculum, there are many circumstances where such technologies can take a negative turn in classrooms. As teachers look around their classrooms, which typically include many at-risk learners, they see some of these negative influences technology has had on students. For example, while teachers are discussing a topic like literature, students often seem uninterested. But as soon as teachers introduce more trendy topics such as video gaming or mobile access to television shows, these same teachers report a rise in student interest levels. Even at the elementary level, students nowadays act more like mini-teenagers who are trying to grow up too fast; and the Internet may be affording them the opportunity. Children now have access to the Internet even *without* a computer. A Nintendo Wii or Sony PlayStation game console gives children unlimited access to the web as it opens up portals of communication without requiring that the games themselves be played.

Students in our classrooms face many challenges of which teachers and adults are unaware or do not notice; like being bullied into committing forms of cyber crime, or being harassed by groups of students who form cyber gangs. Even if parents and teachers do not always agree on the degree to which technology should be used in the classroom setting or at home, the fact is it is impossible to escape it. Teachers and parents both have to remain vigilant of the kind of access and the amount of involvement children have when it comes to technology. At-risk students are more likely to join real as well as cyber gangs because it offers them a sense of belonging. When students feel a sense of acceptance while doing something that may be hurting people, it can lead to a great danger in our society.

The time kids used to spend playing outside in the sun have been replaced by hours in front of a computer or video game console. This change not only leads to an unhealthy life, but it is creating a whole new wave of crime that goes on behind the scenes without being seen in person. This leads to isolation and depression of young children who are victimized by groups of other students who operate undercover with the sole purpose to hurt others for entertainment.

Although most people use the Internet as a powerful and beneficial tool for communication and education – technology functions wonderfully when used appropriately with interactive learning activities – still some individuals exploit the power of the Internet for criminal or terrorist purposes. The use of the Internet for these negative purposes can be minimized by informing parents and the public of the measures they can take to protect their loved ones from the potential dangers that technology may bring.