

#ThingsIHate:You: A study of problematic social media discourse and how we as leaders
can teach to mitigate the harmful practices and effects on today's children

by

Stephanie Ann Samaras
B.Ed, University of Victoria, 1997

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department of Leadership Studies
Co-Supervisor

Dr. Darlene Clover, Department of Leadership Studies
Co-Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department of Leadership Studies
Co-Supervisor

Dr. Darlene Clover, Department of Leadership Studies
Co-Supervisor

Over the span of the last 16 years of my teaching career I have taught elementary, secondary and adult learners in both traditional classroom environments, alternative school settings and distributed learning platforms. Regardless of the grade, subject or environment I have been an advocate of digital technology in education, and enthusiastically welcomed George Siemens' predicted paradigm shift to connectedness enabled through its uses (as cited in Wikipedia, 2013). However, over the past decade this ability to connect through technology has also lead to an increase in cyber-bullying coupled with inherent risks associated with online environments making the connection between cyber-bullying and social media an important area of study. This study began because of a legal case study I was presented with during a graduate course at the University of Victoria concerning issues related to teachers and the law. The case study is based on a high profile YouTube cyber-bullying incident in Canada. Using concepts such as neoliberalism and the promotion of technology as a 21st century tool for schooling, I reviewed Government of Canada and British Columbian research as well as international research regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the use of technology by humans and in education. These documents provided an overview of debates around the benefits for using the Internet, and contrasted this with risks connected to loss of privacy and possible bullying online (cyber-bullying).

My methodology for the study is grounded in qualitative research in which I used three different focus groups from which to gather data. The first group included graduate students from the University of Victoria enrolled in Leadership Studies. The second

group consisted of members from a Social Justice Committee. The final group represented a team of teachers, administrators and support staff at a Secondary School on a coastal School District in British Columbia. Each focus group observed a video posted on YouTube and the discourse that was left below the posting of the video. Participants were asked to reflect individually, discuss as a group and record their thoughts and feelings for the purposes of the study and as a means to suggest ways to mitigate change. Their comments and suggestions for ways to mitigate change supported research I found and at times pointed towards directions I had yet to consider. Similar to me, the act of viewing and participating in the case study left an impact as to how best to mitigate change through the use of case studies and discussions that helped develop compassion and awareness for cyber-bullying victims. The study concludes with a review of current technology and health and career curriculum as it pertains to issues involving cyber-bullying and promoting socially responsible behaviour on the Internet available to schools in British Columbia, along with information regarding new initiatives including the E.R.A.S.E. bullying website.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to those who have struggled to deal with cyber-bullying and to my two young daughters who I hope will never have to.

“To teach is to model and demonstrate, to learn is to practice and reflect”- Stephen Downes

“We must become the change we want to see” -Mahatma Gandhi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A Brief History

The idea of exploring case studies of cyber-bullying as a teaching tool and discussion topic occurred to me during one of my graduate courses. The course offered an in-depth look at the relationship between teachers and the law. It focused on case studies of teachers and students in the courtroom and one specific case that resonated with me, concerned a young boy from Canada who had been bullied as a result of a YouTube video that was viewed by classmates who afterwards mocked him relentlessly. A decade after the original uploading of the video, it had over 900 million views and was still the subject of active, ongoing ridicule by numerous anonymous accounts (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPPj6viIBmU>).

As I read the comments that were posted I began to see how viewing another person's pain might help to develop empathy towards an individual or situation and I wondered if it could have the same effect for students. If we as teachers can use social media examples to highlight and generate discussions regarding the incredible power of social media along with the corresponding devastatingly harmful effects, it may be possible to raise a greater awareness of the importance of developing socially responsible students who are proactive in their efforts to contribute to an inclusive online environment. This also speaks to the need for teacher leadership.

What does it mean to be a leader? Often leadership is based around an individual's ability to relate to others, to gain their trust, and the ability to motivate others to act in accordance with the goals they have in mind. In this way, leadership comes down to relationships that exist between people in social situations (Watkins, 1989). I believe the concept of leadership has implications in the social media world and I also believe strongly that as educators our role is one of a leader as well as one of developing the leadership qualities within our students.

Statement of the problem and the rationale for the study

Like many others, I believe that social media is here to stay and therefore as school-based educators we must learn how to use social media tools as a means of counteracting the troubling trend towards cyber-bullying. This leads me to my question: How can teachers educate today's student about the appropriate uses of social media and provide them with tools to counter the phenomena of cyber-bullying? Simply blocking social media websites, labeling them as distractions in school and telling students it is wrong to bully others has been ineffective in silencing online bullies, since new cyber-bullying incidents occur daily. In my opinion, rather than banning social media sites, we need to recognize them as important learning tools in the classroom.

I have been an advocate of digital technology as a tool in the classroom for my entire teaching career. It is not my intention to set out to blame social media for the rise in cyber-bullying. Nor is it my intention to seek out strictly negative viewpoints regarding particular websites or individuals. However, my research into problematic discourses within social media seeks to highlight how social media can provide a site where unacceptable behaviour can go relatively unnoticed or unchallenged. The general consensus among many online users is something like 'if someone's tweets offend you, you don't have to follow them.' Worse yet, this approach seems to permeate what teachers say to students as well. Some teachers tell students to stay offline if someone is bullying them. However, perhaps if we, as educators, place bullying incidents under a microscope we may be able to find a deeper understanding of the problem and potential approaches to cyber-bullying. My hope is that through analyzing the ways in which social media discourse is being used to harm individuals, and through discussions with other educators, I can help develop ideas to implement and counter the use of problematic discourse on

social media sites as a tool to cyber-bully as well as highlighting how some participants choose to abuse their position or power online with the intent to harm others.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate the question: how can we as leaders teach in ways to mitigate the harmful practices and effects of problematic social media discourse on today's children? I am defining "problematic" as discourse that involves messages of hate and violence, used to harm others and promoted or published through the use of social media

My specific objectives were to:

- Identify how problematic social media discourse was being used as a medium for cyber-bullying
- Analyze the discourse of a selected number of online texts published and visible to the public on popular social media websites such as, Twitter and YouTube that are accessible to students of any age, to more fully illuminate how hate and potential violence were perpetrated or suggested
- Engage a group of educators in a discussion about my findings on cyber-bullying/ hate and violence and its causes for the purpose of raising awareness and generating a discussion about the impact it may have on students who view it
- Begin to consider as a group how cyber-bullying might be mitigated among students who are digitally engaged

A Brief Overview of the Literature

Social media, cyber-bullying and the importance of developing social capital are topics that have been written about extensively over the last decade. As I began to think about the theoretical framework that I would base my study around I quickly became immersed in research

from scholars around the world who were asking the same questions as me. The challenge was twofold: firstly to show a broad view of the scope of factors influencing students today in regards to their use of technology/ social media particularly in relation to cyber-bullying and secondly, to limit my focus to key theoretical frameworks that would be relevant to my work as an educator in the k-12 school system who is concerned about how hate and violent speech impacts the audience, and in particular students that view it.

My literature review begins with an overview of the climate for technology in BC and Canada using the concepts of neoliberalism, postmodernism and the promotion of technology as a 21st century tool for schooling. The political ideology of neoliberalism can be found within the *British Columbia Job and Education Plan* (2012) since both embrace technology. Next, I present literature that defines and differentiates social media and social network sites. This overview considers the rise of popularity, particularly; the increase in the use of and time spent on social media websites over the last decade and its influences on both students and educators. Consequently, I present research conducted by the Government of Canada (2008, 2009, 2010) in addition to international research regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the use of technology on humans and in education (for example, Barrigar, 2009; Clarke, 2010; Dewey, 2010; Veenhof, Wellman Quell & Hogan, 2008). The research provides an overview of the benefits for using the Internet, and specifically social media, such as the development of social capital, and contrasts this with risks connected to loss of privacy and possible bullying online (cyber-bullying). Studies on high school student's perceptions and coping mechanisms for cyber-bullying are presented to provide a snapshot of the current situation in schools today.

Finally, I conclude my literature review with possible ways to highlight the risks and benefits of social media as a teaching tool in the classroom. The term social media can be described as the "wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate

in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities" (Dewing, 2010, p. 1). This review considers different approaches by educators in different curriculum strands and at different grade levels, as well as from different countries. Although social media has been around for over a decade the use of social media as a tool in education is still under review and as such there is a limited amount of research available from educators who have been successful in implementing it in their classrooms. This is another gap I am attempting to fill, by adding my study into the mix.

Methodology

As I mentioned above, it was through the act of personally viewing problematic online discourse and the emotions this experience evoked within me by that I began to see how the act of rendering problematic discourses *visible* could in fact teach others why it is important to consider what they post online and to better understand the permanent nature of what is done online and through social networks. After considering the different forms of qualitative and quantitative research methods available I determined focus group methodology would be the best fit for my study because it brings together a group with common interests and generates discussions about specific issues (Marczak & Sewell, n.d.). Therefore, I invited participants who were employed in the education industry to join me in a discussion about cyber-bullying. It was my hope these focus groups would provide insights into educators' awareness of these online discourses as well as their knowledge and experience with cyber-bullying.

Significance of the Study

This study is occurring as the BC Ministry of Education is proposing a new education plan with the emergence of technology in the classroom as a central idea and learning empowered by technology as the key action plan. My hopes for this study are to communicate with educators

about social media cyber-bullying and problematic online discourses in an effort to engage a group of educators in a discussion regarding how best to mitigate change and to contribute to developing socially responsible students who are proactive in their efforts to contribute to an inclusive environment. My study is significant in that it considers social media usage, benefits and risks from the viewpoint of educators, both as a tool in their professional lives, but also as a personal expression of their private lives. My study reveals the naivety of educators in their understanding of social media as well as examining the occasional withdrawal from social media due to negative experiences educators have experienced or constraints felt from constantly feeling a need to display a professional image. Many studies (Lane, 2011; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Samara & Smith, 2008; Shariff & Hoff, 2007) have considered how best to protect students from cyber-bullying or how students respond to incidents of cyber-bullying (Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012). My study questions how educators respond to incidents of cyber-bullying and in particular how educators deal with an unpredictable and seemingly uncontrollable social media world in comparison to managing a traditional classroom environment.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for this study, and the diverse thematic lenses used for analysis of the data from my study. I begin by presenting current thinking regarding neoliberalism and the push for technology, particularly emphasizing *British Columbia's Job and Education Plans* (2012), followed by an extensive look into current Canadian and international research regarding the advantages of using social media, such as: professional advancement, expressive information sharing, relaxing entertainment, escapism, companionship and social interaction (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011) which promote a feeling of gratification through relationship development and maintenance (Rosen, 2012). I then contrast these points with the accompanying disadvantages including loss of privacy and potential for cyber-bullying. The advantages and disadvantages of the increasing impact of technology on student lives leads towards a discussion of the potential use and benefits of social media as a teaching tool in today's classroom.

Neoliberalism and Technology

Over half a century ago, scholars began to consider the impact of globalization, new media and technology on the economy and education. In 1945, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization formed in an effort by the UN to encourage peace and universal respect by promoting collaboration among nations. The advantages of globalization include the import and export capabilities extending to all parts of the world, and the interconnection of different countries afforded through the use of technology. However, connection has also come at a cost and is viewed by some as detrimental to individual cultural identities. Neoliberalism is defined as a political ideology and a perspective that is based on market ideologies (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). McChesney (2001) suggests that, "neoliberalism is

almost always intertwined with a deep belief in the ability of markets to use new technologies to solve social problems far better than any alternative course” (p. 1). As such, globalization and contemporary global media have become possible through radical improvements in communication technology, where “speed is of the essence” (p. 1). This development has created the ability to communicate with others around the world in real time through the use of the Internet, mobile phones, and the additional development of social media and social networking tools that allow individuals to publish information to an entire world. Depending on the information that is published, this can be an advantage or a disadvantage. The UN’s effort to use this technology to promote peace and universal respect and collaboration has been challenged through the ability of interest groups to gain support and respect through the promotion of hate and violence.

In a more localized sense, the push for technology and its link to the current economic growth strategy in British Columbia is clear. For the last decade, since Premier Gordon Campbell’s creation of the Premier’s Technology Council in 2001, members of the private sector and academia have been voicing their opinions regarding technology-related issues in British Columbia, with the underlying belief that “building a knowledge-based society will better the lives of British Columbians” (The Premier Technology Council, 2010, p. 1).

Jumping forward ten years the *British Columbia Technology Strategy, B.C. Jobs Plan* and *B.C. Education Plan* (2012) echo the same message, calling for “a vibrant technology industry [as] an essential part of the 21st century economy” (Clark, 2012, p. 1). The Minister of Jobs and Tourism and Innovation, The Honourable Pat Bell actively supports this goal, observing how the “technology industry provides more than 84 000 jobs for British Columbians, with a record payroll of \$5.3 billion in 2009, despite the global economic downturn” (Bell, 2012, p. 1). In addition, the former Minister of Education, George Abbott, stated in *B.C.’s Education Plan* that,

“we need to set the stage for parents, teachers, administrators and other partners to prepare our children for success not only in today’s world, but in a world that few of us can yet imagine” (Abbott, 2012, p. 2). In order to do this “we must make better use of technology in education so our young people will be equipped to use it effectively and ethically” (p. 3). Taken together, this suggests powerful global and provincial discourses that support the positive benefits technology can offer to citizens and schools, particularly learning as I will illustrate through examples in the next section.

Learning Empowered by Technology

One of the key action plans of the *B.C. Education Plan* (2012) is the idea of learning empowered by technology. The Plan says that British Columbians are already leading the country with Internet connectivity, noting “85% of British Columbians use the Internet on a regular basis” (p. 7). *B.C.’s Education Plan* (2012) intends to “encourage smart use of technology in schools” which the Ministry of Education hopes will translate into “better preparing students to thrive in an increasingly digital world” (p. 7). The Plan aims to provide more opportunities for students to develop the “competencies needed to use current and emerging technologies effectively, both in school and in life” (p. 7). To support this increased use of technology; educators will be “given the supports needed to use technology to empower the learning process and to connect with each other, parents, and communities” (p. 7). In addition to an increase in technology, will be “increased Internet connectivity to support learners and educators” (p. 7).

Digital Critical Literacy

In a recent study, Fernandez-Villavicencio, (2010) discusses how to help students become literate in a digital networking-based society. In his study, he notes these actions are motivated

by the conviction of each government that this is an essential and strategic element for the economic resuscitation of their country therefore it has become essential for all persons to gain literacy skills in this digital world.

All governments, not just Spain, or not just Europe, believe that in today's world, countries must more sharply focus their efforts by investing substantial resources in acquiring and learning to efficiently utilize these new ICTs, and to develop new, major ICT-based projects in all sectors and in all spheres (Fernandez-Villavicencio, 2010, p. 125).

There is a need to develop Internet-aware students who are able to critically examine and comprehend the notions of stakeholders. By this I mean students should be made aware that various people are involved with the promotion of, or information provided on websites. Each website has its own hidden agenda and understanding that agenda develops an understanding for the basis of the information it is sharing. Decision regarding authors or sources provided on the websites and even associated advertisers are carefully selected with purposes in mind. For these reasons, it is important to equip students with the tools needed to authenticate information located on the Internet (Barrigar, 2009).

We find ourselves confronted by an Information Society that is characterized by extreme ease in accessing information thanks to the sophisticated discovery tools, the abundance of digital content increasingly available online...one of the most difficult challenges is to evaluate the information once found (Fernandez-Villavicencio, 2010, p. 126).

Beyond the implementation of new technologies, social networking sites such as Twitter, Flickr and Instagram are developing in response to the popularity of earlier sites such as Friendster, Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace (Thelwall, 2009). These technologies are ubiquitous and have become integral to many technology-informed learning environments. In this

next section, I explore literature concerning social media and social networking sites and their risks and benefits to adolescents.

Social Media

What is social media, and how does it relate to Web 2.0 tools and user-generated content? For the purposes of this paper, I am defining Web 2.0 as “websites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier web sites, which may allow users to interact and collaborate with each other through dialogue as user-generated content” (Wikipedia, n.d.). The term social media refers to “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0” (Scialdone, Rotolo & Snyder, 2011, p. 515). Social media can be divided into different categories including the use of collaborative projects such as wikis and social bookmarking, blogs and microblogs, (Twitter), content communities (YouTube), social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Dewing, 2010; Scialdone et al., 2011).

In 2010, the two most popular social networking sites were considered to be Facebook with over 400 million active users and Twitter with 106 million registered users (Click, 2010). Twitter was founded in 2006, and is defined by Wikipedia as, “an online social networking service and micro blogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as tweets. The word twitter is defined as a short burst of inconsequential information”. Since 2010, Twitter has grown in popularity and has an estimated 200 million active users as of February 2013. (Wikipedia, n.d.)

Facebook was founded in 2004, and is defined by Wikipedia as “an online social networking service, whose name stems from the colloquial name for the book given to students at the start of the academic year by some university administrations in the United States to help

students to get to know each other”. Since 2010, Facebook has grown in popularity and has an estimated 1.15 billion active users as of March 2013 (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Social Network Sites

Social network sites are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 221).

Generally speaking, “social networking is the building of online communities” (Click & Petit, 2010, p. 138). Barrigar (2009) attempts to differentiate between the words network and networking from the standpoint that “the term network is an object rather than the action of networking”. As she notes, “the primary function of some sites is not (new) relationship initiation but rather the articulation and making visible of social networks both as they exist and as they develop” (p. 4).

Social media became popular on the Internet in the late 1990’s as broadband Internet became popular and “websites that allowed users to create and upload content began to appear” (Dewing, 2010, p. 2). The biggest attribute of social media is that it offers new ways to collaborate and hold discussions with people online. Social network sites are popular because they satisfy a human need to “investigate and gossip about human relationships” (Thelwall, 2009, p. 40). At the end of 2009, “survey findings indicated that four out of five Canadians who use the Internet were also using social media, and that 57% participated in these media at least once a month, making Canadians the most active social media users in the world” (Dewing, 2010, p. 2). This data suggest that social media is an important area to study and has the potential to be an incredible tool in the classroom.

John Seely Brown is a respected scholar in the field of digital age learning and open source knowledge. His paper *Learning in the Digital Age* (2009) highlights his thinking regarding the possibilities available to society through the use of open source knowledge. He suggests that:

Today's digital kids think of information and communication technology (ICT) as something akin to oxygen: they expect it, it's what they breathe, and it's how they live. They use ICT to meet, play, date and learn. It's an integral part of their social life; it's how they acknowledge each other and form their personal identities (p. 70).

O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson's (2011) study supports Seely Brown's claim by stating that in a recent American poll "22% of teenagers log on to their favourite social media site more than 10 times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day" (p. 800). This information can be useful for educators to understand both the possibilities of using social media in the classroom based on its popularity and the possible distractions social media sites poses for individuals on a daily basis.

Does Technology lead to Isolation?

One major concern for scholars is the question of whether technology in general and social media use in particular leads individuals to become more isolated, more reclusive and less integrated in their communities (Veenhof, Wellman, Quell & Hogan, 2008). The underlying cause of this isolation is understood to be a result of time spent on the Internet taking away from time spent away interacting with individuals in face-to-face situations. In his book, *iDisorder*, Rosen (2012) writes from a psychological perspective about the impact of technology on the mental state of an individual. In his analysis he argues that, many technology users suffer from some sort of "iDisorder"; he links psychiatric disorders and certain kinds of connected/online behaviours. Based on his research he argues technologies coerce us to act in ways that may be

detrimental to our well being. I found his argument to be of interest, as it directly related to a disagreement I had with a member of the community over four years ago in the editorial section of the local newspaper. I had opposed her statement that the use of technology in schools was contributing to making students mentally ill and obese by alternatively suggesting it was the unsupervised use of the technology, not the technology itself. Rosen (2012) agrees that the behaviours onset through the use of technology can be offset through developing a healthy balance and a simple awareness.

However, it can also be argued that the Internet allows users to become more involved in their communities (Veenhof et al, 2008) and in fact through the use of virtual online communities the Internet offers some users the opportunity to participate more. These same authors (Veenhof et al, 2008) present evidence that users of the Internet are at least as social as those who do not use the Internet and spend as much time with family, friends and in their community. The underlying assumption is that Internet use is “synergistic with other forms of interaction, helping to maintain and to arrange contacts in between physical interactions” (p. 6). That in fact, it is possible for an “increase in the social interactions of users if online activities are considered to be as valid as their in-person counterparts” (p. 6). Veenhof’s (2008) study highlighted examples of rural communities, immigrants and perceived minority groups where the use of the Internet allowed users to feel a sense of belonging and connection that they were not experiencing in their present community setting.

The paradigm shift toward more connectivity enabled through the use of technology would appear evident from the research provided above. Technology and specifically the Internet allow individuals to connect with others on a global scale, to relate to one another based on common interests and to share knowledge, experiences and cultures: in other words, to *build social capital*. However, the same opportunities to connect also create the potential for losses of

personal privacy and safety making the use of technology a double-edged sword. This makes it important to recognize that as we open ourselves up to meet others and learn in new ways, we must also learn and teach others how to protect themselves from unknown threats that can have devastating consequences.

Risks and Benefits of Social Media

The impact of social media on Canadian society and ways in which it enables people to interact with others is “not yet clear”, since these modes of communication have only recently became widespread (Dewing, 2010, p. 3). O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson report, *The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families* (2011), outlines the potential risks and benefits of social media use by Tweens (generally understood to be children between the ages of 10 and 13) and Teens (adolescents between the ages of 13-18). The report argues that “the engagement of various forms of social media is a routine activity that research has shown to benefit children and adolescents by enhancing communication, social connections, and even technical skills” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 800). The report outlines, similar to Veenhof, et al. (2008), how social media sites like Facebook and MySpace enable children to connect with others who share their interests, in addition to classmates and friends. It also discusses their limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, which puts them at risk. This limited capacity is also noted by Shariff and Hoff (2007) in their paper stating, “the virtual space (is) frequented by children, who often have the technological capacity and skill to run electronic circles around their elders; but, who lack the internal psychological and sociological controls to moderate their behaviour” (p. 78).

It is difficult to ignore the growing availability and utility of the Internet in everyday life, including the household, the community and at work. “The Internet’s complexity makes its impact on individuals – and society – hard to assess and any assessment is likely to be

controversial" (Veenhof, et al, 2008, p. 5). The Internet continues to evolve and is "already embedded in most Canadians lives" (p. 5). This evolution has "deeply affected the ways in which we communicate and exchange information" (p. 5). In order to understand possible reasons why the Internet has become so "embedded" the next section reviews the theory of uses and the gratifications people receive from these uses.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratification Theory is a "theoretical framework that is used to study how media, including social media, are utilized to fulfill the needs of users with different goals" (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011, p. 2323). This theory has been applied to a variety of platforms including blogs, Facebook, and Twitter to "answer foundational questions about the motivations for using social media" (p. 2323). For example, "one study found seven separate uses and gratifications for maintaining personal journal blogs (online diaries for social networking sites): They keep a record of one's thoughts, improve writing, allow self-expression, afford access from anywhere at any time, allow the sharing of information with others, help pass the time, and provide a social community" (Rosen, 2012, p. 35).

Another study examined the different uses and gratifications from Facebook and instant messaging. The study discovered social networking could provide users with gratification in six different ways: entertainment, affection, fashion, problem solving, sociability, social information and the use of instant messaging promoted a feeling of gratification through relationship development and maintenance (Rosen, 2012). Smock et al., (2011) study "used factor analysis to extract nine distinct scales of motives for using Facebook: habitual pass time, relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, companionship, professional advancement, social interaction and meeting new people" (p. 2323). These studies appear to promote the concept that "there are a variety of reasons to spend time doing online

activities, and many of them can be beneficial to the psyche" (Rosen, 2012, p. 37). In addition to uses and gratifications theory is the potential use of social media in developing social capital. Two noted benefits realized through social media relate to the potential to form relationships and professional advancement, which contributes to the ideas presented in social capital theory.

Social Capital Theory

“Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Tomai, Rosa, Mebane, D’Acanti, Benedetti & Francescato, 2010, p. 265). Generally speaking then social capital theory is an idea taken from psychology and “includes all of the benefits that we gain from our social relationships” (Rosen, 2012, p. 36) and reinforces the statement and common belief that it isn’t just what you know, but whom you know.

In 2008, The UK organization, Becta, completed a research report, *Meeting their potential: The role of education and technology in overcoming disadvantage and disaffection in young people*, in which they reviewed how social capital could form supportive connections among people. According to Becta, “social capital is a measure of the networks within a community which give a person access to useful information and opportunities” (p. 29). Further, Becta (2008) argued technology can be “used as a social and cultural tool for sharing information and experiences through peer-to-peer networking and communities of interest; for example, making and maintaining friendships or developing a knowledge around a particular hobby or interest” (p. 57). Becta also notes that the “growth of personal websites, weblogs, and social networking software may provide many young people in particular with opportunities for self-exploration and creative self expression, not otherwise available to them.” (p. 58). This is important, especially for “young people in isolated rural communities” since it has been

suggested that “Internet access not only allows children to extend the scope of their knowledge acquisition but also (allows) children to extend their personal horizons as social actors offering a way of escaping from the spatial and social constraints of rural life” (Valentine & Holloway cited in Becta, 2008, p. 58). It is not so much that rural living is directly related to being part of a disadvantaged group, however, studies have shown (Becta, 2008) that rural communities are statistically at a disadvantage technologically speaking with slower Internet connectivity, broadband width, system providers, and in addition to less opportunities for positions or advancement in the field of technology compared to a metropolitan city. However, technology can also “support disadvantaged members of minority groups, particularly those with concealable stigmatised identities – for example, homosexuals- to increase self- esteem through acknowledgement and reinforcement of that identity (McKenna & Bargh cited in Becta, 2008, p. 58).

Other scholars believe social media “allows teens to accomplish online many of the tasks that are important to them offline: staying connected with friends and family, making new friends, sharing pictures, and exchanging ideas” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 801). Socialization and communication is typically the largest noted benefit for any age using social media and for teens and adolescents the benefits can reach even deeper, extending into their view of self with an enhancement of individual creativity and the fostering of individual identity. Additionally, deeper benefits are also extended to their community and the world with opportunities for charity and volunteering, and the expansion of online connections, which affords the opportunity to connect with diverse backgrounds building “respect, tolerance and increased discourse about personal and global issues” (p. 801).

Privacy Concerns

One characteristic of social media is that content can be copied and shared or found through online searches. Drawing from a study entitled *Social Networking Searching and Privacy Issues*, (2011), “as users share a wide variety of information on social networking sites, concerns are growing about organizations’ access to personally identifiable data” (Qi & Edgar-Nevill, 2011, p. 75). The idea that users need to protect their privacy from other users, in addition to protecting themselves from the very networking sites they are providing their personal data to, can be very alarming (Barrigar, 2009).

A few suggestions have been made however regarding efforts that need to be explored to change the access to personally identifiable data by social networking organizations. For example, “social network sites should continue work to strengthen privacy settings. Laws and policies should be improved to regulate the social networking searching in its legality, necessity and proportionality” (Qi & Edgar-Nevill, 2011, p. 75).

Cyber-bullying

One of the inherent risks of social media and the Internet is the potential to criticize, bully, or harass another human being. Cyber-bullying has been defined as, “the use of electronic methods of communication, such as the Internet or a cell phone, to repeatedly cause intentional harm or emotional distress” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The effects of cyber-bullying and losing control of your online reputation can be very damaging both personally and professionally. Social media is difficult to monitor since “so many different social media outlets exist, it can be difficult to identify and address attacks on one’s reputation that are published via these channels” (Clarke, 2010, p. 7). A few of the benefits of social media are also risks including the notion that content posted on social media sites “remains there permanently by default” (Dewing, 2010, p. 2)

and the potential for anonymity amongst its users. “It is difficult to know who might be reading content posted” on a social media site, and it is equally difficult to confirm “the identity and motives” (p. 3) of those who post content and the individuals that choose to befriend you.

Carrie Goldman (2012), in her book, *Bullied: What every parent, teacher and kid needs to know about ending the cycle of fear*, writes about a personal experience involving her daughter and the constant nature of bullying afforded to children today through the Internet and believes the reason is related to the availability of the connection as the main reason. “There is no safe house, because the Internet has created a way for us to be connected at all times. This can be a wonderful thing, but it can also be severely damaging” (p. 86).

Goldman goes further by highlighting ways in which every single day people contribute to cyber-bullying through comments left on social media or networking sites, emails, newspaper user comment boxes and so on. The wide spread opportunity to leave or add comments enabled through Web 2.0 technology allows users to speak their mind on a variety of issues in public and private forums, as well as directing their comments towards individuals and larger social groups. “We read news reports about how kids are cyber-bullying each other day and night. Everyone is asking, “How do we get them to stop?” Perhaps we should be asking, “Did they learn it from us? How do we get ourselves to stop? Every single day, adults engage in cyber-bullying, without even realizing it, and the kids are always watching” (Goldman, 2012, p. 131).

A recent research study, *High School Students’ Perceptions of Coping with Cyberbullying*, considered how students cope with cyber-bullying which might in turn help researchers and professionals to determine ways to alleviate and/or prevent the negative effects it potentially causes (Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012). The authors concluded there were three main coping themes used by high school students to counteract bullying, which I outline briefly below.

Reactive coping strategies are used after an incident had occurred and were used in an attempt to end the cyber-bullying or to lessen the negative consequences with coping mechanisms (Parris et al., 2012). The first strategy involves removing yourself from the situation to avoid the negative effect by deleting messages, deleting online accounts, blocking numbers, and simply ignoring the situation. The second strategy accepts that cyber-bullying is a part of life but does not need to be the main focus of a student's attention and efforts; it is simply a temporary thing that will pass with time. The third strategy discredits the bully with a belief that the reason the cyber-bullying is happening is because the bully is not capable of doing anything in person, therefore it is not taken seriously. The final strategy involves having an authority figure step in to stop it from happening or to gain advice on how to deal with it (ibid).

Preventive coping is a way to decrease the likelihood of being cyber-bullied. (Parris et al., 2012). The first method includes addressing interpersonal issues in a face-to-face conversation, which prevents the argument from escalating. The second method is to increase security measures by changing the user's password or limiting identifying information and an overall awareness of knowing which websites that may not be safe or would put them at risk. The increase of security measures helps to minimize hacking of accounts. Another point made by Parris et al is to be aware of actions that may influence cyber-bullying. These may include but are not limited to sharing personal information or pictures on social media websites, accepting friend requests from unknown individuals, witnessing a bullying event of another person, or identifying with online interest groups. No way to prevent coping is the final category; this suggests that individuals believe there is no way to prevent cyber-bullying. (Parris et al., 2012). A selection of students believe there are not any consequences for cyber-bullies since it cannot be prevented and because it is seen as difficult to prove bullying has occurred when the bully remains anonymous or cannot be identified (ibid).

Anti-Bullying School policies

The above study (Parris et al., 2012) also refers to Samara and Smith (2008) who reported that school policies related to anti-bullying were not likely to address cyber-bullying and that such specificity is needed to adequately respond to cyber-bullying incidents that may occur in schools. They acknowledge that cyber-bullying is a gray area for administrators and educators to monitor and control, and make evident the need to develop students with digital literacy skills as well as coping mechanisms to deal with the possible threats they may encounter online, so as to deal with problems as they crop up and before they escalate out of control. These authors are not alone. Many other scholars have written about the necessity for school leaders to protect students online while warning of the possible legal ramifications for both students and schools if they do not (Findlay, 2007; Lane, 2011; MacKay & Burt-Gerrans, 2004; Pell, 1994; Scialdone, Rotolo & Snyder, 2011; Shariff, 2004, Shariff & Hoff, 2007; Shoop, 2005).

Advantages of Social Media in the Classroom

When I initially began my study I came across a few select articles regarding the use of social media in the classroom (Pasquinucci, 2009; Rheingold, 2008; Scialdone et al., 2011; Thomas, 2012; Tomai et al., 2010) and the different administration positions who either favoured its use or adamantly opposed it (Schachter, 2011). “There are superintendents who do not want to invest in social media because they don’t feel it will have a high impact on learning. My suspicion is that they don’t understand the technology yet” (Saron (2011) as cited in Schachter, 2011).

Additionally, selected texts considered ways to connect cell phones to education (Kolb, 2008) and even offered a practical guide for educators on how to use cell phones in the classroom (Kolb, 2011). The guidebook offers case studies from Language Arts, Social Sciences, Math and

Science classrooms, as well as cell phone use for an administrator that covers how to use Twitter on a mobile device. It comes complete with lesson plans that utilize audio phone features, and text messaging features and a final section on how to change policy, creating social contracts, parent information nights, and research regarding how cell phones can improve student learning. “One of the greatest challenges to technology integration are schools themselves. Historically, many teachers and administrators have been opposed to technical change” (Kolb, 2011, p. 178). Kolb (2011) goes further to point out, “Utilizing everyday technologies in the classroom requires altering current bans; therefore, a strong argument that the benefits outweigh the dangers is necessary” (p. 180). Kolb (2011) provides research involving situated cognition that suggests, “students learn better when their educational activities are situated in authentic real-world environments using familiar, authentic tools” (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989 as cited in Kolb, 2011, p. 180).

Facebook

Ideas about how to teach in the new media age, regarding a socially networked classroom are now available for educators including examples of how to use Facebook to teach students (Kist, 2010). Kist (2010) likens the current situation of teaching students about online safety to other examples regarding swimming and driving. “It makes no sense to teach kids to be safe online by preventing them from being online” (p. 99). In one example, Kist, (2010) describes an example of how one teacher uses Facebook, under the radar of his administration team. “Facebook was used to connect the group members with experts in the given fields, most of whom were professors in areas of ethics or philosophy” (p. 98). “The professors began, through anonymous profile accounts, to generate critical thinking on the site by posting “devil’s advocate” arguments in response to blogs and podcasts published about slavery, such as suggesting it would mean the end of candy bars” (p. 98). The end result was significant student

improvement on summative assessment at the end of the unit (Kist, 2010). The use of Facebook as a tool in the classroom also requires the teacher to set up the project in a responsible way. Groups need to be set up in a secure way so that uninvited guests cannot enter, and students will continue to want to check their own Facebook pages, so teachers need to be vigilant if you want them to stay on task, and the social contract has identified an agreement students will not use Facebook for personal reasons (Kist, 2010).

Facebook is not just for high school students either. One case study presented by Schachter (2011) presented ideas regarding how one particular grade one class uses a Facebook page to invite parents, grandparents and other approved guests to check in on the status of the first graders each day, view pictures of the days events, and learn of what the plans were for the upcoming days in class. The page regularly updated posts three to four times a day with announcements about editing non-fiction books, pictures of students in math workshops, or notices about the excitement of starting to type the next day. The teacher in this particular case study drew comparisons to the blog she had used in the past to communicate with parents and her realization that it was barely ever read compared to the undeniable popularity of the Facebook page by families.

Twitter

Twitter is also showcased as a popular tool for some administrators or schools that choose to tweet about upcoming events, school closures, sport results or district days. As one superintendent noted, the emphasis is on sharing good news, including district initiatives. “The more ways you can find to communicate, the more transparent you and your district can be” (Grier as cited in Schachter, 2011, p. 30). Another superintendent noted, despite the limited funds available to schools and teachers, “We can’t afford to fly in author to talk to students, but we can tweet him and ask questions” (Smith as cited in Schachter, 2011, p. 31).

In 2013, several more studies emerged that acknowledged the complexities of using social media in the classroom and despite these challenges made promises the increased student engagement was worth the effort (Abe & Jordan, 2013; Casey, 2013). In the recently published book, *Social Media Tools and Platforms in Learning Environments*, editors White, King & Tsang, (2013) note in their introduction, Facebook and Twitter have become “dominant drivers of future change in information and network technology along with the very functionality of modern society” (p. v). Their goal for their book was to “identify original research in the application of online social media” in education in order to provide the reader with references for “current, unique, innovative and effective uses of social media in education for teaching and learning that might stimulate discussion, innovation and future research” (p. vi). As such, it is a collection of studies and scholars who consider how social media is able to enhance learning and teaching experiences in ways not otherwise possible. Two chapters were of particular interest to me. The first focuses on creative approaches to applying social media in the classroom (Bosman & Zagenczyk, 2013) and the second regards the benefits of collected learning enabled through integrated uses of social media in learning environments (Agarwal, 2013). It appears that the idea of using social media is gaining momentum, and the studies and practical guides will help other educators to implement the use more easily into their classroom if they desire to.

Conclusions

This chapter provided an overview of scholarly research and academic theories related to the decisions made to incorporate technological advances in society and education for using technology in the classroom. It considered research that documented possible disadvantages to using technology and more specifically the Internet, including the suggestion by Rosen (2012) of the use of technology mimicked specific mental disorders and the threat of cyber-bullying. It also showcased a more positive side, highlighting advantages for building social capital and

meeting the potential of disaffected and disadvantaged youths. From an educational perspective, it shows a need to incorporate critical literacy skills (Fernandez-Villavicencio, 2010) and further education for strategies to cope with cyber-bullying incidents before, during and after they occur. As mentioned previously, there have been a great many studies that have considered how best to protect students from cyber-bullying or studies that have considered how students respond to incidents of cyber-bullying (Lane, 2011; Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Samara & Smith, 2008; Shariff & Hoff, 2007). My study considers how educators respond to incidents of cyber-bullying and in particular how educators deal with an unpredictable and seemingly uncontrollable social media world compared to managing a traditional face-to-face classroom environment.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study was to help bring attention to problematic social media discourse and to work with educators to develop and discuss ways to facilitate change in school use of social media. Therefore, focus group methodology was the best choice for several reasons. Group interaction is explicitly used as part of the focus group methodology and data generated from focus groups capitalizes on communication between group members (Flick, 2002; Morgan, 1998). The reasoning for this is that it “produces insight that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1998, p. 12). The obvious strength of a focus group is in the generation of discussions that “reveal both the meanings that people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate those meanings” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 96). “This dynamic and social negotiation of individual views is an essential element of the social constructionist theoretical approach to reality” (Flick, 2002, p. 119).

The challenges of the focus group method relates to the documentation of the data. Flick (2002) in fact notes, “specific problem is how to document the data in a way that allows the identification of individual speakers and the differentiation between statements of several parallel speakers” (p. 122). Morgan (1998) suggests it is “more appropriate to work with strangers instead of a group of friends” (p. 48). This notion of using strangers was also suggested by the ethics committee at the University when I initially applied for approval. My initial request was sent back by the committee with the requirement that during the recruitment of participants it was necessary for me, as the researcher, to make clear that it should be voluntary participation, and that their refusal or decline to participate in the study would not impact our working relationship in any way, nor would I hold that decision against them in the future.

Focus group methodology was useful for generating hypotheses in my study based on informants' insights (Flick, 2002). The evaluation of multiple study populations, the approach I have taken in my study, adds to its authenticity.

An important issue for qualitative research is that of authenticity. In establishing authenticity, researchers seek reassurance that both the conduct and evaluation of research are genuine and credible not only in terms of participants' live experiences but also with respect to the wider political and social implications of research. Authenticity involves shifting away from concerns about the reliability and validity of research to concerns about research that is worthwhile and thinking about its impact on members of the culture or community being researched. Authenticity, then, is seen as an important component of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research so that it may be of some benefit to society (James, 2013).

In my study I attempted to establish authenticity in a number of ways. In the first focus group, I provided participants with a sheet to record their answers and also provided a link to review their recorded answers to ensure all participants were given the opportunity to have their voice heard and I had recorded it correctly. For the second and third groups I ensured that all participants were volunteering their opinions in a manner that was comfortable for them, either through the use of the audio recording and /or through the use of recording answers on a written document. I ensured that all participants were aware their participation was entirely voluntary, and offered the opportunity for participants to remain anonymous on their written handouts.

In addition to this, the members of the first focus group had been working together as a class for a period of time and were comfortable enough to question statements made by their peers, to disagree or voice their own opinions. The members of the second focus group were also well known to each other and motivated to mitigate change in the area of social justice and cyber-

bullying. Finally, the members of the third focus group were a group that had worked together for several years and had community ties to the school, staff and students. There were not any “shrinking violets” in any of these groups. This points to the value of using an intact group for completing a focus group. It allowed for a relaxed setting and open dialogue from the onset that encouraged participation. Finally, the potential leadership qualities of the first group, who were actively engaged in current professional development and graduate studies, the background in social justice for the second group, and the community ties for the final group allowed for a plethora of strong examples and ideas to develop and be recorded as possible ways to effect change.

The focus group setting in each of my three groups case was set up in a way that encouraged the simulation of everyday discourses or conversations. As noted above, all of the participants were known to the researcher and as a result their responses appeared to me to be honest reflections and I believe represent accurately their social knowledge of cyber-bullying, including their own beliefs about the phenomena, their informed prediction of how a student might respond, the subsequent reactions to reading problematic discourses, and their ideas for how to effect change in the practices of schools in terms of technology use, in particular the inclusion of social media as a tool in the classroom.

Recruitment of Participants

In order to form a focus group of individuals interested in developing best practice methods I initially recruited colleagues enrolled in graduate course work at the University of Victoria who were also educators and administrators to participate in a presentation on cyber-bullying. Being that the first focus group was only 20 minutes in length I had only collected a small sampling of notes that proved later on, during the course of analysis, too difficult to generate themes from. In essence, this first focus group acted as a pilot study; after reviewing

this data, I decided to add two additional focus groups to my study with increased duration and audio recordings to provide further data. The first addition was a group of individuals who were part of the Social Justice Committee for a coastal School District in British Columbia. The committee members represent different schools and also include the local teacher's union president. The second addition consisted of staff members, i.e. educators, counsellors, admin and teacher assistants at a Secondary School in British Columbia. The emphasis of the research was for participants to reflect on cyber-bullying, and to express professional views about how to help stop cyber-bullying from occurring. Working with participants from my own school district ensured an environment where this could be done more easily than with an unknown teaching population.

The decision to add additional focus group sessions the second with an orientation towards social justice work and the third within the context of a secondary school, essentially a site where cyber-bullying is a concern for educators, also offered additional possibilities for understanding the data collected based on the “social distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon” (Flick, 2002, p. 185) was possible. As Flick (2002) also observed, “the underlying assumption is that in different social worlds or groups, differing views can be found” (p. 185).

All three focus groups were presented with the same video and it was interesting to note the different comments and observations made by the groups. One factor that seemed evident was the length of time individuals had been in their role and the type of role (for example, teacher, support staff, counsellor, school principal) they had. Additionally their varied levels of personal and professional use of social media was also important to consider as participants shared their level of understanding or in some cases admitted their lack of knowledge.

Description of Participants

The participants involved in this study were all consenting adults. All participants came from various demographics and backgrounds and yet were held together by a common interest in education and leadership. The individuals involved in the first focus group were all completing graduate course work towards roles in leadership and/or developing curriculum. The second focus group involved educators who actively engage in discussion literature to schools in their district. The third focus group involved educators, support staff and community coordinators at one specific high school and provided insight into various viewpoints of how one school in particular is coping with cyber-bullying.

The ages of the participants ranged from mid 20s to mid 60s. Most of the participants were Caucasian, however one of the participants was Asian and four were Aboriginal. The range of experience for all three focus groups in their various roles was between 9 months to 30 + years. They took part in the research voluntarily and there was no risk greater than those aspects they would encounter in their day-to-day lives.

I surveyed the participants in each of the focus groups in order to gain background knowledge into their role in education as well as the length of time in that role for demographic purposes.

Research Design and Data Collection

The structure of the focus group was guided by the open-ended questions presented to the participants on their recording sheets and these questions helped to guide the discussions (Flick, 2002). Participants were then invited to share their comments to generate further, deeper discussions. As a group we began by viewing a video on YouTube, “The Star Wars Kid” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPPj6viIBmU>) and then each participant was asked to

respond independently to an open-ended question in which they recorded their honest thoughts about the video they viewed. The second open-ended question asked participants to consider what teenagers might post on YouTube as a response to this video. Again, group members were asked to record on paper and then share their comments. In the third open-ended question, participants were shown a sampling of actual comments left on the YouTube website and displayed below the video. Each group viewed the range of positive and negative comments posted by anonymous accounts and then recorded how they felt as they read the comments left by others about the video before sharing these feelings with their group members. Based on the date of the focus group, this viewing of publicly displayed discourse varied as new comments were added to the site sometimes within hours of the viewing. Finally, as a group they collectively discussed and recorded ideas regarding how educators and school leaders could mitigate change.

How the Data was collected

The first focus group recorded their information on paper, while the second and third group recorded their information on paper and also participated in an open discussion that was audio recorded. Participants were invited to record their answers to the open ended questions on a sheet provided. In the first focus group, the participants were provided with a one sided form that allowed them to record thoughts and or feelings to the different discussions. The second and third focus group were given a two sided form with similar spaces provided to record data in addition to a place to collect information regarding their use of social media in a personal and professional context as well as their views on social media in education. Participants recorded their own responses, reviewed them with classmates to whatever degree they felt comfortable and were free to revise their comments after the discussion and before handing in their sheet. This process allowed for participants to share with anonymity their thoughts and/or feelings about the questions asked without feeling subjected to the approval of the group. All data collected from

the focus group was based on information recorded by the participants on their individual pieces of paper. Participants had the option to put their name on their paper if they wished to have their responses included in the study.

Participants in the first focus group were asked to provide an email address to be contacted on that confirmed their employment with a school in British Columbia and as a contact address to email transcripts of the study. I did not record the first focus group with any audio or video equipment, nor did I record observations other than to make note of the general ease or comfort of the group members throughout the activity. I did, however, after my initial focus group, make the decision to collect additional data by audio recording of the second and third focus group for the purposes of data analysis. After the data was collected, each participant was sent a confirmation email with a link to the website survey monkey. The participants were asked to log in to the survey to offer an opportunity to review their recorded answer and to edit or modify any recordings they felt were incorrect. The surveys were available to the participants for a period of two month after which it was safe to assume no further changes or edits were desired or warranted by the participants. For the second and third group I did not create a survey option for the review of words. I instead relied on the transcriptions from the audio recording and the promise of anonymity for the participants. In this way, the data is valid and honest, and yet does not place any individuals in a compromising position.

Data Analysis

As I progressed through each of the focus group sessions, it became clear that the discussion was becoming enriched and deeper with each attempt. My skills as a researcher were developing, I was adjusting the conditions of the focus groups and the information provided based on my observations of the prior sessions. For example, after the first study, I lengthened the amount of time from 20 minutes to an hour and added additional questions to the recording

sheet that included questions regarding participant's personal and professional use of social media for statistical purposes. Additionally, after the first session I began to audio record the sessions to enable the possibility of transcribing the discussion. Furthermore, areas that were raised in the literature review were brought out in discussions and shaped the direction of the discourse of the session. During the second focus group session, participants had asked questions regarding the status of the young boy featured in the video clip presently, and so for the third focus group I included a segment regarding his success. It was for these reasons I decided to analyze each focus group session separately in each chapter. It shows the progression of the study in the development of the focus group session and the conversation and reflection that occurred for both the participants and me.

Prior to the analysis of the data it was necessary to document, edit and transcribe the data from each focus group session (Flick, 2002). Since I had recorded two of the sessions, this consisted of playing back the audio recording and transcribing the spoken words of each participant. In reviewing both, the recorded transcripts and the written summaries I noted that some participants who were extremely vocal on the audio recording did not record as much information in a written format. Conversely, other participants who seldom spoke or joined the discussion filled their page with their personal thoughts and reflections, sometimes writing down the side of the page for more room, and one in particular who took hers away to contemplate further and to edit her grammar and spelling before returning it to me at the end of the day. Flick (2002) refers to processes like this which enable participants to record their thinking in multiple ways as a "substantiation of reality in the form of texts (as being) valid in two respects: as a process which opens access to a field and, as a result of this process, as a reconstruction of the reality which has been textualized" (p. 174). Afterwards this "version of reality" is the only

transcript available to the researcher for her interpretation. By producing texts in this way I was able to construct the studied reality and make it accessible as empirical material.

Coding the Data

I used different methods for coding my data in each focus group. In the first focus group I was limited to the written responses of the participants, since I did not make any audio or video recordings of the session. This session was also only twenty minutes in length and did not allow time for a deeper discussion to take place; therefore, as noted earlier, it was only really a pilot study to help me organize the second and third group sessions. Additionally, the first focus group was done prior to the literature review and meant it was not specifically guided by my review of the literature but rather it guided my subsequent review. The act of using a pilot study to collect and analyze data that then guided the direction of my study and research could be described as a process of theoretical coding: “Theoretical coding is the procedure for analyzing data which has been collected in order to develop a grounded theory” (Flick, 2002, p. 177). In other words, my own thinking was anchored in and guided by this initial focus group. In this way the interpretation of the data was the anchoring point for making decisions about which direction to go in next (Flick, 2002). The comments made by the participants in the ‘first focus’ group, although it was really no more than a pilot, helped to offer a glimpse into possible trends for educators in their perceptions about cyber-bullying and their experience with social media websites for personal and professional purposes. The information collected set a framework for the literature and subsequently more official focus groups to be compared against.

My first step in coding was using an open-coding format, which enabled me to consider emergent patterns or interesting comments among the responses. This approach worked well for all three focus groups, however by the third focus group it had become easier to identify themes that had emerged from the previous focus group sessions, ones that aligned with the literature

review as well as new ones that had yet to be mentioned. This approach follows Flick's (2002) observations: "The process of interpretation begins with open coding, whereas towards the end of the whole analytic process, selective coding comes more to the fore" (p. 177).

However, as I completed the literature review, it was apparent from the first focus group data that there were several additional theories and concepts related to my study to be considered that had not been addressed by the participants. The combination of the data from the first focus group and my literature review helped to refine and differentiate categories I wanted to explore and that seemed promising to develop. This approach seems to fit into the description for axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where I determined categories to be enriched with additional data and in hopes that the additional focus groups may be able to elaborate. "Axial coding is the process of relating subcategories to a category. It is a complex process of inductive and deductive thinking" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 99). And as Flick (2002) also noted "in axial coding, the categories that are most relevant to the research questions are selected" (p. 182). In this way the last two focus group analyses were guided with the end coding in mind, and yet open to the introduction of new information. I did very little speaking in either of the two focus groups, but at times when a participant mentioned something that fit into one of these categories I was able to ask follow up questions to gain greater detail from the participant: often this process also invited additional comments from others on the same topic and that helped to deepen the potential for the first focus groups to better inform my research questions.

Ethical Considerations

In my study, I was aware of the sensitive nature of the responses recorded to each of the open-ended questions. In order to ensure honest reflections and responses, participants were assured of their anonymity in the final study and the efforts I made to create options for how they could share their information afforded participants some degree of privacy in terms of sharing

their thoughts and beliefs. All of this was in keeping with the ethical guidelines and processes for data collection, approved by the University of Victoria. When I extended my study to include additional focus groups with different participants, I applied for and received a modification of my ethics approval.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROCESS AND DESCRIPTION OF OUTCOMES OF THE FIRST FOCUS GROUP

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the first focus group that took place at the University of Victoria in July 2012 with 15 graduate students of the Leadership Studies program. The data is based on the oral responses and from data collection sheets. This limits the depth of the analysis due to the lack of words recorded and observations of behaviour. However as noted in the previous chapter, the first focus group was more of a pilot for the study. It was not my intention initially to use it as a pilot, however the length of time afforded the discussion and the lack of audio or video recording proved to be insufficient for the collection of data. I have the minimal data in my study for the purposes of reflection and to show the development that occurred as I progressed through the study. In the final chapter of this thesis, I bring the themes of all three focus groups together. In an effort to code this data I have attempted to organize the written responses into categories identified in the literature review.

Why this Video?

My rationale for the study was based on my own observations of problematic social media discourse and reflections of a YouTube video “The Star Wars Kid” I had viewed as part of an Ed-D 591E course entitled *Teachers and the Law* I had taken in the previous term. As described in Chapter Three, the goal was to acquaint the participants with a high profile cyber-bullying case study as a means of generating their professional and personal responses to this phenomenon.

Organization of the Day

The focus group was approximately twenty-minutes. I presented to them first a case study of cyber-bullying from a social media website.

Tables were set up with four chairs and participants were asked to select a seat of their choice. I began by speaking to the group about the idea of cyber-bullying as a controversial hot topic related to educational leadership and provided the group with a definition of discourse along with related concerns for teachers/students/parents today in regards to the explosion of social media. I also spoke about the relatively little emphasis, in my opinion, occurring in schools regarding the importance of social and ethical considerations necessary for using technology today. Finally, I connected the timing of this study with the BC Ministry of Education's proposal of a new education plan with the emergence of technology in the classroom as a central idea.

During the viewing of the video members of the focus group were encouraged to record thoughts and feelings, they were also given time individually after the video ended to reflect on what they had seen and formulate opinions regarding what came to mind as they viewed it. Afterwards, participants were encouraged to share their thoughts/ feelings. When I initially completed my ethics form, I had not selected the option to record the focus group session through the use of audio or video recordings and therefore I was limited in my observations by circulating the room.

First Reactions

As the group recorded their thoughts and feelings of the video they were watching many of them fell into a pattern of attempting to analyze the young boy's mood or suggested possible reasons for him posting a video. Many of these were quite negative. For example, several participants recorded comments describing the young boy's movements, using terms such as "wild and manic"; and his mood as "angry". Others attempted to rationalize why he was on YouTube believing, "there is something deeper going on, (attention seeking)". One participant wrote: "he seems impressed with what he is doing." and another noted, "it doesn't seem like he

did it as a joke". It was almost unanimously assumed by the group that the boy had decided to post himself on YouTube and that this was a "poor or stupid decision" by the boy who was "setting himself up for putdowns."

Only three of the fifteen participants viewed the boy's actions through a positive lens. For example, one participant noted the boy appeared to be enjoying himself and that it was meant to be fun, viewing it as play. Another described it as "creative expression of a passionate hobby" and a unique was of communicating (his) passion for a particular item. Another participant even encouraged the young boy in this type of activity by stating, "good on him- he needs a theatrical outlet." It is possible the focus group participants' experienced different reactions based on their individual experiences with social media or cyber-bullying. However because it was a very short session, there was insufficient time to go into depth with the members to discuss why they felt this way. This came later in the second two groups where I was able to probe and add information and as noted above, I weave all the responses together in my discussion chapter.

Reflections on Consequences and Risks

After participants shared their personal thoughts and feelings with the group about watching the video, I asked each member to consider what students might think or even post on the website in response to the video. I also asked each member to consider the potential harm this could cause the boy and the school. One of the inherent risks of social media and the Internet is the potential to criticize, bully or harass another human being. The young boy in the YouTube clip was certainly bullied. The participants in the focus group adeptly predicted on their record sheets that potential viewers of the video would "think it was funny" and their comments would "ridicule" him in regards to his "weight", "mental capacity" and opinions about his "value as a human being." I will return to these later in my discussion chapter.

Although many of the participants had anticipated that the young boy would be ridiculed and judged on surface qualities, none of them seem prepared for how “honest” and “critical” viewers would be. One participant in particular recorded comments that noted it was “tragic” while another wrote it was “awful, sad, and scary”. As educators and administrators they recognized these comments could lead to the young boy’s alienation and isolation.

Education Strategies

As the final activity for the focus group, members were asked to discuss and attempt to develop as a group, one or more strategies to implement and help educate students about cyber-bullying. In the brief twenty minutes that I was engaged in discussion with this first focus group the major theme to emerge from the tables was one of education, not surprising from a group of educators. What was surprising was the emphasis on educating students about possible consequences for inappropriate behaviour on the Internet. This was surprising to me as the emphasis was on consequences, and I related that to persuading students to behave appropriately out of fear instead of from a place of compassion, empathy or understanding.

Connecting to the theme above, the majority of the participants felt that a crucial step was to educate students about how to protect themselves from making mistakes on the Internet that can impact their future. A few participants suggested students needed to be taught preventative measures before posting, and to weigh out the pros and cons before sending material out that millions of people can access. For example, one participant felt students “needed to know the consequences of the non-immediate and distant responses associated with cyber-bullying.” This theme continued to be reinforced by members of the focus group who cautioned that students needed to be told to “manage what you do, what you post.” While another one mentioned it was necessary to “teach students that what goes on the Internet stays there forever.”

This can be seen in several different ways. The first is from the viewpoint of the person being bullied. It is difficult for students, or anyone, to comprehend how their careless or hateful actions or words could affect others and for how long. What seems to be a passing remark, or a joke, could have a lasting impact on another person.

Secondly, words and actions on the Internet leave a digital footprint that can be tracked and held against them for future opportunities. It is difficult to know all of the different variables involved when two people interact online, and so ideally teaching students to ensure they are comfortable with their words being visible for the rest of their lives is one way to ensure they understand the message and the idea behind the permanency of the Internet.

Thirdly, students may put themselves into vulnerable positions on the Internet that could cause them harm in the future, by giving out personal information, or sharing photos or videos of themselves that would be embarrassing or harmful to their future opportunities if found and copied on the Internet.

All three of these examples are from the viewpoint that the best way to educate students and to encourage appropriate behaviour is to warn them of possible consequences for acting poorly. The idea of increased security of oneself and awareness of how one's actions may influence cyber-bullying is noted in the literature (e.g. Parris et al, 2012).

Conclusions

This focus group made several suggestions of positive uses of social media for the classroom I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Seven when I offer examples of how social media is being used in classrooms presently and suggestions for what can be done. As noted, this initial focus group was a form of pilot for my study and therefore very limited; however, it did point to some alarming responses by teachers and administrators and also provided me with the information I required to strengthen the study. The next chapter is the analysis of the second

focus group with the Social Justice Committee and reflects the modifications of the format of the focus group and a different study population.

CHAPTER FIVE: DESCRIPTION AND FINDINGS OF SECOND FOCUS GROUP

The chapter provides a description and analysis of the second focus that took place in April 2013 with a group representing a Social Justice Committee for a coastal School District in British Columbia.

Organization of the Day

I invited 6 members of the Social Justice Committee members to participate in an hour-long focus group session regarding cyber-bullying. The Social Justice Committee meets on a monthly basis to discuss upcoming events and to help distribute information to the schools in the district. I had arranged for the focus group to take place during a scheduled committee meeting and as such all members were advised by email prior to the meeting of my intent to lead a focus group regarding cyber-bullying.

As members entered the room each one was given a copy of the consent form and page that contained an outline of the focus questions for the activity (Appendix C). Participants were asked to record their observations and reflections on the paper as we progressed through the activity and had the option to include their name at the top of the page to leave it anonymous. Some members participated in the discussion but did not complete the recorded sheet. I advised the group that I would be recording the session for data analysis purposes and advised committee members to read through the consent form and sign the document prior to the beginning of the session. All data collected from the focus group was based on the information recorded by each individual on their individual sheets and the recorded discussion that took place. Tables were set in a row that formed a semicircle with chairs around the outside of the tables. Participants faced a screen where I had displayed the projection from my laptop.

The Social Justice Committee has many different facets to which it provides support, including but not limited to initiatives involving gender equality, sexual preferences, environmental concerns and anti-bullying. Members are also involved in legal matters that relate to social justice concerns within the district. The concern for legality became quite evident during the focus group discussions, as I will illustrate.

Over the school year, we had met as a group to discuss different social justice issues and to help communicate between the committee and the schools we represented. I had communicated my work in the area of cyber-bullying and advised the committee of my thesis work. As a group many members commented that they felt overwhelmed by the increase in the use of technology and the amount of cyber-bullying that was taking place on the Internet. While initially some members felt the Social Justice Committee were not able to deal with such a huge task other members suggested that it was for that reason that we needed to start to get involved, to learn, to try to mitigate change. This was a primary catalyst for completing the focus group with this intact group.

As in the initial focus group, I hoped this session would offer the members an opportunity to speak about how they viewed social media in education. I also hoped to gain insight into their background as a teachers/administrators, to canvas their use of social media personally and professionally, and to explore the problematic discourses of one social media website. For this second focus group I had modified the recording sheet (Appendix C) to include a place for participants to include demographic information about themselves in reference to their personal and professional use of social media.

After the focus group members recorded their personal information I asked them to turn over the page and I spoke to them about the two minute video clip I was about to show them. Discussions were audio recorded as per my ethical application.

The participants spoke candidly about the viewing and many participants took the time to see the person on the video as a real person. By that I mean, their immediate thoughts were that the two minute video clip did not give the audience any background information about who he was, or that this is something he loves to do and so on. It was a short clip, out of context and the members felt that it was easier for others to mock him based on that premise. The discussions that took place began with their own personal thoughts of viewing the young boy featured in the YouTube video clip, which were at times humorous, such as when one participant suggested “For me, its hard not to think that is funny, because it’s funny, well at least at first and then I think well how does that work out you know online, I mean being cyber-bullied because of that...it’s mind boggling how it would just snow ball.”

Innocence and Vulnerability

As noted above, one theme from this focus group was around innocence and vulnerability. The first participant opened the thinking on this by highlighting two different perspectives:

I thought that maybe if he was my child and I saw it, I might talk to him about the world out there and how not everyone is that nice and you might want to think about what you are putting out there, because you are setting yourself up. But at the same time, why should he have to? You know, like why shouldn’t he be able to? He isn’t hurting anyone. He isn’t harming anyone. Why shouldn’t he be able to put whatever he wants to on there and we just have to educate other people if you don’t like it, don’t look at it?

This final question is extremely interesting. Why indeed should someone not be able to post what he or she want and is it just a matter of education? Another participant suggested that the education need was perhaps something related to life skills. He argued that student were not able “to think of the implications of putting something like that on YouTube. Like, he just seems

so, himself, and excited about what he is doing and into it.” For others, the concerns were more around how to physically stop the world from being mean to the “innocent, or vulnerable” people who are part of it:

That’s true, and I think that is what we have to do but there has to be some kind of physical, you can’t just stop everyone, by telling him or her that it is not a nice thing to do. If they have access to the Internet, if they have access to bully someone through the Internet, it is going to happen, so how do you do that? How do you block it? Can you stifle it?

Of course, there has always been bullying on the playground, so this kind of comment could also refer to any form of bullying, and not just cyber-bullying. Bullying has always been seen in a localized sense in schools. The introduction of the World Wide Web and the ability to humiliate someone on a global scale has made the act of bullying more severe, more dehumanizing, and more crippling to recover from when it is actualized.

Dehumanizing Nature of Cyber-bullying

Another theme to emerge from the data around the notion of de-humanization and its impact on students. One participant spoke about the dehumanizing nature of the video and how the lack of background for the child allows viewers to only see a glimpse of two minutes and leads people to make assumptions about whom he is and why he is acting in this manner. This participant also raised the idea of isolation as a result of being bullied.

What I was thinking about it was that the boy has been very dehumanized. By the creation or showing of it, because of no context and no real showing of human emotion, so the fact that there is no sound, we don’t know his name, we don’t know that this is what he loves to do in his spare time. I think it dehumanizes the person.

This theme of the dehumanizing nature of cyber-bullying and the isolation it could lead to is addressed later on as the participants viewed the discourse and perhaps as a result of this

comment that was raised by one participant prior to viewing the discourse. I will discuss it in greater depth in the upcoming section.

Teacher Naivety

Another key theme to emerge out of this focus group was the notion of the naivety of teachers. This theme was not supported or mentioned in any of the literature that I reviewed and yet it was evident from the responses provided in my focus group sessions. Indeed, what became evident during this discussion was that many of the members had little or limited understanding of how individuals can use and reproduce videos online. For example, group members wondered if blocking or stifling others would work. One participant asked if they were able to stop it, if that was possible and then the participants began to wonder why this video was still up there. They asked questions about who was in control of this video and who had the power to bring it down. “If I put it up can I bring it down?” This discussion evoked a lot of emotion and analysis from the participants, who began to wonder who had put this video up and why it was still up if the young boy had gone through such emotional turmoil regarding the event as illustrated by this comment: “Okay so I am trying to understand, they took them to court, it’s still on, I don’t get that part. Why is it still being able to be viewed if they were so upset by it?” What this clearly speaks to is how little, as noted earlier in this thesis, some of the teachers understood the notion of ‘permanency’ and how things cannot be ‘just removed’ from the Internet, and I will return to this shortly.

And yet another participant seemed to understand quite clearly that this video was a copy of the original and therefore the person on the video was seemingly unaware that it existed and/or was unable to control its use. To which another participant commented “why should it be taken down, maybe the guy doesn’t care anymore.” Which brings forth the advantage of developing emotional disparity, the act of putting on a brave face to overcome feelings of inadequacy until

your emotions are able to catch up with your body language. Or to put it more simply, “laugh it off”!

Permanency

As alluded to above and similar to the first focus group, the second group predicted the comments left underneath the posted video would be negative, and most likely based on superficial qualities. As one participant noted, “I imagine it is comments about his body, because people zoom in on that”. Even more frightening, another joked when I asked for their predictions: “Well if it was very complimentary stuff then we wouldn’t be here.” One speculated that the types of comments and the frequency may have changed from when it was originally posted to the day when we were viewing it, some ten years later with another stating: “Well it might be different now from when it was first put on there. People might begin to see him as a hero and all they hype it has gotten.” However, I was able to show the group that this was not the case.

After I had provided the group members with a few minutes to predict the discourse posted on the website, I began to scroll down the page to allow the participants to view comments that were posted beneath the YouTube video. As their eyes scanned the discourse they were surprised that comments had been left a mere four hours prior to our focus group, leading them to fully grasp the permanent nature of a cyber-bullying. In disbelief one participant asked, “You didn’t just get this live did you? Did you load this on your flash drive?” When I responded that I had not, another asked, “Are you saying these are recent?” Another participant said, “Well she has just done a search with three words (Star Wars Kid) and it (the video and negative comments) comes up.” Others could simply not believe that after ten years it was still receiving attention: “the fact that people are still commenting on how many years now?”

I then pointed out places where YouTube had gone in and withdrawn a user's comment. While some were fine with this, one participant questioned whether or not this made it worse. "So they (YouTube) felt some of this bullying was okay and some was not, they are choosing what is acceptable to say about another human being and what was intolerable."

Debating Legality

As with the first focus group, initially individuals thought that the boy posted the video himself, and when it was discovered someone else posted it, it again changed their viewpoint of what was happening and the severity of the bullying. I had told them the teenager made the video for private reasons but it was found by some fellow students who posted it on the Internet and their reactions to this were "posted it, okay, that's different, Oh that is quite different."

Another participant spoke about recent professional development regarding anti-bullying: When we had a presentation, an anti-bullying thing for my class, they were really surprised that it was a crime and it would be punished as a crime so it needs to be taught to the older grades, and still needs to be known in the younger grades.

Another participant also joined in the discussion with:

At least the kids have the understanding there is a consequence of participating in harassment. So this did happen, but it's over now. It can be shown to the kids, and be said there are potential consequences now.

At this point I asked the members if they felt the money he had received was enough to compensate for what happened to him, and one member responded with the idea that, "money doesn't really heal, does it?" Another quickly added a positive side that, "Well he paid his way through law school."

But how positive a side is this really? Is the legal/financial system a substitute or a salve for cyber-bullying? What cost really? Is this again not just a neoliberal or naïve lens to place

upon this problem? To find out, I probed the group a bit more regarding the idea of suing someone for cyber-bullying to see if I could illicit any more responses. One member felt it should have been more, and another participant mentioned that it would be necessary to consider what someone could actually get, realizing it would be difficult for most parents to afford that amount of money. A participant challenged this idea by comparing it to a car accident, but this was quickly responded to by the mention of insurance, since a family would have insurance to cover the cost of damages. Another member was not surprised by the amount and added, “With the right lawyer you could pretty much get anything.” To which a participant responded, “Until they declare bankruptcy.” A member felt this was an excellent point to share with students today: to point out that their actions have consequences and could cost their parents a great deal of money for their participation in this kind of harassment. There are a number of references that warn of the possible legal ramifications for both students and schools. (For example: Findlay, 2007; Lane, 2011; MacKay & Burt-Gerrans, 2004; Pell, 1994; Scialdone, Rotolo & Snyder, 2011; Shariff, 2004, Shariff & Hoff, 2007; Shoop, 2005)

Ideas for Change

For the final part of the focus group, I asked participants to consider how they felt about the publicly posted discourse presented in real time below the video posted on that could be seen, and more specifically about what potential damage could be done to a student in one of our schools if this happened. Immediately, one of the focus group members spoke, “Well, it’s very isolating isn’t it?” Another added,

Well the humiliation and feeling embarrassed and then going into school. I can see a young person at that age, not wanting to go into that environment. They would end up not wanting to be in the company of anyone who might have seen the video.

I then asked, as teachers do we do enough to facilitate change, and more specifically does the curriculum cover this to a level you are satisfied with? Interestingly, the same participant who mentioned the dehumanizing nature of cyber-bullying spoke about the number of things we have on our plates as teachers and she felt in this regard we are doing lots: “I feel like we do a lot and other things are on the back burner. I guess what I am saying is this IS a really big issue and it IS kind of at the forefront of Health and Career teaching.”

I was a little surprised to hear that in her opinion teachers were already doing enough so I asked her, in closing, to offer some examples of what is already in place in the district so that I could add them to my list of examples. She spoke about the “Kids in the Know” program, and how it was a pretty big part of the Health and Career program and about a counsellor who had done six sessions with the boys and six sessions with the girls with her class.

Conclusions

This chapter presented the views of one Social Justice Committee for a coastal School District in British Columbia in which the participants debated the legality of cyber-bullying on social media websites in connection to the dehumanizing nature of cyber-bullying towards students they, the participants, viewed as innocent and vulnerable and therefore deserving of empathy. Teacher naivety was highlighted through the discussions of the participants’ understanding of the permanency of the Internet in regards to teaching students how to protect themselves online and the disconnect of this knowledge in the focus group members understanding of the motives others would have for posting a video of someone else on YouTube coupled with questions as to why the YouTube video was still visible ten years later after the victim had sought court action. The next chapter is the analysis of the final focus group with the staff of a Secondary School and reflects the viewpoints of that particular high school.

CHAPTER SIX: THE THIRD FOCUS GROUP

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the third focus group that took place in May 2013 at a secondary school in a coastal district. As with the previous two chapters, I outline the structure of the focus group and then provide a thematic analysis.

Organization of the Day

I invited the staff members of the Secondary School, to participate in an hour-long focus group regarding cyber-bullying. I discussed my focus group during a staff meeting and invited staff members who were interested to take part. The aim of the focus group was to present a case study of cyber-bullying from a social media website. Similar to the second focus group sessions, participants were asked to record their observations and reflections on the paper as we progressed through my presentation and had the option to include their name at the top of the page or leave it anonymous. I advised the group that I would be audio recording the session for data analysis purposes and advised participants to read through the consent form and sign the document prior to the beginning of the session. All data collected from the focus group was based on the information recorded by each individual on their individual sheets and the recorded discussion that took place.

Beyond collecting statistics on the recording sheets, participants were invited to offer more details regarding what they may have seen on a social media site that caused them concern and the role educators could play in regards to the use of social media in education. This was a valuable discussion since many of the participants were also parents and they are faced with this dual and sometimes conflicting role. For example, one participant spoke about how her daughter is “friends” with some of her students and so she did not want to be her Facebook friend because she felt that blurred the teacher-student professional relationship. She also commented on how

aware she is of parents who have chosen to be “friends” with their children on Facebook, or their friends, or the children of their friends and she again felt this blurred the adult-child relationship in terms of interests and forms of communication.

Expectations: Teachers as Role Models

The teaching profession, in many ways, demands the professional to be an exemplary role model. One of the participants wrote about how this idea affected or permeated her use of social media.

I am finding I am using it a lot less because I feel like I have to be more cautious about anything I post because it is very public. And that sort of takes the fun out of it. If you have to be, sort of, buffing your image every time you post something on Facebook, that's not very fun. I am doing it for leisure, for fun. If I have to be putting up this very professional image every time I do that, then I, you know I just it's too much work for me, I don't want to.

This kind of pressure on educators to be an exemplar in their public lives leads to many different problems that do not come into play with many aspects of this focus group, such as the fairness of such high expectations at times and how this impacts the personal rights and freedoms of teachers compared to other professionals, such as freedom of speech or association. However, it is relevant primarily because a teacher who uses social media is expected to continue to exude an exemplary role model status, and when it is shown that a teacher has behaved poorly, their position is at risk in the community. By this I mean society and employers have an expectation that teachers behave as examples in both their professional and personal lives, which now also includes online in the social media world. In many cases this would lead to either a false representation of whom that, or any, individual is in entirety or the necessity to have an anonymous or pseudonym to express their real life and thoughts. If one of the uses or gratifications for using social media is escapism, or to record one's thoughts, while also being

aware that there cannot be any expectation of privacy on the Internet, the actions of teachers are always open to scrutiny, which includes their personal thoughts and feelings and how they choose to express themselves.

Another participant spoke about the reasons why she initially joined Facebook and how she has pulled back from her use of it after reflecting on how many people she had accepted into her network of friends and whether that needed to be reduced.

I use Facebook, although I have stopped checking it and using it, mainly because I feel like I need to reconsider how I use it and I was sort of one of those people, two of my closest friends began communicating on Facebook quite regularly and I felt really out of the loop so I started, but then I ended up with a lot of friends that I really don't have a strong connection to.

Another participant stated she had stopped using it altogether:

I was on Facebook in the beginning and that was just to correspond with family and friends and then it just got, there was too much gossip on there for me. And I have had two incidents on there where one of the community members will say or a parent attacked me on there and she didn't say my name but she might as well of, um and for talking down to her son or something and then another incident where it was just gossip. I didn't want to be a part of it, so I signed off. And actually my whole family and I did. My mom my sisters, we're not on there. And if we want to talk to each other, we face time each other on our iPhones. I think it's used in a negative way a lot of the times, Facebook, it can be used positively too, but for me it's been negative.

One of the male participants, a teacher in his forties, had been involved in a cyber-bullying situation and he spoke about it in relation to what was being shared with the group:

I had to talk to administration about that, and it (the Facebook post by a student) got shut down so on and so forth. It's just, what it is, is something I don't like about society in general right now is this, this sort of social gossip, talking behind people's back sort of thing, which, I don't know, I despise.

After the focus group members recorded their personal information and provided some initial written reflections, I asked them to turn over the page and I spoke to them about the 2 minute video clip I was about to show them entitled "The Star Wars Kid" the participants were asked to respond to the video by recording their thoughts while viewing and then later sharing these with the group.

Childlike Play

Initially, the participants related the 15 year-old on the video to a young child, or even their child in some cases. One participant shared the following story that paralleled an experience with her daughter.

I totally thought of my daughter because she likes to play that game, she is currently running around in the backyard with a bow. She makes bows and arrows. She is in grade 6. Some of her friends are far more sophisticated and they are much more interested in things like Facebook and putting on make-up and are mocking her for doing that kind of thing. They think she is childish for doing it and the difference between the little bit of drama that is going on in her life and what happened to this kid is the millions of people that get to watch it as opposed to just a couple of people who see the Star Wars, now he can be teased by millions of people who have never met him. So that is the difference in scale makes what seems like classic drama of being teased for looking silly to being publicly humiliated by the world.

As with the other focus groups, the participants assumed the boy had posted this video himself and the analysis of his intelligence (relating him to being childlike) based on posting a video of him in a vulnerable way being perceived as a poor decision. When I explained the video had been posted by a group of students at the young boy's school it changed their perception of what had happened. To which one participant replied, "Oh, okay, that's different".

Empathy or not

The idea that it was a different case regarding someone posting a video of himself or herself versus someone posting it of another person without their permission led to this comment by one member:

Ah it also reminded me of, and this is one where the kid did put it up, you might remember, a couple of years ago, "Friday, Friday, you got to get down on Friday" it was a video that went viral on YouTube, where you guys had never heard of it. Well, okay I'll tell you the story it's similar and yet different, because the girl chose to do it. Her parents paid for her to do it. She is an amateur singer, and she is 13 years old or so, and they paid to have a video of her singing, which she then put on YouTube. She was actually seeking the attention, looking for fame and fortune and wants to be a singer, and it went viral, but in a bad way, because like millions of millions people watching it to mock her singing and trying to make fun of it because it was bad, it was good in a way, it was an annoying catchy song. But the girl was getting, she is like 13 years old and all she is trying to make her way as a singer and with singers nowadays, she was really getting a lot of really nasty abuse for it on YouTube. You know it was like she got the attention she was looking for but it came with a lot of and you know her parents never intended for her to be getting the kind of abuse that she did. Well that is the case where they actually sought it, so you could criticize why are you putting your daughter on YouTube?

This notion of legality and levels of severity for bullying along with ideas of what was deserved based on actions of self or others leads into another discussion of legalities: this discourse and the theme of crime and punishment, government surveillance, and what is legal to post on a social media site echoes the earlier focus group discussions and this is highlighted again in the next section.

Legality and Responsibility

The question of, “Can’t the police go in?” was raised. “Is there not a way that you can just have it removed?” This led to a discussion of things being removed and reposted again, as well as a discussion of Amanda Todd a grade 10 student in British Columbia who committed suicide in 2012. One participant felt strongly the social media sites needed to take responsibility. “And that’s the issue, I have a problem with social media and YouTube like they’ll be like, we are just the vector and we’re just going to put it out there and not make judgments, but like wait a minute, you should take some responsibility.”

Despite the acknowledgement that the focus group wanted social media sites to regulate what is done online there were negative viewpoints of government surveillance through the use of social media.

And I’ve got kind of a conspiricist [sic] theory thing about me, the less that people know about you, the government knows about you, the better. And you see it all the time. There was a thing on W5, yeah, here this woman had a disability claim with the government, she took a little hike out somewhere and put it on Facebook and (snaps his fingers) government finds out about it, now you lose your disability, so...

The issue of the right to freedom of speech, to say how you feel and what you believe led to the question of where to draw the line. One of the participants felt that the human rights code allowed for some protection from slander and liable, or harassment.

School Reactions and Teacher Naivety

Another repeated theme is that of teacher naivety. The naivety of teachers and their understanding of social media, the Internet and the world outside of the classroom was apparent in their reactions to the video, the emotions expressed and the group members desire to protect the innocent and vulnerable from harm and the outside world. One participant who had recently began her career in education and was in her first year questioned out loud, “Why can’t we have a society where you give encouragement and support to people who express themselves?” And this was met with a responding comment from another participant, a teacher of ten years, that she was “too nice”. To which he offered a darker view of human nature seen through this comments below.

The feelings of the participants ranged from extremely optimistic views of what is possible in society to the other end of the spectrum, with one participant stating openly he had a very dark view of human nature and he didn’t believe we had evolved much further from the baboon stage. When the participants began to question how to have something removed from YouTube his response was that a person, “would need to napalm the YouTube servers and even then it would already be on millions and millions of computers”. This particular response appears cynical and yet in some ways captures the realization of the permanency of the Internet and speaks to his own personal experience with cyber-bullying. It is interesting to note that participants who had not had a negative experience online were viewed as naïve and others who had experienced one or more negative experiences were at the opposite end of the spectrum and in most cases had completely deleted all social media and social networking connections and spoke from a place reminiscent of pain and discomfort.

The teaching profession and school systems in general are based on rules and discipline. There is a system of consequences based on actions, “crime and punishment”. It is difficult for

many participants in the group, to understand why the world of social media did not have the same limitations or expectations that are demanded of other forms of media.

Parent Responsibility

There are limits on educators as to what can be taught. Educators are given a curriculum to follow and adhere to in their classroom along with a time line of when it needs to be completed by. The idea of teaching values is a difficult area to enter in to as a teacher especially if it conflicts with the values that are presented at home.

I am not talking about law suits or legal suits, I am talking about in the classroom, it's not okay to lie about your age on Facebook, and yes your parents may think that's okay, reality is, it's not.

But another participant felt there was pressure on parents to let their children join Facebook, arguing

This is one of the things that really bother me about these sites, like Facebook, and I see Google doing this too. For the kids to sign up they have to say they are 13 and it is universal, um, that the kids sign up with a fake age and I was really getting a lot of heck from my kids because I was saying no, I am not going to let you fraudulently declare your age so you can get on Facebook, and they say but all of my friends are and their parents are enabling them to do this, so basically, but I put the onus on Facebook, really for that, because they are, really all they are doing is covering their own butts, forcing the kids to be fraudulent in order to cover their own butts legally. You know saying, "We said it is only for kids 13 and up, but they are not doing anything to enforce it". If they really wanted to enforce the age limit they could easily do so, all they are doing is asking the kids to self-declare their age when they sign up and it's really reprehensible that they are luring kids in asking them to falsify their age and putting them in an adult environment.

She felt it would be easy for Facebook to enforce but they are luring them into an adult environment and parents are going along with it. The other issue that needs to be considered is the impact on a student when there is conflicting information about sets of values between the home and school. “We are dealing with educating children when we know they may go home to a different set of values or standards.” One participant likened it to a kind of warfare within our society about which values should be taught in schools, alongside trying to teach about equality and human rights to students whose parents may have very strong feelings against certain groups or even races and who speak to their children or contribute to the exclusion of certain individuals or groups based on a different set of values or beliefs. “I look at that and I am thinking we are not as an inclusive society as we profess to be. We talk about it all the time, but the reality is, how many of our kids can we truly say are inclusive?”

The last comment was made by a participant whose role in the schools and community is social emotional learning and character development. She is speaking after years of experience in her position of trying to help form connections and include all members of the community regardless of race, colour, gender, social status or religious beliefs. “This just seems like such a pervasive thing that it almost makes me feel you have to go all the way back down to the bottom, the basis of how to behave as an honest, human being”.

Another participant agreed with that statement, “Yeah by saying, you know they take responsibility by saying ‘We don’t take responsibility’. I think that’s just, yeah...”

Social Media versus the Newspaper

Some of the naivety that was expressed was based on the awareness that social media news and blogs are given credibility by viewers as other forms of media, and this was expressed in their attempt to demand accountability. In particular one participant, with a background as a

reporter with the local newspaper, reflected on the limitations that were enforced on her in her previous work.

It amazes me, cause I used to work for the newspaper. We were very careful about what was published. We wouldn't publish unsigned letters to the editor, like you see on Facebook, you know we weren't going to publish any wild accusations, if you couldn't back them up, we didn't, we wouldn't publish it, and yet for some reason like, Facebook doesn't have any of those responsibilities that an ordinary media outlet, like the newspaper would. You know, I don't get why they get a freebie from those responsibilities.

Perhaps the naivety that exists for teachers or others in similar positions is in fact they are dealing with a social media world that is very different from the professional one they are accustomed to working within and are therefore bewildered or even overwhelmed by the cyber dominance that they are expected to live and work in.

Vulnerability

Holding a personal social media account places individuals in a position of vulnerability and it is in that feeling that many educators feel uncomfortable. The teacher student relationship is an interesting mix of formal respect coupled with an attempt to form bonds that allow a teacher to be approachable and seen as a human being. "I wonder if it's partly because we are uncomfortable with our own vulnerability that when you see someone vulnerable you get, it feels a bit scary".

In contrast to the idea of personally placing yourself in a vulnerable position by electing to have a social media account was the mention of the teacher rating website, RateMyTeacher.com, that places all teachers unwillingly in a vulnerable position online. The website offers a medium for students to anonymously post comments or opinions about teachers.

The site pays search engines to be located near the top of the search results screen, and as a teacher if you Google your name, your rating on RateMyTeacher.com is very likely the first piece of information that appears, along with the name of the school where you work. It is an interesting position to place educators in, since as professionals and role models they are unable to retaliate in any way verbally, or through social media when attacked by unsupported claims regarding their abilities and yet it is, through the use of the Internet, highly visible to others. At this point another participant raised a very interesting point. "This kind of hits a thread for me, it worries me a little bit, we are in a society where we feel it is our right to give our opinion about everything, and it worries me sometimes."

This led the participants into a deeper discussion brought on by the comments of one participant regarding value systems that students are guided with at home compared with the ones guiding schools.

The Ability to Communicate

One participant connected the anti-bullying presentations to the idea of teaching children how to communicate with each other. When the group had observed the discourse left by the viewers of the two-minute video clip, they noted there was actually a really good conversation occurring and then someone randomly said something stupid. This idea that there is a mix of nasty, hurtful comments mixed in with interesting and good conversation caused them to reflect on the effectiveness of the anti-bullying presentations being done by teachers or others at the school.

I really think they were getting some good education about protecting themselves and how nothing is really private online, and they are really vulnerable if they put up personal information, and I think that message was getting communicated very effectively. I really question how effective it has been in getting any of the bullies to rethink what they are

doing. And the bullies include, it's not like there is a special group of people who are evil bullies. My daughter is a pretty good kid, and I have had to talk to her about, look I don't like what you are saying here because that is bullying and you know, she didn't perceive it that way and you know we had to have discussions about it, but you know they all get drawn into it in some way of saying things and just the fact that is kind of being said in the moment and instead of it disappearing it is there and other people can add to their own meanness to it.

When I raised my concern that the idea of social media, the use of technologies in the classroom and this sense of urgency to express thoughts were all problems that society would continue to face and needed to be addressed in education a participant responded with a critical view, "But how do we teach or model for kids the idea of balance or control when we are not fully there ourselves?" It's a good question. It often places teachers in a vulnerable or uncomfortable position to teach about something they do not feel they have achieved a mastery level in. However, as a math teacher and advocate of Peter Senge's double loop theory, I also understand that the best modeling of problem solving for students happens when the educator does not know the answer beforehand. Students need to see educators deal with impromptu problems, to have open discussions about possible ways to solve a problem and also to identify alternative solutions. I think the same is true in the social media world. The illusion that educators never make mistakes needs to disappear. Mistakes and failures need to happen and are just as useful to learning. The discussion that is generated by students and teachers during the act of problem solving, including the metacognition, is where the true learning occurs.

Neoliberalism: "Speed is of the Essence"

The conversation headed towards a discussion of the current state of society, and the re-emergence of the need to state opinions about everything the moment a person feels it, the sense

of urgency to express that is often also the reason for regret and mistakes in social media was raised. The group considered how advances in technology allow people to communicate with others in real time and although this is sometimes beneficial, it is also damaging. The immediacy afforded through the use of technology, and more specifically in this discussion the use of cell phones, allows students to connect and express their thoughts, feelings or opinions whenever it occurs to them and this immediacy offers multiple opportunities for poor decisions to be made.

Cell Phones in the Classroom: Distraction or Useful Learning Tool?

The use of cell phones in the classroom needs to be discussed. As an American study points out as many as “seventy-five percent of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, 54% use them for texting and 24% use them for instant messaging” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 800). A number of students bring cell phones to class and this causes a great deal of problems for some of the teachers in the focus group who saw it as a distraction. The conversation about cell phones brought in a number of different factors. In connection to my research, and as an example for how to teach balance and control in the classroom, perhaps teachers can begin to consider policies related to the use of cell phones in class along with the potential uses and drawbacks. Banning the use of cell phones, in my opinion, does not solve the problem, nor does it teach balance. One member mentioned a study:

Some people are doing studies about that too, you know like whether as a teacher you expect them to have their phone away but they are so distracted because their drive to check it is so strong that it was more beneficial to actually have it out so the teacher could see if they were, like who was interacting with their phone, like the kids could focus better on their work if they could see their phone and...

The use of cell phones in the classroom can be seen as both useful and as a distraction. For teachers there are different approaches to dealing with them based on school wide rules and

individual opinions regarding the usefulness. “I don’t think phones should be allowed in the classrooms at all.”

Some teachers had strategies for dealing with cell phones in class:

As they come in they have to put it in the basket, because it is so distracting, and I say to them you can’t possibly learn anything by looking at your phone constantly while I am trying to teach you. It drives me absolutely bonkers. It is a huge interference.

Parental involvement with cell phones was also raised. Often parents are texting or even calling their children during class times and in a few instances parents have complained when their child has not been allowed to use their cell phone in class. One participant felt the answer was to have a blackout button during class time that cut off the ability to use the phone, but another quickly noted, “There was a school where they did that, they brought in a box that like zapped everybody’s cell phone and there was this, the parents were outraged because they could not contact their children.” So it seems that another part of the issue, once you have the school in agreement about the use of cell phones, is to also get the parents on board with the decisions and the reasons behind it.

When teachers discussed the possible relevance of what a parent would be texting their child in the middle of the class, they surmised it was most likely along the lines of “could you pick up milk on the way home”, and as a group we circled back to the idea that as a society we need to consider how we feel such a need to communicate what we are thinking or feeling the moment we think it. “That is the thing about society, when you have a thought, do you need then, like does your mom need to make sure you get her thought right then.”

Cross-cutting themes

This chapter presented the views of one coastal School District in British Columbia, in which the participants considered, briefly, the potential use and distractions of cell phones in the

classroom, in connection with neoliberal ideals of speed and technology and questioned the ability of students to communicate with one another. These questions tied into an idea of social media websites that are geared towards an adult environment and the availability of access to students who are then placed in vulnerable positions either by choice or environment. These students often lack the ability to critically review the information they are viewing and the skills to authenticate the source and the data. As such, students may unknowingly give as much credibility to social media as they would a newspaper and points to the need to develop critical literacy in the classroom. Through discussions, it also became apparent that the teachers were choosing not to participate in social media and this behaviour was a possible reason that teachers did not understand the possibilities and limitations of social media sites as educational tools as well as stumbling blocks for problematic social media discourse or cyber-bullying.

Teacher naivety rose out of the discussions in regards to the knowledge educators had received in regards to Internet safety, gained through presentations, compared to actual online social media experience not gained, due to negative experiences or lack of use. The participants in the first focus group collectively stated that students, teachers and parents were in need of education regarding how to protect themselves from being bullied online. Ideas such as protecting students from problematic discourse through the act of blocking or stifling the social media sites were considered. In many cases, the focus group participants were uncomfortable with the lack of control they felt in an online social media environment and the apparent lack of consequences or punishment for individuals who were causing others emotional turmoil. In the final chapter I discuss these overarching themes in greater detail in an effort to tease out possible reasons and solutions to notion of teacher naivety with social media.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

During my literature research I found several studies that addressed ways to protect children from cyber-bullying incidents (Barrigar, 2009; Lane, 2011; Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Samara & Smith, 2008; Shariff & Hoff, 2007) however, as I engaged in my focus group sessions and heard the initial recommendations from the participants I realized that the idea of protecting students from vulnerable situations, and loss of privacy (Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Findlay, 2007; Lane, 2011; MacKay & Burt-Gerrans, 2004, Shariff, 2004; Shoop, 2005) had not eliminated the problem of cyber-bullying, as was suggested in the literature. I also began to recognize through the focus study sessions that many educators were viewing the hateful discourse in the same manner as I did initially, with shock and awe. It also became apparent through these discussions that many educators choose not to participate on social media websites. I believe this is due to the contrast online compared to the traditional classroom environment, based on the apparent lack of rules creating environments that are unpredictable and also uncontrollable. This realization that the level of naivety for educators may have an impact on how educators would approach incidents of cyber- bullying began to open up other questions as well. I began to consider whether the disconnect students feel in the classroom (Dewey, 1990; Kelly, McCain & Jukes, 2009; Seely Brown, 2009) could also be related to differing styles of organizations, (Morgan, 2006; Senge, 1990) particularly the top down approach present in most schools versus the freedom exercised through social media websites in terms of Web 2.0 with the ability to interact and collaborate in the process of generating content. Social media website and networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook offer an opportunity for individuals and companies to earn respect which contrasts an obligation of authority or status, which is implied by the command and control narratives of teachers in charge that I hear among participants. However, it is also apparent that respectful

engagement isn't always the case on social media sites; cyber-bullying and anonymous, even hateful comments can be made making social media sites difficult to navigate in terms of trust and privacy in return for the freedom offered. I believe the anti-bullying campaigns and education offered in school would be more effective if educators developed their understanding of digital critical literacy in regards to social media websites.

Do we, as educators, truly understand what we are saying when we speak about the permanency of the Internet? Based on the transcripts from the three focus groups, participants appear to know the words to say to students in the form of Internet safety and yet fail to understand the applications in real life, "Why is this still on there?" For example, the confusion raised by members of the focus group as to why the high profile incident of cyber-bullying (The Star Wars Kid) was still continuing to receive attention over ten years after the initial posting. Furthermore, the idea of "Why can't everyone just be nice?" shows an incomplete understanding of social media as marketing tool, or an understanding of how leaders outside of the education system come into, or remain in power, for example, Machiavellian styles of leadership.

Many studies (Barrigar, 2009; Fernandez-Villavicencio, 2010; Lusk, 2010; McBride, 2011; Nielson, 2011; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Scialdone, Rotolo, & Snyder, 2011; Tomai, Roas, Mebane, D'Acunti, Benedetti & Francescato, 2010; Valentine & Holloway, 2001) have considered the effects of social media on students, however, not many have looked at the implications it has had on the teaching profession from the viewpoint of educators or those in the education field, and in particular whether the image they are expected to present inhibits their level of comfort and use of social media of any kind.

In an attempt to understand the disconnect educators appear to have between school life and social media life, I considered the responses from focus group members in their decisions

to not participate in various social media platforms and considered this in comparison with the data collected by MMS Education, (2011) which gives the reader an impression educators use of social media is increasing. My survey of educators in a coastal School District in British Columbia shows a decline of use with participants, in some cases, opting to delete social media accounts instead of increasing their use. The focus group sessions pointed to the fear that some educators feel towards bringing their personal lives onto social media platforms, in addition to the negative experiences some educators have had previously on their social media accounts.

What might explain this fear? The organization and hierarchy present in today's school system has, for the most part, remained the same since its introduction during the Industrial Age, with the same buildings, timetables, chain of command style administration, sets of rules and consequences (Kelly, McCain & Jukes, 2009) being a staple to that environment. "The reasoning behind such monitoring, of course, comes back to the custodial function that schools have served for many years, with schools serving "in loco parentis". Not only do we have to protect them from the mean world, but we have to protect them from themselves" (Kist, 2010, p. 115). This history could be a reason for how professionalism is now understood as largely custodial, yet must also reflect the power educators have over students. Educators are in a position of power over their students and for this reason there have emerged strict guidelines for professional practices that provide limitations to this power; this rule oriented approach also seeks to control student behaviour and activities in classrooms, as the command and control discourse evident in my focus groups also made evident. However, as contemporary contexts, including the emergence of social media, have shifted power, due to the wider access to information afforded through the use of the Internet the emphasis of the role of the educator as being the expert at the front has been affected.

Freire (1970) predicted decades ago, the role of the educator shifting towards one of a facilitator, and with that shift comes a shift in power and control as well as how respect is earned in the classroom. The information age has provided educators with the opportunity to take on a different role in education and the availability for the access to personal information and lives of educators to be discovered online. In other words, educators have the opportunity to shape their practices and pedagogy in ways that take advantage of these relatively new learning spaces.

Having made this observation, my intention is not to necessarily characterize participants' views negatively, rather to point out the fear of exposure or perhaps even the fear of breaking professional boundaries that some educators may feel regarding personal profiles online through social media accounts and how this may influence their use of social media, and consequently their experience with social media websites and knowledge of legal discourse concerning social media websites. All of these discourses based in established professional expectations influence teachers' ability and willingness to educate students regarding online safety and Internet awareness in terms of cyber- bullying and problematic social media discourse. Furthermore, it influences their comfort level using various social media tools in their classroom with their students.

Different Roles in Education

Within each of my focus groups, participants had a plethora of experience in education, which was also coupled with varying amounts of time spent in each of these roles. I am reminded of a professor at the University of Victoria that used to speak to our class about the idea of "different ages, different stages", she cautioned us to always consider this when dealing with groups of people that we hoped to lead. Depending on the person, the naivety that is expressed may be a result of their age, or position in education. For example, a teaching

assistant in her sixties may not have a solid background of experience in the area of social media, or she may have a great deal based on family that lives abroad and her attempts to communicate and stay connected through the use of Skype and Facebook with her grandchildren. The teaching assistant may also see firsthand how often students are texting each other while the teacher has his or her back turned to the board.

Additionally, the assistant's perspectives may differ from a young counselor with nine months of experience, recently graduated from university, who serves as a non-enrolling teacher without classroom teaching duties who uses social media to stay in touch with friends from university. Her daily work environment may present numerous situations showcasing the dramatic effects of bullying on individuals in the school through individual counseling sessions with students. She may even have specialized training and regularly attend professional development in the area of bullying or victimization, as well as knowing intimate family history details of each student.

An administrator may approach bullying from a top down approach, based on strict policy guidelines handed down from the superintendent or perceived pressure from staff or parents. Depending on the length of time in the District or that particular school, the power of the administration team and the respect given is based on past decisions and successful implementations of school goals and codes of conduct.

Elementary school teachers work with younger ages and may want to protect children by blocking hurtful words and wanting everyone to be nice to one another. These are formative years and it might be considered inappropriate for certain languages or visual imagery to be shown to that age group. An educator may need to provide more guidance at a younger age in the form of supervision and prior knowledge to their students.

Personal Responsibility

In each of my focus group sessions the level of empathy that was afforded the boy on the case study, and later in reference to other cyber-bullying examples was linked to the idea of personal responsibility. By this I mean that if participants felt that someone posts a video of himself or herself on the Internet, then they deserve whatever criticism is thrown at them. Alternatively, if others put someone's story/video on the Internet, they don't deserve any criticism; rather they are victims and deserve empathy. For example, in the case of the Star Wars Kid, when the participants initially assumed the boy had posted the video on YouTube himself their comments regarding what happened to him seemed to be rooted in a belief that he had brought this on himself. For example, posting his video on a website was described as a "stupid move" that put him in a vulnerable position. Another said, "He is setting himself up for putdowns". These assumptions that individuals are responsible for bringing bullying on themselves was also expressed by a participant in a different focus group in response to the example of a young girl whose parents posted a video of her singing on YouTube: "Well that is a case where they actually sought it, so you could criticize why are you putting your daughter on YouTube?" The opinion that individuals are responsible for putting themselves in positions to be bullied online also appeared to be supported in the literature review (Parris et al., 2012).

When it was discovered the boy was not responsible for the posting of the video, their views changed completely. For example, one participant stated: "The teenager made the video for private reasons but it was found by some fellow students who posted it on the Internet". Another said: "Posted it? Okay, that's different. Oh that is quite different."

But why is it different? The emphasis of the focus group was on the problematic discourse posted below the video, not on determining responsibility for the posting. Instead of viewing the incident of an example of how people feel they can appropriately speak to one another

behind a cloak of protection and anonymity provided through the Internet the emphasis shifts to finding someone to blame for the video being posted in the first place. Instead of teaching children it is wrong to try to hurt someone or make fun of them we teach them it is wrong to be yourself, and if they put themselves on the Internet they are in danger of being bullied. As a teacher, I have heard people speak about the idea of bullying and victimization that focus on how personal responsibility means you ALLOW yourself to become a victim. The idea that seems to be a part of this way of thinking is that people do not have the power to change anyone else, they can only change their reaction to what is happening; a very individualistic stance.

Perhaps the problem is that there is a lack of understanding of the difference between being critical of someone and offering a critique. As one member in the focus group mentioned, when a student is bullying another person the key is to “Call them on it right away.” To which another responded, “They don’t like being called a bully.” Perhaps they, the bullies, in this case, do not see their words or actions as one of bullying another. I am reminded of yet another university professor’s summary of Foucault’s (1988) differentiation between the words “critique” and “being critical”.

A critique is not a matter of saying things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest. It is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. (Foucault, 1988, p. 154).

It is important, I believe as educators, to help students differentiate between the two and this will not only develop their communication skills but also aid in the selection of discourse students may choose when interacting with another.

How to control student behaviour online

The members of each focus group grappled with their inability to control the social media environment. The idea that behaviour should be controlled and that social media is an environment that should be controlled was expressed in their comments regarding social media problematic discourse. If the freedom to post comments publicly in social media is compared with acceptable behaviour at school or in a classroom, rules are set out at the beginning of the year and when an individual does not adhere to the rules there are consequences. If an individual repeatedly breaks rules, the consequences become more severe until the individual is removed from the classroom or school.

Yet can this command and control model be translated into the social media world? When teachers are engaged in activity online, they are equals to other participants, unless they have set up parameters around the activity that allows them to cut off discussion topics or approve of messages prior to the message being sent or read by others. In elementary schools, having a moderator in place is an excellent way to avoid potential problems and mimics the control model described above. However, as students enter high school and teachers branch out to try more public forms of social media in the classroom the opportunity to teach balance and control of emotions, and words, will come at a cost of control. In other words, the social media environment calls for a different approach from control. I believe this is important as Dewey (1990) would suggest, “From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his [sic] inability to utilize the experiences he [sic] gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself” (p. 75).

Where does this command and control perspective come from? Historically schools were set up for two reasons (Kelly, McCain & Jukes, 2009). The first to keep children safe, during the time of the Industrial Revolution when they were out combing the streets and getting into

trouble. The second was to prepare them for the outside world, essentially to become skilled labourers who had the skills necessary to enter the work force when they were of an appropriate age (need a reference for this claim). In many ways these mandates have not changed. For example, the BC Jobs Plan (2012) refers to the push for skilled workers in the area of technology, and notes the rising job opportunities available to the field.

However, as this study has illustrated, social media is seen to be too great a risk for some educators to navigate based on their feelings of being powerless to control the online environment and as such they stick with environments they feel comfortable in. While this choice protects students and teachers from unpredictable situations students who would be at risk in their professional position if students were left roaming the Internet independently or allowing unknown individuals to access student information online.

My purpose in pointing this out, however is to showcase there are many different perspectives and experiences that are involved in a community, a committee, or a school and how each opinion is valid, each experience is their truth, each viewpoint needs to be considered, and the strategies put in place need to be accepted and valued by all members of each team. My study hints at some of these contextual dynamics; additional research is needed to trace how these social, political, educational, gendered discourses operate in teachers' choices to engage or not engage in social media use.

In summary, there are many competing discourses and tensions between them are part of the education system, however the complicated webs of intricate relationships and situations, as well as personality types that comprise a school environment also enrich the organization. Approaches are not always the best fit for a certain type of person, school, or community as each individual situation is always mitigated by outside influences that are unknown to all parties. All of the participants in the focus group sessions were individuals who volunteered

their time out of a desire to discuss cyber-bullying and to help create a safer, and more respectable world for all people. This diversity speaks to the potential for innovative solutions teachers, teaching assistants, administrators can bring to the finding ways in which the context of social media is effectively managed so as to prevent the damage inflicted by the cyber-bullying phenomena.

Common Assumptions among Participants

The participants in the three focus groups appeared to make many of the same assumptions about the video they were asked to view. There were assumptions about 1) personal responsibility, 2) assumptions about how to control student behaviour, 3) assumptions about the power of education, as well as 4) what kinds of educational practices are best used for dealing with cyber-bullying. These assumptions, which highlighted in many cases an overarching theme of teacher naivety, will be explored in the next section.

However it does little to develop skills in regards to online safety and Internet awareness or authentication in the form of digital critical literacies.

What is important about the observations that arise from this research is that despite formal presentations to students regarding what *not* to do online, without real world applications and the opportunity to practice in a guided or supervised environment in the classroom, students are left to navigate social media in their personal lives on their personal time outside of school. It is not difficult to find current education programs in place to combat cyber-bullying, but many are clearly ineffective: cyber-bullying remains a phenomena of concern to educators, families and communities alike, and it appears that the perpetrators are becoming more and more skilled in their ability, through the use of anonymity, and more subtle, indirect messages, to cyber-bully. If anything, the education students have received

regarding how to protect themselves and the consequences of inappropriate action have unintentionally taught them to become anonymous online to protect their identity. Yet, in my opinion, it has done little to develop empathy towards others or improve communication skills online and on social media websites which, I believe, provides an important focus of effective cyber-bullying education.

The Power of Education

In response to their concern for the boy in the video, there was a large proportion of participants from all three focus groups who felt what was needed was more education. By this they meant, educate students, parents and educators about how dangerous it is to put personal information online, how cyber-bullying occurs, and the consequences of inappropriate actions on student future careers or academic goals. In fact, students are told to consider reviewing their online social media accounts prior to application, since it is most likely to be reviewed prior to their acceptance. Pasquinucci (2009) believes it is important for educators to emphasize to students “the importance of examining their online presence and eliminating undesirable comments and images before the job search begins” (p.15). He notes that this is a good time to “make the point to all students that online activity leaves a trail visible to everyone: future employers, parents, graduate school admissions officers, etc.” (p.15).

This approach to educating students about the Internet seems to focus on protection of students from prosecution as well as threat, and does little to develop awareness of others, compassion, empathy or understanding. As one participant noted, “I really question how effective it has been in getting any of the bullies to rethink what they are doing”. This is the question as a reflective practitioner I am struck with repeatedly, and a question that needs to be asked constantly, how effective has the current education about Internet safety been in stopping cyber-bullying from occurring? Educators want to protect students from the outside world, from

themselves and from each other. The top down approach presented in a school setting takes away a student's power to make decisions good or bad and places the responsibility on the educator to preselect websites that will avoid risks to personal safety. It is not so much that I think students should be thrown to the wolves so to speak, however, I question how students will develop the skills necessary to behave in a socially accountable and ethical way if they are not presented with opportunities that require decision-making. This is powerfully illustrated in the case of a recent study where students were sent an anonymous email with a picture of a student and animal merged together and their actions were recorded as to whether they chose to delete the photo, report the photo, or pass the picture on to their friends (insert reference for this study here). In some cases, the picture was even placed on the school walls by students. I applaud this research as it creates a situation where we can explore more effective means by which to engage students in learning that fits their real life experiences and engages them in critical reflection.

Freire (1970) would suggest that,

The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them.

Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible (p. 77).

It is possible educators, administrators and school districts for the most part have consistently avoided social media because it has the potential to cause problems in the school. Is it because this might be considered the path of the least resistance and it places the responsibility elsewhere outside of the school system? While some administrators might believe that social media has no use in education: as Schachter (2011) notes, "Some districts are making the most of popular social networks, others are not choosing the 'like' button" (p. 27).

This idea, of opting out of social media use as a tool in the classroom, is similar to one expressed by some of the participants in the focus group sessions.

Educational Practices for Combating Cyber-bullying

As was noted in my earlier description of the focus groups, the idea of blocking out the problem by banning the use of social media entirely was a key theme. Earlier I also explored where and how these beliefs might come from, including the command and control discourses that have historically been a part of formal schooling. As Thomas (2012) noted, “many schools have extensive censorship measures to block students from accessing sites such as Facebook and Twitter” (p. 22). This is because, he argued, it is seen to alleviate many of the potential problems that arise through Internet use and the potential for harm through the bullying of students. If schools opt to block Internet sites or limit access to the Internet while on school property, it places the onus on parents to be responsible for what their child is doing outside of the school. It mimics the command and control system that is prevalent in contemporary schools.

Yet as I indicated in my literature review, The *BC Education Plan* (2012) supports the notion that learning will be empowered by the use of technology. The use of technology in schools is envisioned as part of preparing students to enter the workplace. The command and control model of cyber-bullying education that blocks and controls access to websites controls the actions of students while they are at school and protects the school and educators from any risks involved with those identified websites and potential lawsuits against the school or administration seem to be inconsistent with this new mandate. This command and control model does not prepare students for when they leave the safety provided to them behind school walls. Nor does it allow teachers to come to terms with an online world that is free from

imposed control and censorship in school environments. It is simply impossible for a student to be protected from a potentially dangerous environment and then be expected to know how to navigate through without danger when that protection is lifted. Protection does not always mean avoidance of danger, sometimes it means looking directly at it and trying to understand it better.

All of the participants in the focus groups are dedicated educators who are speaking openly about how best to protect children, from themselves and from others. Online safety programs teach students to not give out personal information and to avoid websites that put them in a vulnerable position. In many ways, when the members of the focus group speak about posting a video on the Internet as a “stupid move” they are referring to the inevitable result of what has come to be expected and seemingly uncontrollable behaviour in an online world. But this is where the problem lies. Educators acknowledge that this is going to happen, and yet the only protection we seem to embrace is to tell them not to do it.

The idea of protecting students by keeping them off of social media websites while they are in school does not prepare them for what will happen when they inevitably use social media when they leave school. If it can be identified, the main problems with cyber-bullying occur due to poor online communication skills; another approach, one I’ve explored briefly in this conclusion, conceives of cyber-bullying education as a critical skill that can be developed with students. Such a critically informed educational approach might also deal with limited emotional control some students exhibit in their online activities. This could be pointed out, and strategies to help students recognize and control their emotions can be developed and practiced in the classroom. This may also be a route to addressing students who are at risk of committing suicide who are in a vulnerable situation with low self-esteem, self-efficacy or a lack of identity; such programs could build on the development of these areas need to be implemented.

The ability to communicate and withstand critique may be two of the most needed skills for successful individuals compared to any curriculum objective in the development of digital critical literacies and this seen as a large part of the heath and career curriculum in British Columbia. Yet, I am left with the same question, why do cyber-bullying incidents continue to rise, if the current education provided is meeting all of these identified problems? These are questions that I hope to continue to explore in my work as a teacher leader in my own school district.

In this next section of my conclusion, I explore the significance of what I have described in this study as “teacher naivety”, a predominant theme that emerged from my research study.

Teacher Disconnect with Social Media

“Okay so I am trying to understand, they took them to court, it’s still on, I don’t get that part.” This comment and my earlier discussion in this chapter illustrate what I described earlier as teacher naivety. A majority of teachers who participated in this study believe that the courts and legal system should be able to control the cyber world in the same way as they control the social world—through a system of responsibility and punishment. The top down approach to dealing with bullies highlights in many ways teacher naivety about the social media world, and the world that exists outside of school. It is often speculated that students experience a disconnect between what they are taught in school and what is occurring outside of the school (Dewey, 1990; Kelly, McCain & Jukes, 2009; Seely Brown, 2009). I would take this one step further; the focus group sessions often highlighted the viewpoints of teachers who also appear to have a disconnect between school and the world outside. It is not just teacher naivety about how to control social media, but also in their naivety about the uses and gratifications of using social media, “It comes to me being so naïve, like I am naïve in that it never occurred to me

while watching that, that someone else would have posted the video clip." The disconnect between teachers and social media, identified in my focus group sessions highlights a possible reason that current cyber-bullying education has not been more effective.

As noted and described earlier in this thesis, schools are run by rules and systems of organizations that seldom offer students personal choice or freedom to do as they please. Everyone in the school is expected to follow the same rules and this structure is both comforting and confining at times. Rules are in place to protect individuals within the school, ensure safety, and as remnants of past industrial style models of organizations (Morgan, 2006) in which students were being trained to work in factories and follow orders or instructions for assembly lines. Procedures are practiced and there are consequences in place for not having followed the rules. What are the consequences for not following the rules on social media? Who monitors the behaviours online and decides when rules are broken? What, if any, are the rules for using social media? These questions remain unanswered in the approaches to cyber-bullying many of the participants advocated. These contradictions are troubling and warrant further investigation. This is also another area for potential future research.

Digital Critical Literacies in Social Media: The way forward?

My review of the literature, this research study and my own experiences tell me that schools and communities are failing to adequately deal with cyber-bullying, since it continues to rise and occur. Part of my belief in developing an educational approach that emphasizes critical literacies in both areas of social media and cyber-bullying is based on the assumption that protecting students to a point of blocking social media sites is harmful and sets up students for failure when they are exposed to it when they leave school. Therefore in this final section of my thesis I want to briefly explore ways in which critical digital literacies offer a way forward in terms of educating students more effectively so as to counter the cyber-bullying phenomena.

Firstly, I think it is important to distinguish what I mean when I speak about developing digital critical literacies (Fernandez-Villavicencio, 2010; Rheingold, 2008). To begin, digital critical literacies are teaching students to be discerning regarding the information that they view on social media coupled with their ability to authenticate this information. Secondly, digital critical literacies consider the information individuals feel comfortable posting about themselves on their social networks in terms of their own vulnerability. This idea is linked to the inability of a student to regulate his/her behaviour online (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Rheingold, 2008; Shariff & Hoff, 2007) as being problematic.

Discerning Information Viewed on Social Media

While engaged in the literature review I came across several different examples of ways that social media can be used in the classroom (Abe & Jordan, 2013; Agarwal, 2011; Bosman & Zagenczyk, 2011; Casey, 2013; Kist, 2010; Kolb, 2011; Mouza & Lavigne, 2013; Schachter, 2011), most of these examples stem from developing critical literacies perspectives. In Chapter two, I cite Fernandez-Villavicencio (2010), who suggests that the act of using Web 2.0 and Social Networking tools in education will help students and teachers develop critical literacies. A few key skills and understandings have been identified as becoming a necessity for the 21st century learner and one such skill is the ability to filter information; by this I mean to authenticate sources as well as scan and navigate websites and the Internet in general for relevant or pertinent pieces of information or data relating to an individual's selected topic or question. This is seen as a critical skill to teach as it develops the ability to seek and retrieve high quality and highly relevant information. Further, "these new skills are required not just by students and learners, but also by teachers, administrators, government policy makers and business employers" (Fernandez-Villavicencio, 2010, p. 128).

Social Networking Vulnerability

Howard Rheingold's article, *Using social media to teach social media*, (2008), claims students today "learned how to learn new kinds of software before they started high school. They know the Internet not as a transformative new technology, but as a fixture in their environment" (p. 25). Because of their tech 'savyness' at such a young age these "young citizens are both self-guided and in need of guidance" (p. 25). Students need guidance in conducting Internet searches, authenticating websites, regulating their behaviour, and making good decisions on social media regarding the information they share about themselves, the people they choose to let enter their network and the comments they post in public forums. This can be modeled for students both at school and at home and discussed openly in a way that elicits feedback instead of scrutiny. In this way, the student is making decisions on their own and then reflecting on these decisions through discussions and the sharing of information.

This idea is supported by Thomas (2012) who states that social media technology "can be used by students for more than just socializing and posting photos of each other. Students can critically engage in the world around them if they feel the skills they are acquiring are relevant to their own experiences." (p. 23).

Examples for the Classroom

An example of digital critical literacy might include a study or discussion regarding popular Twitter accounts. It might consider common characteristics of accounts that have large followings, comparing similarities and identifying anomalies. It might also look at which YouTube channels have a large amount of subscribers and consider again possible reasons for popularity. It might even consider a reflection of the people they have "friended" on Facebook

and their reasons for allowing these people into their networks. Perhaps a critical question regarding why certain pictures are “liked” on Facebook, and what it means to be popular on social media would be a useful approach. Students could also consider various stakeholders in the social media world, such as advertisers, or the CEO of various companies to consider what their agendas are in reference to the development of the website or the attraction of online users. Students can also consider the reporting and commenting on current events in the world through the use of social media compared to news reports on television or in print.

Communication

Many of the difficulties faced online through problematic discourses of social media and cyber-bullying stem from student difficulties communicating as it is believed the reason the bully is going online is because they are unable to do anything in person (Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012) or alternatively, their inability to regulate their own behaviour (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Rheingold, 2008; Shariff & Hoff, 2007). The British Columbia Ministry of Education has produced an integrated resource package that lists curriculum guidelines for language arts, health and safety of students as well as career development, both of which make direct references to forms of effective communication. These documents can be used as a guide for teachers to help students develop communication skills relating to cyber-bullying.

The Language Arts K-7 (2006) document also refers to the development of oral language (speaking and listening) abilities, and the development of reading and viewing abilities and in reference to extended or critical thinking. As such strategies regarding accessing prior knowledge, predicting, making connections and asking questions begin in Kindergarten and are developed through engaging in discussions and creating representations after reading and

viewing that reflect on the text and confirm meaning. Perhaps social media discourse can now be considered as one option of text to reflect upon as students develop these skills. Beyond that are the skills of contributing and making connections, retelling or restating and asking questions for clarification and understanding. Going further, the curriculum then considers the purposes for writing such as to develop voice by showing individuality through personal, informational and imaginative writing. It is not difficult to see how the world of social media could easily be adapted into the language arts classroom and its fit with these curriculum outcomes.

In particular, The Health and Career Education K-7 (2006) document lists the prescribed learning outcome of “describing the nature and consequences of various forms of bullying behaviour, including the potential effects on those who are bullied and the potential consequences for students who bully” (p. 33) in the grade three curriculum document, gradually increasing to one of “demonstrating behaviours that contribute to the prevention of stereotyping, discrimination, and bullying” (p. 37), in the grade seven curriculum document. It also includes ways to help students recognize a “power imbalance and lack of empathy” (p. 37) in relationships.

The grade 8 and 9 Health and Career education curriculum (2005) document naturally builds on what was developed in the lower grades to an outcome that expects students will be able to “describe effective and appropriate responses to bullying, discrimination, harassment, and intimidation (e.g. recognizing discrimination when it occurs, encouraging communication and empathy, promoting responsibility and accountability, speaking up on behalf of others, identifying support services)” (p. 21). It is interesting to note that the two documents have been in circulation for about seven years suggesting that there have been avenues through which to better prepare students for online communication; yet as a society there remains an overwhelming expression of feelings about how there is a need to better handle cyber-bullying.

Media examples emphasize that the problem continues to be students who do not know how to effectively and empathetically communicate with each other. Does this mean that the current programs are not effective in teaching these life skills? I am not sure, however, it is disappointing to see a curriculum that incorporates the ideals of communication and empathy at the same time that students are struggling with low self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Is there a connection that we are missing between the curriculum and the real life situation that occurs in the hallways or online? This needs further study.

E.R.A.S.E. Bullying

Near the end of 2012, the British Columbia Ministry of Education developed the E.R.A.S.E. bullying website in an attempt to combat bullying in schools. E.R.A.S.E. stands for Expect Respect and A Safe Education. The vision for the site is to foster safe schools and prevent bullying, stating, “every child deserves an education free from discrimination, bullying, harassment, intimidation and violence” (<http://www.erasebullying.ca/policy/policy.php>) and is an effort to build on British Columbia’s Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools Strategy (2004). The focus of the 2004 strategy was to create schools with a sense of connectedness and school community.

E.R.A.S.E. bullying has gone one step further by building on the initial approaches included in the curriculum documents referenced earlier by adding components that emphasize that these the need to prepare all children regardless of gender, race, culture, religion or sexual orientation. The main goal of this approach is to ensure that every student is and feels safe, accepted and respected. The strategy calls for the whole community to take responsibility for preventing and dealing with bullying.

The website also provides resources on policies to guide schools. These resources include

a link to the Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools Policy and guide, the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order, A Framework for Diversity in BC Schools as well as the BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility. In addition to this there are several pieces of legislation that impact the development of school policies, procedure and practices. These resources include the Constitution Act, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Rights of Aboriginal Peoples, Multiculturalism Act, BC Human Rights Code, Official Languages Act, Youth Criminal Justice Act, School Act (British Columbia), Statement of Education Policy Order, School Regulation and the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order.

The website even goes so far as to provide a place to report bullying online at the click of the button. Part of the E.R.A.S.E. initiative is education about bullying through a positive proactive lens. As a school and community issue, the call is for everyone to have a role in promoting positive mental health and wellness as well as positive social behaviour. It is suggested this can be achieved through an integrated approach to prevent, address and/or reduce bullying by developing partnerships with schools, parents, community and police. (<http://www.erasebullying.ca/safe-schools/safe-schools.php>).

My own experience illustrates an important point about educator and student familiarity with this high profile government program. During a recent grade seven-transition day I had the opportunity to meet with groups of grade seven students who were making the transition to high school the following year. The day was set up to welcome the students to the school, to introduce various teachers, administrators and to participate in activities that encouraged team building. I had requested to provide a workshop on bullying as part of a social justice initiative and as part of my group each student viewed the E.R.A.S.E. bullying website and answered questions related to it. I was surprised to discover that many students did not know of its existence and so we spent some time navigating the website as a group to discover what

information could be found on the site, exploring useful links, videos, and the area that could be used to report bullying anonymously. On the site was a link to the YouTube video, “To this Day Project” by Shane Koyczan, a Canadian slam poet (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92DfnPY>). The video focuses on the words, “you have to believe they were wrong” in reference to surviving bullying. After we watched the video the students recorded what they liked about themselves and others in their group and then shared it with each other, in an attempt to begin to build self-esteem and friendships with classmates. I saw this approach as a useful one, particularly given the context of my study and how what we know about cyber-bullying and the benefits of emphasizing effective communication, self-esteem and critical thinking.

Yet this story also helps to illustrate the complexity of cyberbullying—despite efforts at improving resources and making them widely available, students, parents, teachers, or other organizations may or may not be aware of them. It also illustrates how implementation can vary significantly and provides more evidence of why the issue of cyber-bullying remains problematic.

Conclusions

The process of opening a dialogue about bullying and viewing problematic discourse was a transforming event for myself and for many of the participants in the focus group sessions. In many ways, the act of communicating thoughts and feelings to a group of people helped participants to seek clarification regarding questions about technology and Internet use, as well as to share emotions that were evoked through watching the bullying of another individual. It is not surprising that the act of communicating was helpful to educators or that it is listed as a key way to develop digital critical literacies in social media for our students. One of the most

important things I learned from this study was the recognition that many educators in my focus group sessions have withdrawn from using social media because of a negative experience, or fear of exposure of their personal lives. The other important aspect of my study was the level of teacher naivety regarding social media websites. When I link these two ideas together it implies that one of the first steps to combating cyber bullying is in the professional development of teachers in the social media world. To move forward from this study I want to consider and explore more deeply the negative experiences teachers in my study described, the idea of teachers being bullied on social media websites, and how this might connect to their naivety of social media in general. I would also like to review British Columbia curriculum documents in reference to learning objectives and ways to align these with tools available through social media accounts.

It would also be interesting to develop lesson plans that met the curriculum objectives through the participation in social media. It is my belief that when educators are shown how simple something can be they are more inclined to try it. Having lesson plans in place, previously reviewed websites, and activities prepared ahead of time offers educators a simple, straightforward approach to trying something new. Furthermore, I want to continue to consider ways to explore the development of communication skills in students and teachers, such as circle training, and the building of self-efficacy to contribute to the overall strength of students in the social media world.

As a researcher, the ability to review literature, observe the focus group participant reactions to problematic social media discourse, participate in further professional development in the area of cyber-bullying, social media uses, and grow in my understanding of the benefits and risks for using technology helped to develop my skills pragmatically for dealing with events that occur in the classroom and helping to organize events that could prove beneficial to the community in

which I work and live. It often feels at times that the problem of cyber-bullying will never go away, and it is a hopeless venture to undertake, however, the alternative of turning a blind eye to a problem is not a viable option either. I am reminded of the words of my Philosophy of Leadership professor, “Choose your battles wisely, not everything is worth the effort. When you find the area you are most passionate about and you are facing an uphill battle, ask yourself, are you prepared to die on this hill? If not, let it go.” I believe I have found my hill.

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APPENDIX A: Cyber-bullying Focus Group (#1)

Name:

Are you a teacher or administrator?

How long have you been in this role?

Role play #1- As a staff watch the 2 minute clip, as you watch the clip write down any words or thoughts that come to your mind as you view it.

Role play #2- Share your comments with the group. Contrast what you may think students might write. What potential harm might this cause to the boy? school?

Role play #3- After reading the comments left by the viewers of the clip how do you feel about the discourse?

As a group, develop one or more strategies to implement and help educate students about cyber-bullying.

APPENDIX B: Terri Cohen's BCSTA E-Digest Article

Social media sites – including Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter and Flickr to name just a few – have rapidly become a popular way for students to communicate with each other. The technology has many positive features and when used appropriately can be a powerful teaching tool. But social media also has a darker side, and when misused can be a dangerous vehicle for student harassment and bullying. “Cyber-bullying,” that is, using social media sites to harass and torment someone online, has become an increasingly worrisome trend for educators who continue to struggle with the difficult challenge of enforcing student codes of conduct in cyberspace.

A tragic and high profile case from a Quebec private school illustrates how social media can be misused, and also the social, emotional and legal consequences of such misuse.

The “Star Wars Kid”

During the 2002/2003 school year, a 15-year-old student at a Quebec high school made a video of himself awkwardly swinging a golf ball retriever while pretending he was a Star Wars character (Darth Maul) famous for wielding a “lightsabre” in combat. The video clip shows a rather overweight and clumsy teenager making awkward combat moves for a period of about 2 minutes. The teenager made the video for private purposes, but it was found at the school by some fellow students who posted it on the Internet, and invited people to make insulting remarks about the clip. Within a period of just a few weeks, the video clip was reportedly downloaded several million times. An adapted version of the clip was also apparently created, together with Star War music, text, and sound effects. According to one report, the video at one time was the most popular video clip on the Internet and had been viewed approximately 900 million times.

Unfortunately the teenager was apparently relentlessly teased at school as a result of the video, and according to reports eventually dropped out of school and finished the school year in a children's psychiatric hospital. The harassment from his classmates was, according to the student, "simply unbearable, totally. It was impossible to attend class." Apparently whenever he would enter common areas of the school other students would jump up on tables and chant: "Star Wars Kid!" "Star Wars Kid!"

The teenager's parents eventually sued the parents of the grade 11 students who had published the video clip on the Internet and sought \$351,000 in damages. The Statement of Claim reportedly stated, in part, that the student "had to endure, and still endures today, harassment and derision from his high-school mates and the public at large" and he "will be under psychiatric care for an indefinite period of time." The lawsuit also apparently included information reporting on lengthy chats among the students who had posted the clip, which were alleged to demonstrate that the students were unrepentant.

The lawsuit brought by the teenager's parents was scheduled to be heard in court in 2006, but was eventually settled out of court, according to reports. Details of the settlement remain confidential.

Lessons for School Officials Although the "Star Wars Kid" case occurred several years ago, it remains one of the most high profile cyber-bullying cases in Canada and, given the recent explosion of social media, provides educators and parents with important current lessons about the unchecked consequences of cyber-bullying.

As demonstrated in this case, cyber-bullying is a unique and potentially extremely harmful form of bullying. School officials can do much to address this form of bullying, through continuing to teach students about civic behaviour and codes of conduct, helping students to understand the adverse and damaging effects of cyber-bullying on their

classmates, and engaging in curricular programs that assist students in learning how to appropriately use social media. Additionally, it may be useful for boards of education to review and update their acceptable use and technology policies, including updating the acceptable use of social media and other Internet communication vehicles.

Given that parents and boards of education could be held vicariously liable by the courts for acts of cyber-bullying by students, it may also be prudent as a risk management strategy for school officials to also consider updating both educators and parents about social media generally, and the potential misuses of the technology in particular.

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APPENDIX C: Cyber-bulling Focus Group (#2 and #3)

Name:

What is your role in School District #46?

How long have you been in this role?

Do you have any social media accounts that you use for personal use, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc?

Do you have any social media accounts that you use for educational uses, such as Edmodo, ePals, Twitter, YouTube, etc?

Do you use social media accounts to interact with your students?

Have you ever seen anything on a social media site that caused you concern?

Do you feel that we as educators have a role to play in teaching students how to use social media in a positive and constructive way?

As a group we are going to watch a 2 minute YouTube video clip. As you watch the clip please write down any words or thoughts that come to your mind as you view it. If you feel comfortable please share your comments with the group.

Take a minute now to consider how students might react to watching a video like this. Reflect on words or thoughts they may express.

I am going to show you a few comments that have been posted regarding the video clip you have just viewed. After reading the comments left by the viewers of the clip how do you feel about the discourse? What potential harm might this cause to the boy? school?

On your own reflect on ways teachers can teach to mitigate change regarding cyber bullying. Then when you are ready and feel comfortable share your ideas with the group.