MIDDLE SCHOOL RESPONSES TO CYBERBULLYING:
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

By

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Abstract

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This action research study engaged a small public middle school in the northwest United States in a collaborative process to address cyberbullying issues that often lead to academic and behavior problems in schools (Hinduja, 2010; Olweus, 2010). The specific purpose of this action research study was to address the middle school’s cyberbullying issues in order to understand the problems and generate interventions appropriate to the school setting. This action research study was informed by a theoretical framework related to the "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004) and the concept of moral disengagement, a part of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002; Bauman, 2009; Mason, 2008).

This study used the middle school's existing School Improvement Team (SIT) to establish a collaborative action research team, facilitated by the researcher. The design of this action research study was guided by Stringer's (2007) Look, Think, Act model for the research process. During the Look phase of this study, the SIT participants gathered information, shared their perceptions, and participated in individual interviews related to cyberbullying. During the Think phase, the participants engaged in discussions and analyzed data, incorporating documents
and survey results to further their understanding. During the Act phase, SIT participants made decisions that resulted in the addition of student lesson plans and a school-wide internet safety plan that specifically addressed cyberbullying and the issues that surfaced during the study. Throughout the study, the SIT team cycled back and forth among the Look, Think, and Act phases multiple times. The SIT team concluded that collectively they had "learned so much" about cyberbullying and related issues due to the action research process.

The major outcomes of this study included the understanding that teacher's personal perspectives and fears regarding student technology use and cyberbullying affected their classroom decisions and professional practice. The team concluded that healthy online social skills were distinct in many ways from the skills necessary for healthy face-to-face communication. This understanding resulted in the SIT team incorporating information about online disinhibition (Suler, 2004) into classroom lesson plans. The action research process empowered and motivated the team to engage in a collaborative process to address cyberbullying.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Megan Meier, a 13 year old girl, committed suicide by hanging herself in her bedroom closet after being taunted and told "the world would be better off without you" by a fictitious boy that she had befriended on Myspace, a social networking site on the internet geared for teens. Megan had been bullied in school for years and was having problems on and off with peers. She was often called mean-spirited names such as "fat cow" and "thunder thighs." Her mother, succumbing to her daughter's pleading, allowed Megan to open a Myspace account under some specific rules that her parents thought would protect her from strangers and sexual predators preying on young children. Megan's mother didn't realize that the real predator lived just four doors down the street and was the mother of Megan's friend. Megan communicated with "Josh Evans," a boy created on Myspace by the adult neighbor, Lori Drew, her daughter Sarah, and Lori's part-time employee.

The online relationship between "Josh" and Megan continued for several weeks. One afternoon, after Megan's mother instructed her to log off her Myspace account, Megan became very distraught over negative comments that were made about her by "Josh" and several other girls from her school. She knew that the bullying would continue at school the next day. After closing down Myspace, Megan went to her bedroom. Twenty minutes later, her mother found her in her closet hanging from a belt and unconscious. Megan died the next day. Her family was in shock and devastated. They tried to locate "Josh" over the internet but noticed that his page had been removed.

Several weeks later, a different neighbor called the family to tell them that the fake Myspace page had been created by Lori Drew to spy on whether Megan was making mean
statements about her daughter, Sarah. Unfortunately, at the time, there were few laws governing this type of online behavior. Lori Drew was eventually convicted only of a misdemeanor charge based on violating the Terms of Service Agreement with Myspace (Bauman, 2011; Edgington, 2011). Though rare, Meagan Meier's story raised awareness among parents and educators about the risks of cyberbullying and was an extreme example of the potential devastating effects of cyberbullying.

Typically, students experience cyberbullying through chronic teasing, shaming, and shunning behavior online, which may lead to doubt, fear, excessive worry, and depression. Frequently, cyberbullying involves teasing and taunting over Facebook, a popular social networking site on the internet, where students "friend" each other and then proceed to target specific students through mean statements, "unfriending," ignoring their posts, and not inviting them to events. This activity, especially for girls, can be damaging to self-esteem and trust with peers. Often, this hurtful behavior continues through conventional bullying at school. Typically, students do not report online bullying for fear of the situation escalating, losing their online privileges, and experiencing shame and embarrassment (Bauman, 2011).

Cyberbullying is defined as a type of bullying and form of harassment that is intentional, repeated, and inflicts harm through the use of electronic communications such as e-mail, cell phones, and social networking sites (Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2006; Kowlaski, Limber, & Agatson, 2008). Cyberbullying is increasing in frequency in schools in the United States (Bauman, 2009; Beran & Li, 2005; Olweus, 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010) and affecting students' self-esteem and safety (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Willard, 2007). Whereas conventional bullying involves face-to-face interactions, and the bully often has some physical power over the victim, cyberbullying has altered this power dynamic. Physical strength and
power is not required in cyberbullying. Physical power has been replaced with the anonymity and invisibility that online interactions may provide (Bauman, 2009, 2011; Suler, 2004; Willard, 2007). The anonymity of the cyberbully gives power to the bully rather than physical size and strength (Bauman, 2009; Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Bullying has taken on a new look through the use of technology and internet-based social media, therefore, school responses to this problem must change to address cyberbullying issues (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010).

Recent studies reveal that there are unique issues of concern that are specific to online cyberbullying. For example, (a) electronic bullies can remain virtually anonymous making identification of the bully difficult (Li, 2007); (b) cyberbullying is often widespread and pervasive in schools as messages and images are forwarded rapidly among students (Willard, 2007); (c) bullies may be disinhibited to write inappropriate messages because it is easier to write such statements than speak them to someone in person (Suler, 2004; Dooley & Cross, 2009); (d) adult supervision is lacking in cyberspace as many adolescents have access to computers in their bedrooms, and parents are not knowledgeable about computer-related activities (Bauman, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Willard, 2007); and (e) cyberbullying is occurring around the clock outside of school, rather than just during school hours, resulting in uncertainty about school responsibilities and student rights (Lane, 2011). These distinct concerns specific to cyberbullying present challenges to school personnel as they strive to use digital technology in the classrooms and endeavor to simultaneously protect students.

Recent literature points out that a school's climate is important to academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010), and school climate is negatively impacted by bullying and cyberbullying (Hinduja, 2010; Olweus,
2010). Many students are fearful of attending school due to the teasing, threatening, and shame they experience from bullying and now, cyberbullying. In general, school personnel lack clarity and understanding about cyberbullying, in part due to the inadequacy of information, guidance, and resources (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011). This lack of research and useful resources related to cyberbullying is a problem for school personnel and was identified as an issue of concern by the school team involved in this action research study.

The specific challenges that school staff are struggling with include, (a) understanding the extent of the impact of cyberbullying on student well-being and safety (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010); (b) lack of understanding and supervision of student's computer activities (Bauman, 2011); (c) lack of knowledge about the legal issues and concerns in schools (Willard 2007); (d) student disbelief that school staff care and will take action (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010); and (e) centralized solutions seem ineffective and time-consuming and therefore unrealistic on the local level (Beale & Hall 2007). As a result, school personnel are ill-prepared to respond effectively and consistently to cyberbullying and are just beginning to learn how to deal with this problem (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011).

As a professional educator and counselor working in an Educational Service District, a regional agency that provides services to school districts in Washington State, I am keenly interested in the problem of cyberbullying among K-12 students and the related issues that have surfaced due to the increase in use of digital forms of communication, both in and out of school. My interest in small schools is due, in part, to the support and assistance that the Educational Service District provides to the smaller schools in our service region. Small schools typically lack the resources to provide similar services to students than larger school districts. In this case, I wanted to "piggyback" on supportive services that might benefit this school in addressing their
issues related to cyberbullying (Herr & Anderson, 2005 p. 75). I was interested in engaging in this action research study to assist one middle school with these issues and to generate recommendations that can be shared with other schools and districts. Since digital technology among students is rapidly becoming more accessible (Bauman, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010), the problem of cyberbullying is increasing, and is likely to persist without preventative school responses in place.

**Purpose**

This action research study engaged one small public middle school in the northwest United States in a collaborative process to address cyberbullying issues that were perceived to be causing academic and behavior problems and disrupting the school climate. The specific purpose of this action research study was to address cyberbullying issues by engaging a school team in understanding the issues and generating interventions and responses appropriate to the school setting. In designing and conducting the study, I was guided by the following questions: (a) What are the stakeholder's experiences and understandings about cyberbullying? (b) What is the impact of cyberbullying in the school setting? (c) What interventions, in regard to cyberbullying, are appropriate in the school setting? and (d) How are the school’s cyberbullying issues and responses understood through the lens of a theoretical framework related to online disinhibition and moral disengagement?

This study used the middle school's existing School Improvement Team (SIT) to establish a collaborative action research team, which I facilitated. The membership of the SIT team was diverse and included an administrator, counselor, five teachers representing 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, and two parents. Before launching this study, recent issues the SIT team had addressed included the adoption of a new teacher and principal evaluation process and aligning
curriculum with the "Common Core" standards recently adopted in Washington State. These issues were multi-layered and complex and required several different steps to address. In dealing with these issues, the SIT team had demonstrated capacity to bring to bear the multiple perspectives of team members to address emerging and complex issues and tasks. Since cyberbullying was also a new and complicated phenomena, the SIT team was an appropriate group to engage as an action research team for the purposes of this study.

In my view as researcher, the diverse membership of the team would allow multiple perspectives to be applied to understanding and addressing cyberbullying issues (Molina, Smith, & Pelham, 2005). In addition, action research was a suitable methodology for this study in that it was more likely that school staff would embrace solutions generated through the collaborative action research process and sustain their implementation if the solutions were created by those affected by the problem (Stringer, 2007).

**Theoretical Framework**

This action research study was informed by a theoretical framework referred to as the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004), and the concepts of moral disengagement, a part of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002; Bauman, 2009; Mason, 2008). Suler's (2004) online disinhibition effect served as the primary framework and was incorporated into SIT team discussions and actions during each phase of the study. For the most part, I used the concepts from Bandura's (2002) moral disengagement and social cognitive theory while thinking about the results and conclusions of this study. Further information about moral disengagement and social cognitive theory is provided in the review of the literature in Chapter Two. The basis for the online disinhibition effect was proposed during the 1990s after the digital revolution was well underway and social networking was beginning to surface on the internet. According to the
theory, the disinhibition of online behavior is the result of several factors specifically related to communication through the use of a digital device, such as computers and cell phones, rather than face-to-face interactions.

Inherent in online interactions are several factors that distinguish online from face-to-face communication. Suler (2004) discussed six factors that may result in people saying and doing things in cyberspace that they may not ordinarily do in person. The six factors are, (a) dissociative anonymity, (b) invisibility, (c) asynchronicity, (d) solipsistic introjection, (e) dissociative imagination, and (f) minimization of status and authority. Collectively, these phenomena are referred to as the online disinhibition effect.

First, Suler (2004) suggests that dissociative anonymity occurs when usernames and email addresses do not identify the user. People may hide some or all of their identity. They may also alter their identity or impersonate another user. This anonymity is one of the primary factors that creates the disinhibition effect and may provide a source of power to the individual. Under this condition, people may reveal very personal and private information about themselves and others online that they would never reveal in person. Dissociative anonymity may result in people writing or forwarding mean statements or unflattering or revealing pictures. The second factor, invisibility, overlaps with anonymity but contributes to disinhibition when the user is known to the online community yet is physically unavailable online and can behave in a threatening or harmful way without worry about their own immediate physical well-being. Even with everyone's identities known online, invisibility creates an atmosphere where individuals don't have to care about how they look or how their message sounds, further disinhibiting their behavior. Anonymity and invisibility can create a false sense of safety. This false sense of safety may lead individuals to convey thoughts and feelings they wouldn't normally express in other
situations allowing normal behavioral restraints to become disregarded (Mason, 2008; Suler, 2004).

The third factor Suler (2004) discusses is asynchronicity, which occurs when people email and send messages online that are read and responded to later. For the most part, people do not interact in real time online, which creates a time lag between when a message is sent and when it is received. This may take minutes, hours, days, or longer. Asynchronous communication may have an impact on the emotional reactions of others depending on the situation and state of mind when the message is read. This delayed process may result in responses that are not expected by the sender. Responses may not be aligned with the situation, therefore resulting in misunderstanding and confusion.

The concepts behind Suler's (2004) fourth and fifth factors overlap in important ways. Solipsistic introjection and dissociative imagination are similar in that they distort online perceptions from offline facts. Solipsistic introjection occurs in the absence of facial and emotional cues that inform the communication process. Statements may be misunderstood leading to inappropriate emotional reactions. Without the physical cues of others, the online user may merge self-boundaries with the other person online. Disinhibition occurs when the individual inflates their comfort and trust in the online relationship and continues these conversations online or in one's mind offline assigning character traits and imagining interactions that have not actually taken place. Further disinhibition of behavior may occur as people carry out a fantasy, for example, imagined conversations, arguments, or confrontations that are not real. When this occurs, one's reality may be based on imagination and may disinhibit subsequent online behavior resulting in miscommunication, misperceptions, and confusion. Dissociative imagination may occur when the user splits or dissociates online fantasy from offline reality.
Some people may view their online life as somehow different from their real life and governed by a separate set of rules and laws, therefore committing harmful acts online that they would not participate in offline. Once the computer is turned off, the user may believe they can resume their daily routine and leave their online life behind without consequence (Suler, 2004).

Lastly, when online, a person's social status may not be known to other users and may not have the impact their authority yields when face-to-face. Minimization of status and authority occurs online due to a lack of the usual cues that establish such authority (Suler, 2004). For example, a person's social status, education, dress, body language, and other characteristics often communicate status and authority. Absent these cues, online users tend to minimize authority figures and may disinhibit their behavior with people of authority online. The factors discussed by Suler (2004) suggest that there are several unique characteristics to online communication that may lead adolescents to problem behavior, including cyberbullying.

Online disinhibition is not the only factor that determines how much people disclose or how they behave in cyberspace. The presence of online disinhibiting factors may result in moral disengagement allowing students to behave in a manner that violates their personal code of moral values (Bandura, 2002; Bauman, 2009, 2011; Mason, 2008; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfinger, 2012). For this study, the phenomenon of disinhibition was situated in a broader perspective related to social cognitive theory and moral disengagement (Bandura, 1989, 2002; Bauman, 2009). From a social cognitive perspective, a person's moral behavior is a function of moral reasoning and the self-regulatory mechanism of self-monitoring, judgment, and reactions (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastoretti, 1996). Moral disengagement is used to justify behavior that is in violation of a person's own internal moral standards, thereby reducing
accountability (Bandura, 2002). This perspective informed the team's understanding about how student cyberbullying might develop and persist.

Moral disengagement occurs in a social context and some social settings can weaken self-regulation and reaction, such as the online environment. Socializing through technology rather than face-to-face can weaken a person's ability to assess and understand the immediate reactions of others (Hindaju & Patchin, 2010; Willard, 2007), resulting in cyberbullying. Moral disengagement may occur online as a result of the disinhibition effect (Mason, 2008). Online anonymity, invisibility, and lack of physical cues may provide explanations about how disinhibition may result in moral disengagement. Without facial expressions and body language one can ignore the feelings of others and reduce the impact of empathy and guilt (Suller, 2004; Willard, 2005). In the cyber-world, this is a part of the disinhibition effect and may affect whether students engage in cyberbullying behavior (Mason, 2008; Suler, 2004).

In facilitating this action research study, I relied on these theoretical perspectives to help understand and interpret the issues related to cyberbullying that surfaced during the course of the study. A lack of instruction offered to students that included Suler's (2004) online factors and information that distinguishes cyberbullying from conventional bullying were identified during the course of this study. In addition, this framework was useful to the SIT participants throughout the study. The framework provided a means for understanding online behavior and how middle school students may engage in cyberbullying when often they do not engage in conventional bullying behavior at school. These unique characteristics related to cyberbullying were discussed during each phase of the study and were identified as distinct characteristics that separated the definition of cyberbullying from bullying. Suler's (2004) six factors contributed to the generation of specific lesson plans that were added to the technology curriculum. Additional
ways in which this framework influenced the study are discussed in the narrative report of the study and in the conclusions.

**Action Research**

The purpose of action research is to provide a set of tools that enables people to deal effectively with many of the problems that confront them as they perform their work (Stringer, 2007). Of all the research approaches typically used in education, action research is the most applied and practical design (Cresswell, 2008). Action research is also more democratic and equitable than other types of research, as it incorporates the opinions and voices of multiple stakeholders that are affected by the issue and problem. While action research shares some similarities with qualitative designs, it is different in that research participants themselves are either in direct control of the research or are participants in designing and conducting the study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The role of the lead researcher is like that of a facilitator and co-researcher who ensures that protocols are adhered to and timelines are followed, while the team members actively engage in the research process. As Herr and Anderson (2005) state, action research is "inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community but never to or on them" (p. 3).

Action research is often used as a methodology in schools to improve teaching practices, implement new curriculum, and test assessment tools. It is a practical way to conduct research in schools and assist with data-driven decision-making (Sagor, 2000). Action research uses whatever methods are useful to collect data and work toward solutions for localized problems. Both quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, and observations may be used. As discussed by Grogan, Donaldson, and Simmons (2007), a useful distinction is made between first-person, second-person, and third-person action research. Grogan et al. (2007)
explain that first-person action research involves the researchers introspective inquiry into their own bias, assumptions, motivations, and practices. Second-person action research includes the discussion and "voice" of co-researchers involved in the research, while third-person addresses the audience, or consumer of the research. Participatory action research is mostly written about as second-person voice due to the collaborative nature of the process. The ongoing collective education and understanding of the researcher and the team is a primary goal of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Action research methodologists emphasize that action research is cyclical involving multiple phases of observing and reflecting, organizing and analyzing, and creating and implementing action plans (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Sagor, 2000; Stringer, 2007). Stringer (2007) describes action research as a cyclical framework of Look, Think, and Act. The Look phase includes gathering relevant information and building a picture that describes and defines the issues. The researchers seek to answer the questions who, what, when, where, how, and why. Who is affected by the problem? When and where does the problem occur? Why is it occurring? Answers to these questions support further understanding of the issues. The organization of the data is critical in creating a picture of what is going on. The Think phase includes exploring and analyzing what is happening and creating a theory that interprets and explains. During this phase, the research team may engage in formal data analysis, as well as reflection and dialogue that result in critical thinking about the problem under study. The Act phase includes planning, implementing, and evaluating an action plan resulting from that data analysis process. Methodologists point out that the action research process is cyclical, with phases of the study repeating throughout the study (Stringer, 2007).
Action research methodologists discuss quality standards rather than validity or trustworthiness of action research studies. Herr and Anderson (2005) state that "neither term is adequate for action research because neither acknowledges its action oriented outcomes" (p. 49). Herr and Anderson have linked five quality criteria to the goals of action research. First, Herr and Anderson stress the importance of process and dialogic validity. The manner which problems are discussed and solved in schools should continue to encourage the learning of the participants and the system involved. Peer review of action research is a form of dialogic validity (Grogan et al., 2007). The action research process is a collaborative inquiry that is conducted with others, therefore improving dialogic validity. Second, the importance of achieving action-oriented outcomes is an integral part of the methodology. Success may be measured by the outcome or product created that can be used effectively to resolve the problem under study. Third, Herr and Anderson refer to catalytic validity as the ongoing education of both the researcher and participants. Dialogue and reflection can be a catalyst for learning. Fourth, democratic validity refers to the extent in which the research is conducted in collaboration with participants affected by the problem. Ensuring that results are relevant to the local setting is an important goal of action research. The fifth quality criteria discussed by Herr and Anderson is process validity, which is important to generating a sound and appropriate research methodology. Underlying these quality criteria is the belief that action research is both a rigorous and trustworthy methodology.

Herr and Anderson’s (2005) quality criteria were addressed in this study as discussions and actions cycled between the Look, Think, and Act phases. The SIT members brought relevant documents regarding cyberbullying to the meetings for discussion. These documents improved dialogic and catalytic validity and contributed to individual and group knowledge development.
Democratic validity was addressed through ongoing member checks (Merriam, 2009), bi-monthly face-to-face collaboration with the SIT participants, and email correspondence. Adjustments were made to the data to accurately reflect corrections and comments along the way. As much as possible, verbatim responses are included in the narrative report of the study. Outcome validity was applied with a final action plan that addressed the issues that surfaced during this study.

The action research process and Stringer's (2007) Look, Think, and Act phases were important factors in providing structure and momentum throughout this study. The SIT participants became familiar and comfortable with the action research process, influencing the success of this study. The dynamics of the team became more cohesive during the study, contributing to efficient decision-making and support for the decisions closer to the end of the study period. With the middle school defined as the "community of interest," and cyberbullying as a problem to be addressed, Stringer's (2007) Look, Think, Act Interacting Spiral worked well as the methodology for the phases of action research, as explained in the next section and further discussed in the narrative report of the study.

**Study Overview**

This action research study was conducted from September 2012 through March 2013 in a small public middle school in northeast Washington State. I work at an Educational Service District, which serves 59 public school districts and 47 private schools in this region of the state. I am in a director position, supervising prevention programs for students in the region. My expertise is in coordinating counseling programs, substance abuse prevention, bullying prevention, and other school services that reduce the risk factors that students encounter. The middle school participating in this study is a school within the service region of the district.
During the course of the study, I worked with the middle school as an "outsider in collaboration with insiders" (Herr & Anderson, 2005) and facilitated the action research inquiry in regard to understanding and responding to the school’s student cyberbullying issues. During the past 12 years, I have provided technical assistance to this middle school and consulted with the school counselor and previous principal on student issues of substance abuse prevention and violence prevention. All of my assistance has been as an outsider, working with school staff in the district (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

The middle school is comprised of 6th through 8th grades. During the year of the study, the student population was approximately 230 students, 56.5% male and 43.5% female. The student population included 86.2% White, 3.4% Native American/Alaskan Native, 4.3% Hispanic, 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.3% African American. Just over 2.0% reported two or more mixed races. The special education enrollment was approximately 11%, and participation in the free and reduced lunch program was about 23.4%. The school employed 20 classroom teachers, 90% of which were females, most with masters degrees averaging 13 years of experience.

The school district community consisted of mostly white, middle class families with the parents commuting to work in the nearby larger city. The school principal reported that most students have access to computers and cell phones with internet access. The middle school is situated in a small school district of 938 students with one elementary, one middle, and one high school. The school district is considered rural, but the nearby city is quickly expanding outward and growing in the direction of the community. The district was established after three separate schools combined in the 1950s. This small and quiet community appears proud of its history, which is prominently displayed on the school district's website. The district's mission statement,
as posted on their website, states a commitment to "honoring their past while keeping an eye on the future." The mission statement further supports student development into "capable, confident, and ethical members of the 21st Century."

During the 2011-2012 school year, the school district, in general, performed higher than the state average in most academic measures of student progress. The middle school performed better than the state in reading, writing, math, and science, essentially all academic areas tested. In addition, most students in 6th and 8th grades participated in the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey in Fall 2010. The report presented results about student behaviors and attitudes regarding a variety of health factors that may influence student habits and choices, both in and out of school. Included in this survey were data about student perceptions of safety, bullying, and relationships at school. Students in the 6th grade reported being bullied 26.2% of the time while 29.2% of students in the 8th grade reported being bullied. These results were similar to the Washington State bullying rate of about 30% for each grade. The middle school scores were not significantly different from the state rate. Cyberbullying behavior was included in the bullying definition on this survey and was defined as "bullying through the use of technology" (p. 12).

About 91% of 6th graders and 93% of 8th graders reported feeling safe at school. These results were higher than the state rate of 86.8% and 82.7% respectively. Thus, despite an average rate of bullying reported on the Healthy Youth Survey, a majority of students reported feeling "safe at school" (p. 12). The data on this school reflect state and national trends in regard to bullying and cyberbullying issues. Although this school does not stand out as having an exceptional issue as Hunduja (2010) points out, their rates are still problematic and indicate ongoing bullying issues that need to be addressed. Further, as I began to explore this topic with
school staff, I became aware that the school staff seemed to be "stuck" in responding to cyberbullying and the related issues.

To form an action research team for this study, I worked with the school’s existing School Improvement Team (SIT), which consisted of the principal, school counselor, five teachers representing 6th through 8th grades, and two parents. More details on membership of the team are provided in Chapter Three. The SIT members that participated on the team in September 2012 remained members for the duration of the school year, except for one parent who was unable to continue attending the meetings due to employment responsibilities. Membership was voluntary, however each member was required to commit to attending SIT meetings for the school year. Past priorities for the SIT team have been the establishment of a homework policy across the school, alignment of local learning objectives with the Common Core state standards, and adoption of new evaluation processes for teachers and principals.

The SIT members were co-researchers in this study. I facilitated the action research process, but remained cognizant of each member's role as researcher and decision-maker. The dates of the team meetings were set for the school year, in advance. Prior to the school being approached to participate in this study, the staff at the middle school had suggested that the SIT team should address cyberbullying problems at a school-wide level, therefore, motivation and engagement to participate in the action research study were not a problem. In fact, maintaining engagement of the participants was enhanced by their own involvement as researchers and their collective control of the study through the action research process. Following an initial meeting with the superintendent and middle school principal, I understood that this study was supported by their leadership and that they would support the SIT member's engagement (Glanz, 2007; Grogan et al., 2007; Moore, 2009).
During the 2012-2013 school year, the SIT team met once per month, with additional short meetings mid-month, to complete the action research study. Meetings were about 1.5 hours in duration depending on the agenda. The action research team determined the types of data that were collected and examined. The types of data relevant to this study included interviews with SIT members, observations, field notes, surveys, meeting minutes and staff agendas, disciplinary reports, research literature, and documentation of conversations and emails between the research team and myself.

This action research study was guided by Stringer’s (2007) Look, Think, Act model for the phases of action research. A timeline for this study was developed early in the process in conjunction with the action research team. The timeline for this action research study is in Appendix A of this report. The study began in September 2012 and continued through the 2012-2013 school year, with the data collection process ending in March 2013. The Look phase began with an overview of the study, researcher roles, and preliminary data collection. At the first SIT meeting, I explained the action research study and discussed the Look, Think, Act methodology. I discussed my positionality in relationship to the study and the participants involved. I shared research about cyberbullying, in general, and about the theoretical framework that guided this study. The Look phase also included gathering relevant information and building a picture that described and defined the issues (Stringer, 2007). Dialogic and process validity were addressed through ongoing conversations during SIT meetings, qualitative interviews, and the sharing of information and data amongst co-researchers (Herr & Anderson, 2005). During the Look phase, the research team began to define and describe the school’s cyberbullying issues by looking at the data suggested by the team. This data included behavior records, past student survey data, staff stories, and documents they brought to the SIT meetings. In addition, I conducted
interviews with the purpose of exploring their understandings of cyberbullying and student technology use.

The Think phase included exploring and analyzing in order to interpret and explain the issues related to cyberbullying (Stringer, 2007). Democratic and catalytic validity were addressed as SIT members shared ideas and responses to the information and data (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Member checking, as described by Merriam (2009), occurred frequently to check for accuracy in the data and to ensure that the data represented the ideas of the SIT team. Member checking also encouraged ongoing discussions and improved the knowledge and understanding of the team members. During the Think phase, the group worked to clarify the issues. As discussed earlier, bullying is a complex phenomenon as is cyberbullying. Understanding these phenomena as they occur in a particular context requires a variety of data to be analyzed. The data were organized on a chart as the research team worked through the Think phase allowing information to be accessible at-a-glance. Breaking down the data into key concepts, themes, and core codes for categorizing the data, as in qualitative research, occurred during the Think phase.

The Act phase included planning, reporting, implementing, and evaluating (Stringer, 2007). Outcome validity was addressed as the SIT team moved to suggesting ideas and solutions to the issues that had been investigated (Herr & Anderson, 2005). During the Act phase, the research team made some decisions about the data and created an action-oriented plan. Prioritization occurred so that outcomes were manageable and realistic. The Act phase required creativity, brainstorming, and a paring down of ideas to formulate actions that led to addressing the problems related to cyberbullying. The three phases rotated through cycles of review, process, and action many times, as SIT participants collaborated and made decisions. Since most
people had very strong views about cyberbullying, what it is, what it is not, and what to do about it, this complex social issue required ongoing cycles of exchange, negotiation, realignment, and repair, as suggested by Stringer (2007). This resulted in the cyclical nature of action research repeating during the study period.

The major outcomes of this study included the understanding that teacher's personal perspectives and fears regarding technology use and cyberbullying affected their classroom decisions and professional practice. The team concluded that healthy online social skills were distinct in many ways from the skills necessary for healthy face-to-face communication. This understanding resulted in the SIT team incorporating information about online disinhibition (Suler, 2004) into classroom lesson plans. The action research process empowered and motivated the team to engage in a collaborative process to address cyberbullying.

The outcomes of this study were significant at several levels. First, a practical significance was that since there was only one elementary, one middle school, and one high school in this district, students attending the middle school may be positively influenced by cyberbullying resources that might carry over into their high school experiences. A second practical significance of this study occurred through the development of new knowledge, resources, and lesson plans about cyberbullying that can be shared, if appropriate. Third, a theoretical significance, was the inclusion of information about the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004) that SIT team participants incorporated into the technology curriculum that will address cyberbullying and healthy online communication. Finally, results reported from this study may provide new knowledge and insights about how schools can respond collaboratively through action research to cyberbullying problems at the local level.
Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations enter into every phase of an action research study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action researchers adhere to the same strict ethical protocols to protect participants as do other research methodologists (Stringer, 2007) and action research is considered to be ethical research in that it is democratic and collaborative, and involves stakeholders affected by the problem in the generation of the solutions (Stringer, 2007). In addition, ethical considerations needed to be addressed in a mutual way with team members. However, due to its nature as collaborative research, action research has its own set of ethical considerations. For example, the issue of confidentiality of participants and of the study site may be of unique concern as all study participants are usually known to each other and the site. Issues regarding "power" of the researcher within the study can be mitigated through careful attention to initial contacts and actions with participants. In the case of this outsider/insider action research design (Herr & Anderson, 2005), as researcher, I negotiated my role as facilitator in order to equalize the power factor during this study. I facilitated the SIT meetings and the action research process and served as co-researcher with the team (Stringer, 2007).

The confidentiality of the study site and participants involved were an important consideration before beginning this action research study. To address these issues, action researchers forge agreements with participants that address how identities and information will be protected. For example, the use of a pseudonym for the school name in this study was used in this final report. The SIT team decided collectively to use a pseudonym to encourage and reinforce trust and openness in disclosure by participants (Stringer, 2007). In action research, the participants agree that their identity is known to each other. Discussions about these concepts and participant's opinions were a part of the initial meetings in this study.
When considering action research in the school setting, there are special ethical considerations that need to be addressed in advance regarding the power of the researcher within the study setting (Stringer, 2007). When an employee from the Educational Service District goes into the schools, they are often seen as the expert on the topic of interest. This puts the Educational Service District employee in a position of power as a facilitator and technical assistance provider. I will need to be cognizant of the collaborative process so as to not lead the dialogue and influence the decision-making process any more than the other participants. In this study, since I am not a school district employee, my power within the study setting was, for the most part, neutral. Other than guiding the study, I had very little power during the decision-making process. Equal voice was fostered among partners within the research design and implementation (Stringer, 2007). Ethically viable consent, safety, and social justice research are important considerations in action research and especially to the topic of cyberbullying in schools. Participants had their own lived experiences with bullying and most remembered their bullying experiences, even as adults. Creating safe spaces in socially just research designs, while protecting participants and the institution is critical (Depalma, 2010).

An important requirement when conducting research of any kind is obtaining "informed consent." Informed consent ensures that participants in the study understand the benefits and the risks in their participation (Cresswell, 2008). It is possible that research results may be used in a manner that is negative, critical, and unintended. The purpose of informed consent is to make sure that no one is unknowingly harmed through their involvement in a study without having the risks fully explained (Sagor, 2000). Consent to participate in this study was obtained with an explanation about the potential harm and benefits for all SIT team members.
Security of the data collected for this study was discussed with participants. All data, documents, and products collected through this study were kept secure at all times. Data and identifiable information was protected behind locked doors and file cabinets. Electronic data and information was password protected on my personal computer and kept secure at all times. Only myself, the participants, and the dissertation committee had access to confidential information. Pseudonyms for the school site and school staff were used to protect the identity of study participants when writing the study results.

Cyberbullying is a growing problem in and out of schools. Ignoring this problem in schools violates Washington state laws, but over-reacting can have negative and lasting consequences for schools and students. This problem brings to light an ethical purpose in addressing cyberbullying problems. Often times, students suffer from social injustices, such as bullying that affect their opportunity to an equal and fair education. By the end of the study, school personnel believed that attention to cyberbullying issues was socially-just and critical to a positive school climate, school safety, and optimal learning.

**Positionality**

I work as an administrator at an Educational Service District in northeast Washington State. The middle school participating in this study is a school in the educational service region. As an administrator and counseling supervisor, I coordinate prevention programs that include bullying prevention in schools in the region. My expertise is in coordinating student assistance programs, substance abuse prevention, bullying and violence prevention, and other issues that may interfere with student learning and graduation. Previously, I worked as a student assistance specialist in a small middle school with similar demographics as this school site.
I am interested in researching and supporting schools as they work toward resolving and responding to cyberbullying issues. I have been involved in assisting schools in northeast Washington with student bullying and cyberbullying problems for over 12 years. As a program administrator and mental health counselor, I have been involved in developing school programs that reduce student risk behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco and drug use, school violence, truancy, and school disengagement. I have coordinated the implementation of bully prevention programs using the research-based curricula, Olweus Violence Prevention Program, Steps to Respect, and Second Step. I have also spent 12 years as a student assistance specialist and supervisor supporting students that have been bullied and have participated in bullying behavior in local schools. I have witnessed the devastating effects that bullying has on student self-esteem and learning. In one experience, a local school counselor and I were able to intervene on a possible student suicide situation through information gathered off an internet social networking site. In another situation, I assisted a school counselor with helping a middle school student with cyberbullying problems that led to the student coming back to school after severe bullying.

As an educational leader interested in social justice issues, I believe that successful academic experiences are not the only goal of schools in our democratic society. Due to regular daily access, schools are well-positioned to teach students about responsible behavior toward each other and toward oneself. Bullying, and now cyberbullying, are injustices in schools that must not be ignored. The responsibility to address those injustices belongs to every school staff member as protectors of students. These efforts are as important in the cyber-world as in the physical world, especially due to the advancement and our dependence on technology. Students will need to use technology in an ethical manner at work and in leisure, therefore, schools have an obligation to teach the skills necessary in the 21st century.
During this study, I worked with the middle school as an "outsider in collaboration with insiders" (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Relevant to the preparation for this study were issues of school climate and culture and researcher positionality (Milner, 2007). Planning for known dangers and obstacles and being prepared for unknown issues to surface assisted in effectively working with participant emotions as they arose. Milner (2007) suggested a non-linear framework to prepare the researcher that included researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system, in this case the school. This framework was helpful to me as an outsider in the middle school under study. Developing trust between myself and all members of the SIT team led to more meaningful inquiry.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the action research study. To fully understand the phenomenon of cyberbullying, Chapter Two will include a thorough review of the literature related to bullying and cyberbullying. The literature review includes the history and prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying, the issues involving students and school personnel, legal issues, and current research regarding effective strategies for intervening and preventing cyberbullying. Unique characteristics regarding online behavior is discussed along with a new framework, the online disinhibition effect, as a means of understanding how cyberbullying might begin and persist. Chapter Three includes a detailed description of the action research study and methods. Chapter Four presents a discussion of the conclusions and implications, followed by my reflections about the study in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This action research study engaged a small public middle school in a collaborative process to address their cyberbullying issues and to develop appropriate school interventions and responses. To provide contextual information for this study, this literature review includes the history and prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying, the issues affecting students and school personnel, and a brief summary of the research on bullying and cyberbullying. The unique characteristics regarding online behavior are discussed and a framework, the "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004), is suggested as a means of understanding how cyberbullying might begin and persist in middle school students. Finally, research regarding cyberbullying behavior as it relates to the social-emotional aspects of learning and the impact on school climate is presented. These topics are important considerations to fully understanding the impact of cyberbullying in middle schools.

Bullying in Schools

Bullying in schools is a very old phenomenon (Olweus, 2010) whereas cyberbullying is a relatively new problem (Li, 2007). Preliminary information about cyberbullying, as described in research, indicates a similarity to conventional forms of face-to-face bullying (Beran & Li, 2005; Cassidy et. al., 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011; Morales, 2011; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, 2010; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007). This merits some discussion of bullying in order to begin to understand the roots of cyberbullying. The Olweus (2010) study discusses the nature and extent of conventional
bullying, that which is face-to-face, among school children over the past 40 years. This study is important because it provides a thorough and widely accepted definition of bullying:

“A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Further, negative actions can be carried out by physical contact, by words, or in other ways, such as in writing, gestures or intentional exclusion from a group” (p. 124).

Olweus (2010) also provided a more simplified definition of bullying as "intentional, repeated, negative behavior by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself due to a power imbalance" (p. 124). The power imbalance in favor of the bully may originate from physical size and strength, popularity and membership in social groups, racial majority status, or possession and access to weapons (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). These descriptions define bullying and how it is distinguished from other forms of conflict between students. Conflict is often confused with bullying behavior leading to confusion among students, parents, and school staff. Conflict occurs when students disagree and react with mostly equal emotions (retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/SafetyCenter/BullyingHarassment). Conflict occurs frequently in social settings and can usually be resolved quickly. Bullying, however, occurs repeatedly, is intentionally harmful, and there is often a power imbalance between the students involved (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

**Historical Perspectives of Bullying**

Although most people are familiar with bullying behavior, it was not until recently that this phenomena was specifically addressed in schools through research and interventions. Beginning in the 1970s, Daniel Olweus began extensive research into bullying behavior in schools in Scandinavia. His early studies have become foundational (Olweus, 1978, 1993a,
and are cited in most research articles about bullying and cyberbullying. Following this extensive research and several high profile media incidences during the 1990's, there was an explosion of bullying and other peer violence research resulting in programs, interventions, and policy decisions world-wide (Olweus, 2010). Olweus reported that a search of the PsycINFO database, using the term *bully*, resulted in only four books, journal articles, chapters, or dissertations on the topic of bullying by 1988, while more recently, this number had increased dramatically with thousands of references on diverse topics related to bullying.

The significant increase in interest in bullying has been, in part, the result of several highly publicized beatings and school shootings that, following investigations, were likely related to chronic bullying and victimization among students (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Federal attention to the problem in schools has led to many states adopting legislation and policies that address disciplinary procedures for chronic violators. Most of these policies require discipline procedures and protection of the victim, as bullying often occurs between children without any evident provocation on the part of the person being targeted (Pellegrini, 2002). Bullying is also referred to as *peer abuse* for this reason (Olweus, 2010). No longer is bullying considered a "rite of passage" or a naturally occurring event in childhood (Pellegrini, 2002). Most schools respond to bullying situations when they are made aware and school personnel are beginning to understand the severe and long-term problems this behavior can have on the victim, the bully, and the school environment (Athanasiades & Deliyanou-Kouimitzis, 2010).

Early estimates of the prevalence of bullying were based on surveys in schools in Norway. These surveys reported that approximately 15% of students in 3rd-10th grades were affected by bully and victim problems at school (Olweus, 1986). Several years later, Olweus
(2010) reviewed results from his large-scale study in 2001 that revealed two "disturbing trends" (p. 125). The percentage of victimized students had increased by 50% since 1986, and the percentage of students who were involved in the most serious forms of bullying problems had increased by 65%. Further studies were conducted across 40 countries, including the United States, that revealed 26% of students had been involved in bullying two to three times per month (Olweus, 2010). At this time, cyberbullying did not exist and was not a part of the definition of bullying. A recent survey conducted in Washington State of bullying in 6th and 8th grades suggested that approximately 30% of students reported being bullied. (Healthy Youth Survey, 2010). In this study's middle school site, approximately 26% of 6th graders and 29% of 8th graders reported being bullied (HYS, 2010). These percentages were not significantly different from the state rate. Thirty percent of students or nearly one-third of the school population reported being bullied in middle school. This is a disturbing trend and worth the attention of school staff to begin to address reduce bullying behaviors and related issues.

Forty years of research confirms that children who are exposed to bullying are likely to be seriously affected by this experience in several ways. Bullied children tend to suffer from depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, social isolation, and suicidal ideation (Johnson, 2009; Olweus, 1978, 1993a, 2010). These studies also concluded that children who are victims of bullying experience symptoms of anxiety, inadequacy, social incompetence, over-sensitivity, and excessive worry. It is suggested that these characteristics may signal the aggressors that they cannot defend themselves, which encourages the bully (D'Esposito, Blake, & Riccio, 2011). These problems derived from childhood bullying may persist into young adulthood (Olweus, 1993b). Victims are not the only ones that experience negative outcomes from bullying. Children who bully others are at considerable risk of engaging in violent or other anti-social behavior
putting themselves and others in further danger (D'Esposito et al., 2011). Often these behaviors worsen over time if left unchecked (Morcom & Cumming-Potvin, 2010). Children that bully others experience similar negative outcomes as the victims of bullying.

**Biased-Based Bullying**

Individual personality characteristics in combination with physical strength and membership in social groups are important considerations in the development of conventional bullying behavior (Olweus, 2010). Boys often engaged in physical face-to-face bullying for the purposes of power and control whereas girls engaged in more covert bullying through verbal messages, ostracizing from groups, and spreading rumors (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). Boys and girls were just as likely to bully others, although girls tended to be more sympathetic to their victims (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). For both genders, bullying peaked about age 13-14 and declined significantly by age 18 (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). Due, in part, to stricter punishment for physical fighting at school, these gender differences have changed with more boys participating in relational cyberbullying through technology.

About one fourth of all students from elementary age through high school were the victims of bullying and harassment while on school property because of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion or sexual orientation (Dessel, 2010). Bullying, for these reasons, is also referred to as biased-based harassment (Holzbauer & Conrad, 2010). Harassment and bullying that occurs in schools and targets students for reasons of sexual orientation, race, gender, disability, and religion can be a serious problem because federal and state laws prohibit this behavior (retrieved from http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/federal/index.html). Violating state and federal laws can be much more serious than breaking a school policy. Students should be made aware of this distinction.
Concerns of School Personnel

School personnel often view bullying behavior differently than students (Harris & Hathorn, 2006; Maunder, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010). Adult perceptions of bullying behavior are more serious than students. This may be related to adults perceived clarity about how bullying is defined whereas students often omit behavior that adults would refer to as bullying. In most research studies, school administrators reported that their schools were very safe and perceived that staff were highly supportive of reducing bullying (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). These results did not agree with students that reported that they do not always consider their schools safe nor do they view school staff as supportive of reducing bullying (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). There is a mismatch in perceptions between students and adults in schools possibly reducing the likelihood that students will report bullying problems and trusting that adults can and will help them (Cassidy et al., 2009; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).

Also of importance, are factors present in the school environment, such as, the attitudes, routines, and behavior of adults in the school that play a major role in determining the extent and magnitude of bullying. The physical design of school buildings may contribute to bullying behavior. Concealed areas that lack adult supervision, such as hallways, bathrooms, locker rooms, and playgrounds frequently have higher incidences of bullying (Johnson, 2009). Some research has revealed that adults in schools may have a hand, either directly or indirectly, in perpetrating bullying behavior through their own responses (Meyer, 2010; Pellegrini, 2002). For example, ignoring and minimizing the severity of the behavior may perpetuate bullying. Leadership styles of administrators associated with lowering incidences of bullying and victimization include a combination of consistent enforcement of school discipline and the availability of caring adults (Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Shih, & Huang, 2010). Both structure and
support were important in reducing bullying and most effective when combined. Students needed to know that the school policies and procedures would be enforced and that there were caring adults that would help them.

**Current Bullying Strategies**

Several strategies are suggested in the research for effective bullying prevention in schools (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). The categories range from environmental and school-wide to classroom and student-based. The five categories discussed were: (a) systems-level interventions that are school-wide; (b) school staff and parent involvement; (c) educational approaches with students; (d) student involvement; and (e) interventions with bullies and victims. These approaches encompass a variety of programs and curricula, as well as, policy enforcement and counseling supports for the individual bully and victim. Although some differences may occur across cultural groups and gender, despite these efforts, the national rate of bullying in the United States has not changed significantly since research studies began measuring bullying in schools (Olweus, 2010). Conventional bullying was strongly predictive for cyberbullying (Peren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012). Students that bully face-to-face, often bully through technology, as well. As discussed, there are many individual, social, and environmental factors that influence bullying behavior in schools. The social factors that influence bullying and cyberbullying behavior are presented in the next section.

**Social-Emotional Development and School Climate**

"Children grow into the intellectual life around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). Cognitive and intellectual life is fundamentally social and therefore it is relational and emotional (Johnston, 2004). Social-emotional learning is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible
decisions, and handle challenging social situations effectively (Devaney, O'Brian, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006). Acquiring these skills at a young age leads to social-emotional competency and are important for healthy relationships. Although social-emotional knowledge and skills may differ from grade level to grade level, for the most part they include: self management; self awareness; responsible decision-making; and social awareness (retrieved from http://www.casel.org). The foundation of social-emotional learning is to teach and foster the development of self-regulation and respect for others, so that children develop social responsibility. Research reveals that social-emotional competency is fundamental to ethical development, citizenship, motivation, and academic learning (Devaney, O'Brian, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006).

Many students may be in danger of behavior problems and school failure because they lack the proper social-emotional skills as they transition from primary school to secondary school (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Teaching and learning in schools have strong social, emotional, and academic components (Durlock, Dymnicki, Schellinger, Taylor & Weissberg, 2011). School staff must address the social and emotional aspects of learning along with the academic. Relational problems between students are the most common behavior conflict in school buildings and may lead to more serious bullying behavior. Related but unique in many ways, cyberbullying has resulted in new ways for this old behavior to persist, as well. Inherent to online interactions, social-emotional cues are mostly non-existent, furthering the opportunity for relational problems. Inadequate social-emotional perceptions online may be a part of this complex and dynamic problem requiring further attention.
Relationship to School Climate

An understanding of the importance of a positive school climate is critical to understanding the dynamic nature of student bullying and cyberbullying. Discussions about the use of the words culture and climate and whether they can or should be used interchangeably has been occurring for quite some time and these concepts have been examined in school improvement efforts (Hoy, 1990; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008; Van Houtte, 2005). The literature has provided clear definitions, suggested frameworks, and strategies for school leaders when discussing a schools' culture and climate. These strategies suggest that in order to improve an organization such as a school, knowledge of the existing beliefs, structures, and functions needs to be understood.

More recently, research has clearly defined these terms and separated their meanings in helpful ways. One useful difference is that culture consists of shared assumptions, whereas climate is defined by shared perceptions of behavior (Hoy, 1990). Van Houtte (2005) called for clarification of the terms school culture and school climate and the role of each in school effectiveness research. Looking back on the definitions of culture and climate, it can be noted that culture is viewed as the broader, all inclusive concept, while climate is the preferred construct when measuring the overall health of an organization (Hoy, 1990; MacNiel et al., 2009; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). These terms should be used separately, and for the purposes of this study, more recent research that presented climate as a subset of culture appears to be more accurate.

Evidence suggests that social-emotional skills, school climate, and school safety are linked to each other and to academic outcomes for students (Hinduja, 2010). The elements of school climate are based on patterns of students', parents', and school staff's experience of school
life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (retrieved from: http://schoolclimate.org/climate). Schools that pay attention to their school climate report improvement in student engagement and engaged students are more successful in school (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Mitchell, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010). Bullying disrupts a positive school climate and interferes with student perceptions of safety and learning (Olweus, 2010). Given this association between school climate, bullying, and learning, school climate is often a target of school improvement initiatives and programs.

**Moral Disengagement and the Online Disinhibition Effect**

This action research study was guided by the principles related to social cognitive theory, of which moral disengagement is a part (Bandura, 1989). Moral disengagement is a term for the process of convincing the self that ethical standards do not apply to oneself in a particular context, such as while online (Bandura, 2002). Of the many theories that have been developed to explain human development, social cognitive theory was one that described developmental changes over the life-span through a psycho-social-environmental perspective. The theory identified human behavior as an interaction of personal factors, behavior, and the environment and acknowledges that human development is a life-long process that varies significantly in psychological, biological, and social ways (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Bandura (1989) described that diversity and change produced substantial individual differences in capabilities that can be either cultivated or ignored. Social cognitive theory is a model that represents reciprocal causation in behavior, cognition, environment, and other personal factors that interact bi-directionally and with differing strengths (Bandura, 1989). Moral disengagement, a part of social cognitive theory, was discussed to explain why people might violate their personal codes of conduct and under
which conditions this might occur. Moral disengagement has been discussed in relation to bullying behavior and more recently, cyberbullying behavior and the online environment.

Bullying and cyberbullying occurs within a social context that is layered among peer networks, classrooms, schools, communities, and families sharing influences of varying degrees (Bauman, 2009). These relationships are complex and diverse, adjusting as the individual and their environment changes. From a social cognitive perspective, one's moral behavior is a function of moral reasoning and the self-regulatory mechanism of self-monitoring, judgment, and self-reactions (Bandura et al., 1996). Most children who bully others report that they know bullying behavior is wrong, yet they persist in sidestepping this understanding. Bandura (2002) described a process of moral disengagement, which suggested why an individual may take actions that violated their personal codes. Moral disengagement was the result of the justification of behavior to oneself that was in violation with one's internal moral standards. Moral disengagement occurred in a social context and some social settings weakened self-regulation and reaction. Socializing through technology rather than face-to-face impacted a person's ability to assess and understand the immediate reactions of others. Without facial expressions and body language one can ignore the feelings of others and reduce the impact of empathy and guilt (Suller, 2004; Willard, 2005). In cyber-world, this is known as online disinhibition (Mason, 2008; Suler, 2004).

**Relationship to Online Disinhibition**

Online interactions are distinct from face-to-face communication in several ways, based on the theoretical framework referred to as the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004). The six factors that comprise the framework are: (a) dissociative anonymity; (b) invisibility; (c) asynchronicity; (d) solipsistic introjection; (e) dissociative imagination; and (f) minimization of
status and authority. The online disinhibition factors suggest that there are several unique characteristics to online communication that may lead adolescents to problem behavior, including cyberbullying. These developmental processes are "under construction" and may be vulnerable to social and environmental influences.

The alignment of the disinhibition effect and moral disengagement provided a framework for understanding how social interactions may lead to cyberbullying behavior. These theoretical underpinnings helped explain how cyberbullying might develop and persist during middle school. Examining cyberbullying through the lens of these theories, in conjunction with the developmental maturity of early adolescence, provided some explanation for the urgency in addressing these potentially serious issues that had surfaced in the school. According to Erikson (1993), the major tasks for young adolescents include identity formation, shaping social relationships with peers, and struggling with moral development. In addition, the underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex of the adolescent brain, which is the locus for decision-making, predicting consequences, and controlling impulses, may be a compounding factor leading to online disinhibition and moral disengagement (Bauman, 2011). These theoretical understandings may also provide some perspectives about how schools might begin to impact student cyberbullying during the middle school years.

The disinhibition effect can be described as a catalyst for moral disengagement, as it allows the individual to behave in ways that are contrary to their moral code (Bauman, 2009). The disinhibition effect attempts to explain why some people may make statements online that they would not convey face-to-face. For example, some people may reveal very personal and private information about themselves and others online that they would never say in person. Online anonymity seems to foster the disinhibition phenomenon. In addition, online social
interactions can create a false sense of security that may be misinterpreted. This false sense of safety may lead individuals to convey thoughts and feelings they wouldn't normally express in other situations (Suler, 2004) allowing normal behavioral restraints to become disregarded (Mason, 2008).

These theoretical underpinnings support further understanding about how cyberbullying might develop and persist and also provides some perspectives about how schools might begin to positively impact this phenomenon. Children and adolescents respond in healthy and unhealthy ways to their personal, social, and environmental situations. Education, instruction, and mentoring about positive healthy choices online may provide improved self efficacy, self concept, and behavior change in regards to bullying and cyberbullying (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000). The relationships between social, emotional, and cognitive processes affect how students learn. Access to new technologies and computers has had a significant impact on the way we interact with each other. In fact, increasing access to new technology has the potential to increase students' social interaction and enhance collaborative learning experiences (Beran & Li, 2004). Few can argue that technology in modern culture has had tremendous benefits in both the access to and development of knowledge. The advancements and benefits are undeniable, yet, the concerns technology has created in society and in schools is needing further research.

**Student Culture and Technology**

Digital technology is expanding and changing rapidly (Mason, 2008; Rosen, 2011; Siegle, 2010). For the average adult, keeping up on the digital revolution has been a mostly passive experience. For children and youth of today, this has not been the case (Rosen, 2011). According to the Pew Internet and the American Life Project, 93% of teenagers are online one or
more times per week (Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011). Today's children, also known as, "digital natives," have grown up with computers, laptops, ipods, and mobile phones with internet access at their fingertips virtually, anytime, anyplace (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Children can often be seen using these technologies all by themselves in restaurants, in cars, waiting in lobbies, and recreational settings in the community. Where you rarely see them using these devices are in schools. This is slowly changing as adults, "digital immigrants," are becoming more familiar with digital hardware and software programs (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Slowly, adults are catching up to children in understanding this new way of communicating and learning. Comfort and ease with technology will be critical for young people entering the workforce in the future. For both personal and career-related reasons, using technology is critical to student success. Based on the past, this trend will likely continue. Children and youth are immersed in technologies that give them opportunities no previous generation has enjoyed (Rosen, 2011).

Every generation becomes known for something that particularly describes the experiences from that era in which they grew up. Research suggests that the majority of people born during a particular generational period share some similar traits. For example, people born between 1945 and 1965, known as the "Baby Boomers," tend to be optimistic, idealistic, and value education. The next generation between 1965 and 1979 called "Generation X" seemed to believed in the power of community service and balance between family and work. The following generation entered the digital age by the birth of the World Wide Web and were born between 1980 and 2000 and known as the "Net Generation." These children were the first true cyber-generation (Rosen, 2011) and most of them have entered the work force bringing with them a higher level of comfort with technology than generations past. Current children born after 2000, known as the "iGeneration," bring with them familiarity with ipods, ipads, iphones, and
the Wii gaming devices (Rosen, 2011). Children and youth from this current generation are defined by technology through Myspace, Facebook, YouTube, X-Box, and other communication software that allow social interaction over the internet, mostly accessed at home (Rosen, 2011). Fostering the creativity and imagination that exists around use of technology could be a fascinating and engaging process for teachers. Children have responded. How will schools respond?

Schools and Technology

Several shortcomings still exist however with incorporating technology in schools. Some schools still lack internet access, but that number has rapidly been diminishing this past decade. Access to up-to-date computers and software is expensive for schools. Most schools cannot afford updating equipment as often as is necessary to keep up with advancements. Not all teachers are comfortable with using new technologies. Professional development is time-consuming and costly. Many adults believe that children spend too much time in front of screens already through television, computers, and video games. Parents don't want their children sitting in front of screens at school and not being taught by human teachers. These are generational differences that are present in schools today. Rosen (2011) cited a recent candidate for an Outstanding Young Educator Award as stating, "Education has to change. We can't pull kids into learning in school if they are engaged in a different world outside school" (p. 7). Ongoing discussions and changes are necessary if schools are going to fully tap into the idea of transforming education with technology.

When observing the typical teenager at home, you might see them switching between listening to music on their ipod, doing a writing assignment on a laptop, and responding to a text message between friends with apparent ease. Regardless if researchers find that this multi-
tasking has a poor impact on learning, this is what teenagers like to do if they have the choice. In schools, for the most part, students work on one task at a time. Usually with paper and pencil in a solitary fashion (Scherer, 2011). Technology research is not recommending that students spend all their time working with technology, but that teachers use technology to engage students and teach their content more powerfully and efficiently (Rosen, 2011).

As discussed earlier, much has changed with regard to how children and youth communicate with each other and use technology both personally, in school, and at work. This technological journey has not been without many worries and fears. Computer systems have crashed resulting in lost documents. People have had their identities stolen and lost precious personal information and money. Children have been violated through online predators and cyberbullying. In extreme and rare cases, homicide and suicide has resulted from the shame of cyberbullying and chronic harassment. These problems are worrisome for parents and school personnel that are responsible for caring and nurturing children (Bauman, 2011; Willard, 2007).

Discussing the protective steps that may prevent problems is a positive place to start. In many ways, the use of technology stepped right over protection because advancements and access have been occurring so quickly (Mason, 2008). With as many as 30% of children reporting cyberbullying experiences, this is one of the most challenging problems regarding technology use today (Englander, 2011; Li, 2007; Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011; Morales, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2009). Incorporating lessons regarding digital citizenship and ethics have been suggested in both the national literature and by government agencies that oversee the protection of children (CIPA, 2000; Ribble & Bailey, 2007). Now is the opportunity to step back and reflect on ways that schools can move forward using technology with confidence. An action research study may be an efficient way to find, review, and catalog
new resources. Through action research, plans can be created, implemented, and evaluated, building confidence in school staff about technology during the process.

**Cyberbullying in Schools**

Bullying is a widespread problem in our schools and communities (Bauman, 2009; Olweus, 2010; Willard, 2007). Traditionally, bullying behaviors occurred face-to-face, however with the advent of the internet and other digital technologies, bullying has taken on a new form referred to as cyberbullying (Mason, 2008). Cyberbullying is defined as a means of bullying that “is a form of harassment that occurs through the use of electronic communications such as e-mail, cell phones, and social networking sites” (Beran & Li, 2005). Cyberbullying can be thought of as a covert form of verbal and written bullying and frequently is hidden from adults (Willard, 2007). Cyberbullying can be done without physical contact or knowledge of the bully's identity. Cyberbullying is increasing in frequency in schools in the United States as access to technology increases (Bauman, 2009; Beran & Li, 2005; Olweus, 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). This problem is especially prevalent in middle schools (Bauman, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

The use of technology among students is increasing creating problems regarding cyberbullying (Bauman, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Cyberbullying is a growing concern among school-age students (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Most children own cell phones with full internet and text messaging by middle school (Englander, 2011). Since access to this media and social networking via the internet and cell phones is increasing at younger ages, the problem of cyberbullying is increasing at younger ages. There are several issues in schools that administrators and other school staff are struggling with. A lack of clarity and understanding of cyberbullying issues in general (Lane, 2011; Olweus, 2010) and a lack of understanding about technology and social networking and the important role these play in adolescent culture
Most problematic is the overall lack of guidance and resources available to school personnel (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011).

In conventional bullying, there is usually a power differential, where the stronger, bigger bully torments the weaker victim. In cyberbullying, the power lies in anonymity and invisibility, as part of the online disinhibition effect (Bauman, 2009). There is the ability for the bully to remain unknown and cause harm to others that may go unnoticed by adults for quite some time (Suler, 2004; Willard, 2007). Willard (2007) also notes that under the cover of anonymity, bullies may act more aggressively than they would when face-to-face. Students are more likely to become cyberbullies and engage in unethical behavior online when they believe that they will not get caught and that other students are engaging in the same behavior (Lane, 2011). Strom and Strom (2005) found that cyberbullies felt less regret, sympathy, or concern toward their victims than conventional bullies. This lack of regret and concern may be due to the impersonal nature of digital communication and online disinhibition (Strom & Strom, 2005).

Cyberbullying messages mostly originate at home, but come to school through student social circles (Bauman, 2009). Students report that an event or incident at school usually precipitates the cyberbullying messaging at home. This incident leads to online exchanges that bring the conflict back to school the next day. This cycle often flares the reaction and retaliation causing the situation to worsen over time (Cassidy et al., 2009). There is a strong sense of privacy online and many adolescents have access to computers in their bedrooms (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Supervision is also lacking in cyberspace. Messages are not reviewed or modified prior to being sent. Parents or other guardians are often not involved in children’s computer-related activities (Willard, 2007). These unique characteristics of online communication create unique issues for school personnel.
A recent study found that approximately 30% of middle school students were victims of cyberbullying at least two or more times in the past month and 22% of middle school students admitted to engaging in cyberbullying two or more times in the past month as perpetrators (Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011). Children that are victims of cyberbullying report feelings of isolation, fear, excessive worry, humiliation, lower self esteem, and in extreme cases, suicide and homicide (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007). Although a relationship exists between cyberbullying and lowered self-esteem, the causation remains unclear. Are children with low self-esteem easy targets for the bully or does cyberbullying lower self-esteem? More research is required to understand this relationship further. Students who are victims of cyberbullying are fearful to attend school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatson, 2008). Going to school may trigger another episode of harassment, both face-to-face and online. The stress and anxiety can interfere with student’s concentration during class and on homework at home leading to diminished learning (Wong-Lo, Bullock, & Gable, 2011).

Seventy-three percent of teenagers, ages 10-17, who have been victims online, also report being victimized offline (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finkelhor, 2007). Further, almost all types of online and offline victimization were independently related to depression, delinquency, and substance abuse (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). Adolescence that were in trouble offline were often in trouble online. This risk factor was an important indicator for both bullying and victimization. Students often reported that they were both bullies and victims when asked about their behavior through surveys (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). Negative school outcomes such as: poor grades, absences, and disciplinary referrals occurred for both the cyberbullies and victims.

Females were involved in cyberbullying incidents at a higher percentage than males (Bauman, 2009, 2011; Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011; Mason, 2011). Similarly, the Pew Internet Life
survey reported that nationally 38% of girls were cyberbullied, compared to 26% of boys (Lenhart, 2005). This is not surprising considering that cyberbullying is relational and girls tend to bully for relational purposes related to socializing and fitting into social groups.

**Digital Sexting**

Sexting is defined as the sending or forwarding of nude or semi-nude photos of oneself or others through a cell phone or the internet (Manzo, 2009; Siegle, 2010; Taylor, 2009). The emergence of sexting among teenagers caused great concern for parents and school personnel (Manzo, 2009). Several recent high profile cases in the media, were about young girls that sent nude photos of themselves to boyfriends, who then forwarded them to others resulting in problems for the students involved and alarm to many adults. The actual act of sending or forwarding nude or sexually explicit photos of underage children is a felony and considered child pornography (Taylor, 2009). Despite the original innocent intentions of these acts, the repercussions were serious. Sexting quickly became defined as the possession and distribution of child pornography (Taylor, 2009). Parents and law enforcement were often notified immediately when sexting became known to school staff.

There is very little research about sexting in the literature. Other than surveys conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Unplanned Pregnancy and Cosmogirl.com, very little is known about the numbers of teenagers that have engaged in sexting behavior. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Unplanned Pregnancy Survey from 2008, claimed that nearly 40% of teenagers admit to having sent sexually suggestive texts or e-mail messages (as cited by Taylor, 2009). A press release by the campaign pointed out that both boys and girls were sexting. Teenagers reported feeling personally more aggressive because of technology and girls reported they engaged in sexting to be fun and flirtatious. They reported
participating in this behavior as gifts to their boyfriends or as a joke (Taylor, 2009). Recent surveys revealed that most teenagers reported that little or no harm occurred as a result of their sexting (Siegle, 2010). Further research regarding sexting behavior with cell phone and computer cameras is necessary.

Siegle (2010) reported of a situation currently under litigation where an 18 year old girl committed suicide after her ex-boyfriend shared a digital nude photo of her from the neck down that she had sent to him. He shared the photo with other students in her school and the photo became widely distributed. Harassment of the girl increased after she sought legal counsel to have the distribution stopped. Her parents are currently suing the ex-boyfriend, several high school classmates and the school for failing to stop the harassment. The media and subsequent lawsuits surrounding these incidents became overwhelming for the school. Attitudes among principals and school boards have ranged from inattention to overreaction (Manzo, 2009). Many schools have added sexting to their phone and internet use policies and are responding to violations with suspensions and other disciplinary actions. An additional problem related to sexting is that administrators report that they have not been instructed about how to handle these sensitive situations in accordance with the law in order to protect the students and themselves (Manzo, 2009). Education about the legal ramifications and social-emotional consequences for young people is needed.

Legal Issues

A lack of knowledge about the legal issues and concerns in schools may lead to inaction by school personnel (Willard, 2007). In the past few years, media coverage highlighting stories of teen suicide as the result of cyberbullying has created concern about this phenomenon. Many states have introduced and passed legislation to enhance internet safety and punish cyberbullying
behavior along with other forms of harassment. Cyberbullying is occurring around the clock rather than just during school hours resulting in uncertainty about student rights and school responsibilities. In addition, courts have not yet offered a great deal of guidance on the subject (Lane, 2011).

Schools are given the responsibility and often challenging task of providing for the care, concern, and safety of students while they are at school. Although students have the right to express themselves online through emails, chat-rooms, and blogs, they also have to be responsible for their actions as they affect others (retrieved from http://www.aclu-wa.org/print/2266). Schools must respond swiftly to problematic behaviors and situations that are deemed unsafe and potentially harmful to students. This includes addressing cyberbullying and online behaviors that interfere with the educational process of one or more students, whether they occur at school or in the community. Given that the majority of cyberbullying situations occur between peers, the problems that arise between students often make their way to school, resulting in conflict at school. Schools are implicated in a large number of cases because that is where adolescents interact with each other (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Schools are given the task of addressing online problems that originate off-campus while protecting the student's rights and ensuring that the school is protecting itself from potential liability. These issues can be difficult because the laws governing internet speech and cyberbullying are evolving as more cases come before the courts. Consensus has not been reached about key constitutional rights and responsibilities (Jacobs, 2010). As a result, many school districts have been reluctant to respond to cyberbullying situations, as they fear overstepping their legal authority (Lane, 2011; Willard, 2007).
In response to concerns about children's exposure to potentially obscene and harmful internet content, Congress enacted the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2000. CIPA requires that all schools and libraries that receive federal discounts for internet access, known as the E-Rate program, must follow specified requirements and rules. These requirements have recently been updated to include the monitoring of online activities of minors, providing education about online behavior, and cyberbullying awareness. These updated requirements along with internet blocking and filtering serve as an initial step toward preventing online problems and protecting the school from liability. A preventative education component to the CIPA requirements in all grade levels was added in 2011. In 2008, Congress enacted the Title I of the Broadband Data Improvement Act to improve access across the nation to internet services much like that of television during the 1960s. Title II, Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act, was enacted at the same time to promote a safe internet environment for children. These provisions underscore the importance of ensuring internet safety for young people and provide a platform for creating effective responses in schools.

There have been some decisions by the courts that can provide information and guidance to school administrators as they make decisions about both on and off-campus online behavior. Recently, states have clarified their bullying and cyberbullying definitions, policies, and procedures. This activity has provided a means to more clearly explain and define cyberbullying and what actions will occur if the policy is violated. Washington State's anti-bullying policy states that "The district is committed to a safe and civil educational environment for all students...that is free from harassment, intimidation, or bullying" (Prohibition of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Policy No. 3207 p. 1). This definition includes a reference to electronically transmitted messages or images. The policy instructs the school to identify a
Compliance Officer whose responsibility it is to respond to complaints and violations of bullying and cyberbullying in the school. The accompanying procedure No. 3207P, further describes the role of the school, definition of terms, relationships to other laws, prevention and intervention requirements, and corrective measures that will be taken. This detailed law has provided a framework for understanding and responding to both bullying and cyberbullying violations in Washington State. Although this step has been instrumental in clarifying the roles and responsibility of the school, there is still doubt about the school's authority related to civil rights issues and free speech (Lane, 2011).

Harassment has always occurred in society, but has had legal intervention since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). In general, this law led to the prohibition of harassment on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or disability. Following the Civil Rights Act was the implementation of Title IX, which prohibited sexual harassment or exclusion from participation in activities in public school settings. These laws have required school administrators to respond to discrimination and civil rights violations at school. These laws have been reinforced in cases involving harassment and bullying where school personnel have been found neglectful in taking appropriate action. Previous case law regarding bullying provides a standard where cyberbullying may fall within harassment parameters (Jacobs, 2010).

Another legal issue facing school personnel, regarding cyberbullying, is the extent to which educators have the right to restrict student expressions or to discipline students for speech that the school believes is inappropriate. The right to freedom of speech is described in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States (retrieved from http://www.aclu-wa.org). Hinduja and Patchin (2011) discuss a few landmark Supreme Court cases that have set a precedence and provide direction for schools. In *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*,
School District, 1969), the court ruled that the suspensions of three public school students for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War violated the free speech clause of the First Amendment. The Court ruled in favor of the students citing that the school failed to show a "substantial interference" in the educational process, therefore the student's behavior could not be restricted. In order for school personnel to intervene on student's speech, they must be able to show that the behavior "materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school" (Tinker et al. v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969). Restricting student expression without compelling educational justification is beyond the authority of the school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

In the case, Bethel School District v. Fraser, 1986, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that not all student expressions are protected by the First Amendment. The court considered the case of a student that used graphic and explicit sexual metaphors in a nominating speech for his friend at a high school assembly. The school suspended the student. Although local courts sided with the student, citing the Tinker case, the Supreme Court reversed the decision explaining that this behavior was different from the non-disruptive wearing of armbands. Schools may restrict speech that intrudes upon the work of the school and the rights of other students. Additionally, the court ruled that schools have a responsibility to teach students the boundaries of socially appropriate behavior and therefore must play a role in restricting behavior and speech that is considered "highly offensive or threatening to others" (Bethel School district v. Fraser, 1986). This case is important when considering electronic speech that may be considered threatening to others and bordering on cyberbullying definitions.

An early court case related to cyberbullying involved a student that was suspended for making statements on a web-site that used profanities toward school personnel. The courts ruled
that the school could not impose discipline for an act that did not occur at school (*Beussink v. Woodland R-IV School District*, 1998). Another case that did not result in a favorable decision for the school involved a student who was expelled for creating a website that asked for votes about who should die next. He also included mock obituaries for students from his school. In this case, the courts ruled in favor of the student citing that this type of speech was out of the school's control. The court also ruled that the school failed to demonstrate that the student actually threatened anyone (*Emmett v. Kent School District No. 415*, 2000).

There have been some legal cases that have resulted in support for the school's ability to discipline off-campus speech. In the case of *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* (2000), a student created a web page that displayed hurtful information and profane words about a teacher in his school. The school principal expelled the student and the court upheld the discipline because the school showed that the action created a significant disruption to the learning environment, both for the teacher and other students (*J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District*, 2000). In the case of *Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District* (2007), a student sent an electronic image of his teacher being shot in the head to friends. The student was suspended and the courts upheld the suspension because it was decided that the student should have known about the disruption his actions would have caused at school (*Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District*, 2007).

These court cases and others, may further confuse school personnel due to their diversity and the varied outcomes in the court systems. Regardless of the outcome, students, their families, and those targeted by the internet speech experienced some degree of harm, humiliation, and restriction. Even the teenagers that won their cases faced suspension, expulsion, inability to participate in extra-curricular activities, financial issues, family problems, hospitalization and
evaluation, and legal consequences. Students and their families experienced some level of adverse consequences due to their internet speech (Jacobs, 2010). Students may benefit from education about their free-speech rights and the responsibility that accompanies the right.

**Concerns of School Personnel**

Who is responsible for stepping up and taking responsibility for responding to inappropriate use of technology? This question is in debate in schools. Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown (2009) reported that 57% of students would tell their parents about cyberbullying problems. In the same study, only 47% reported an incident to school personnel. Yet, nearly 75% confided in their friends. One-fourth of the students surveyed reported that they would not tell anyone about cyberbullying. The students that would not report incidences of cyberbullying to anyone stated that they would fear retaliation. Cassidy et al., (2009) also found that students do not report incidences of cyberbullying for several reasons. They believe that cyberbullying is a student problem not the school's problem. Students don't believe that school staff can stop the cyberbullying. They think they would get their friends in trouble or their parents would restrict their internet access. Students also think that they would be labeled a "rat" or informant (Cassidy et al., 2009).

Previous research on student cyberbullying in schools reveals that school administration and staff are slow in taking action when student cyberbullying becomes evident (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Administrators are unsure about the school's responsibilities and student's rights, due to the lack of guidance and resources. Parents and school personnel may unintentionally be encouraging bullying and cyberbullying by not responding to it or viewing it as a problem that children need to solve on their own (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).
School personnel are becoming more familiar with the term cyberbullying and the problems this creates, but many are still unsure about how to respond when incidences are reported. This topic is important because conventional bullying, has been a problem in schools for years and has had mixed results following recommended interventions. Centralized solutions often seem complicated and time-consuming, so administrators handle situations case by case rather than from a systemic level. These concerns result in school responses that are mostly reactive and inconsistent (Beale & Hall, 2007). Most recommended interventions and strategies from state and national sources suggest following bullying prevention programs with the addition of cyberbullying information to the curricula. Due to the unique factors creating online disinhibition, this approach seems inadequate in fully addressing the cyberbullying issues.

Current school responses to cyberbullying problems often results in severe punishment to the bully in the form of suspension and to the victim through lost access to technology privileges in attempts to protect them. To protect the school, No-Use policies may be created. These disciplinary actions result in lost opportunities to teach and practice appropriate use of technology. Responding swiftly, however is critical to ensure the safety of the victim and others involved and to alleviate the suffering and stress of the student. Schools in Washington State are required to address the compliance requirements, as stated in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28A.300.285). In severe cases of bullying, a report to the state office of education is required with a description of the incident and the school's response. While these requirements force schools to pay attention to bullying complaints, as a result, they often produce more severe punishment rather than education.
Current Cyberbullying Strategies

Hinduja and Patchin (2009) recommend several steps from the literature that support a healthy response and maximizes the learning opportunities present in schools. Suggested protocols include: (a) Ensure the safety of the student(s); (b) Involve parents; (c) Inform law enforcement, legal counsel, and a counselor, as needed; (d) Establish a thorough policy and procedures, including off campus incidents; (e) Protect the school with cell phone use policies and internet use policies; (f) Follow state and federal laws; (g) Provide yearly education in schools at all grade levels; (h) Provide parent and family educational information; and (i) Provide professional development to school staff about the problem and about the school's policy and procedures. These suggested solutions to cyberbullying are more appropriate and effective when researched-based interventions are combined with localized planning, problem-solving, and implementation (Hobson-Horton & Johnson, 2009).

Summary

Several conclusions can be drawn from the literature included in this review. A school's climate is important to academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Mitchell, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010). School climate is negatively impacted by bullying and cyberbullying behavior (Hinduja, 2010). For several reasons, school personnel are slow and inconsistent in taking action regarding incidences of cyberbullying further exacerbating the concerns (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). In addition, cyberbullying and the related issues are complex incorporating school life and home life into the whole picture. As discussed in the literature review, school personnel lack clarity and understanding about cyberbullying, in part due to the inadequacy of information, guidance, and resources (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011). As a result, school responses to cyberbullying are often inadequate and inconsistent.
Research studies have shown that computers in classrooms have positive effects on learning in all subjects, however, this also brings problems, such as cyberbullying, that deserved serious consideration (Li, 2007). Students of the 21st century rely on technology for their learning, pleasure, and future success more than any other generation. Schools are slowly attempting to embrace technology, without fully understanding the ethical considerations. Further research is needed to understand the school issues and to contribute to the knowledge and resources that school personnel require to properly educate students about online behavior and cyberbullying.
CHAPTER THREE
NARRATIVE REPORT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this action research study was to address one small public middle school’s cyberbullying issues by engaging a school team in a collaborative process to better understand cyberbullying and to generate interventions appropriate to the school setting. The following questions guided this study: (a) What are the stakeholder’s experiences and understandings about cyberbullying? (b) What is the impact of cyberbullying in the school setting? (c) What interventions, in regard to cyberbullying, is appropriate in the school setting? and (d) How are the school’s cyberbullying issues and responses understood through the lens of a theoretical framework related to online disinhibition and moral disengagement? The study involved Wylie Middle School's School Improvement Team (SIT) in a collaborative action research process. The use of the pseudonym "Wylie" for the school name was used in this final report. As an employee of an educational service district, I worked with the middle school as an outsider in collaboration with insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2005) as a member of the team and facilitated their action research inquiry in regard to understanding and responding to their cyberbullying issues.

During the study period, Wylie Middle School was comprised of 6th, 7th, and 8th grades with student demographics that were mostly White (86%) and middle class (23% Free and Reduced Lunch participation), and with a 11% rate of special education participation. Most students had access to computers and the internet in their homes (90%) and regularly used cell phones, many with internet access, as reported by the technology teacher, based on informal
classroom surveys conducted during the school year prior to this study. Details regarding the setting for this study were described in Chapter One.

The members of the SIT team were the primary participants in this study and included an administrator, counselor, five teachers representing 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, two parents, and myself. All SIT team members were White and 90% female with two males participating, a teacher and the principal. The demographics of the SIT team members matched the demographics of the teaching staff of the school, overall. The SIT team had an average of 20 years teaching experience. Most of the years teaching had been spent at Wylie Middle School. All of the SIT team teachers expressed in some way that they "would never consider teaching anywhere else." They seemed committed to the school and "liked" or "enjoyed" working there.

The design of the action research study was guided by Stringer's (2007) Look, Think, Act model for the action research process. As explained in Chapter One, Stringer's model includes three cyclical phases of Look, Think, and Act. In this study, the Look phase involved group discussions, gathering data, building a picture, and describing the issues related to cyberbullying. The Think phase included exploring, analyzing, interpreting, and explaining the issues and problems. The Act phase involved the making of decisions throughout the action research process and the development of an action plan. Throughout the study, the SIT team cycled back and forth among the Look, Think, and Act phases. For example, the Look and Think phases were a part of each SIT meeting and each stage of the study.

This chapter describes the study in detail and discusses each of the Look, Think, and Act phases (Stringer, 2007), as they took place during the 2012-2013 school year at Wylie Middle School. For the most part, this written description follows the chronological order of the study timeline during the school year and is structured around the activities engaged in by the SIT
Most SIT members attended each meeting. The dates of the meetings had been set for the year, in advance, by the principal. During this insider/outsider study (Herr & Anderson, 2005), I directed careful attention to my relationships with participants and my changing positionality within the study. As the study progressed during the school year, I noticed subtle shifts in my relationships with SIT team participants. We began to create a comfortable collegiality in which I felt a part of the group and I felt a part of discussions rather than the initiator of them. One teacher exhibited leadership characteristics within the group through her participation, follow-through with assignments, sharing of documents, and initiation of a survey. These leadership skills led to improved participation and support by other SIT members. Several activities occurred at the onset of the study to negotiate and establish trust, improve researcher understanding of the school's priorities related to cyberbullying, and to frame the focus of the research and the research questions to the participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2007), as described in the next section.

**Launching the Study**

The study began in August 2012 with my efforts to gain entry and establish trust with the school community (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Negotiating and establishing trust is a key factor in building an effective action research endeavor especially in an outsider working with insiders study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I sent initial emails to the school district superintendent and middle school principal to establish contact and set up an initial meeting. In September 2012, I met with the superintendent and principal for approximately 1.5 hours. Listening to these administrators and understanding the issues related to cyberbullying from their perspectives were important first steps for me. I did not provide an agenda for this meeting other than to suggest an action research study that addressed cyberbullying issues. We discussed past bullying and
cyberbullying incidences at the school and their concerns about the issues. The issues that surfaced during this initial discussion included these administrators' desire to address bullying and cyberbullying in a consistent manner in order to maintain a positive school climate, protect the safety of individual students, and to address federal E-Rate requirements and the Washington State bullying prevention law. Also discussed was the administrators' interest in an action research study of this type and their ideas about how the study would be a good fit within the overall scope and functioning of the SIT team. This discussion identified that the school's SIT team would be an appropriate group for this action research study (Stringer, 2007). The administrators disclosed that the SIT team had worked to improve other issues of concern in the school, such as homework policies, teacher evaluation procedures, and curriculum adoption. The school's leadership team decided that this study was a "good fit" for the school's 2012-2013 goals and objectives and the ongoing work of the SIT team.

During this initial discussion with the administrators, I also introduced the issue of confidentiality in regard to this action research study. Confidentiality in an action research study is approached differently from other types of research, because in action research all participants have agreed to work together and are known to each other (Stringer, 2007). We agreed that, for the purposes of reporting results from this study, pseudonyms would be used. Although both administrators agreed that confidentiality was "not a worry" of theirs and stated that "we are an open book," the pseudonym "Wylie" would be used for this site. In addition, we agreed that identities of the individual participants would be protected in the writing of this report. I felt more comfortable using a pseudonym for the school name in the writing of this report of the study.
Finally, as an outsider working with the school staff (Herr & Anderson, 2005) and as Educational Service District employee, I expressed concerns about being viewed as a technical assistance provider and expert. The administrators suggested some strategies that supported my role as co-researcher with the team (Stringer, 2007). Their suggestions included adapting the arrangement of the meeting space. The principal suggested that I sit at the meeting table with SIT members and arrange the table and chairs in a square rather than classroom style to support a participatory process. Their suggestions were followed during this study. The administrators remarked that the SIT team was accustomed to inviting non-staff members to meetings to contribute information that would lead to more effective decision-making. Non-staff members that have participated in the school's SIT team in the past have included parents, area business representatives, and policy makers. The principal remarked to me "You will be one of our team members this year."

The administrators' support and suggestions contributed to the effectiveness of this action research study (Sagor, 2000). Evidence of school leadership support for this study included the principal sharing information about this study with school personnel in monthly staff meetings and during monthly school board meetings. The school principal ensured that the SIT team members attended the first SIT meeting on October 22, 2012 and subsequent meetings. He communicated regularly with me and SIT participants over email, providing information about the agenda, participant ideas and suggestions, and next steps regarding the study prior to each SIT meeting. There were many documents that were collected and analyzed during the course of the study. These documents were included correspondence over email, school board minutes, SIT team agendas and minutes, field notes and memos to myself. These documents contributed to documenting the chronology of the study and specific verbatim comments of SIT members,
and served as memory tools for myself throughout the study time period. These documents contributed significantly to my development of knowledge about Wylie's cyberbullying issues related to the four research questions.

**The Look Phase**

The Look phase (Stringer, 2007) of this study began in early October 2012 with a second meeting. This meeting included the middle school principal, the school counselor, and myself. Also included in the Look phase were the first two SIT meetings and interviews with SIT participants. The school counselor, with whom I was previously acquainted through my job duties at the Educational Service District, gave me a copy of a Power Point presentation at this meeting about cyberbullying that a previous student intern at the school had developed for the student advisory period. During this meeting, the school counselor explained that the student intern's assignment during the 2011-2012 school year was to create a presentation for the students about cyberbullying problems in the school to be delivered during the first period student advisory class. This presentation was the school's initial attempts to provide awareness and information to students about cyberbullying.

As presented in the student intern's Power Point, the cyberbullying presentation included a definition of bullying and cyberbullying. The definition for cyberbullying was "Cyberbullying is bullying and is willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices." A citation was not given for this definition, but it reflects current definitions used in research articles cited in the literature review. In addition, the presentation explained that cyberbullying is "cruelty to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social cruelty using the internet and other digital technologies." Also documented was information about the power dynamics resulting from the anonymity and
invisibility of the cyberbully, reflecting facets of Suler's (2004) online disinhibition effect, although this reference was not cited in the presentation. I discovered during this meeting with the principal and the school counselor that this presentation was the school's first attempt at delivering information about cyberbullying to their middle school students.

Also discussed during this meeting with the principal and the school counselor was the school's cell phone policy, which stated that students are not allowed to use their cell phones or have them on during the school day. Phones were taken away from students who used them during school hours. The counselor remarked that "I think they [students] are very careful to hide it from us, and I think a lot of kids just don't want to hassle with it, because if their phone rings or beeps we take it away." The counselor and principal told me a story about a student that had his phone taken away at school and while it was on the principal's desk, it beeped with a text message. Another student in science class was texting him unaware that the phone had been taken away. The school counselor remarked "I think we know about 5% of what they actually do with their phones at school." This initial meeting at the middle school started the data collection process and the first Look phase between myself and key participants of the SIT team, providing support and solid footing for this outsider/insider action research study (Stringer, 2007).

At this meeting, the school principal shared a report with me that reported the school’s 2010 Healthy Youth Survey results, which included data about how youth perceive bullying and cyberbullying in their school, along with other health risk indicators. This information provided quantitative data about the prevalence of bullying in the school environment, based on student perceptions. Additional data reported in this survey included how safe students felt at school, their health-related habits, and whether they have supportive adult relationships at school. In 2010, Wylie had an average rate of bullying, when compared to the state. Approximately 26% of
6th graders and 29% of 8th graders reported being bullied at school. This was similar to the Washington State rate of 30% of 6th and 8th graders that reported being bullied at school. Learning more about past student perceptions related to bullying and cyberbullying through the survey results contributed to my understanding about the school staffs' experiences with bullying and cyberbullying and provided initial data regarding my research questions for this study.

As described by Stringer (2007), the Look phase involved group discussions, gathering data, building a picture, and describing the issues related to cyberbullying. Several documents were gathered during the initial Look phase that contributed to my knowledge and understanding of the school's issues related to cyberbullying. These documents are presented in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Provided By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Policy and Procedures 3207</td>
<td>School policy that governs the definition and process for handling bullying and cyberbullying issues among students.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Resources Policy 2022</td>
<td>School policy that defines electronic resources and how they should handled and protected.</td>
<td>School District website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wylie Middle School Student Handbook</td>
<td>Handbook provided to students containing information, expectations, and rules of conduct at school and during school functions.</td>
<td>School District website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Rights and Responsibilities Pamphlet</td>
<td>Pamphlet defining and describing several policies and processes, including the cell phone use policy and internet use policy.</td>
<td>School District website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Youth Survey 2010 Report</td>
<td>Results from the student survey of healthy behaviors, including bullying and cyberbullying perceptions and school safety perceptions.</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student intern Power Point presentation about cyberbullying</td>
<td>Presentation that included information about cyberbullying and the issues that cause problems for students.</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the meeting with the principal and the school counselor, I gathered and reviewed the school's policies and procedures related to cyberbullying issues such as, the
Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying policy and the Electronic Resources policy. The school's bullying policy, at the time of this study, met the requirements under state law for bullying and cyberbullying. In addition, the school's Electronic Resources policy was up-to-date and thorough in addressing the school's responsibilities to protect students from inappropriate internet content and other digital information. The Wylie Middle School Student Handbook and Student Rights and Responsibilities Pamphlet provided information and expectations to students regarding cell phone use during school, acceptable internet use, and bullying prevention, among other rules of conduct. These documents were valuable to me in order to understand a baseline of information at Wylie related to cyberbullying and helped me understand the previous efforts of the school staff in addressing cyberbullying.

**SIT One: Working with the SIT Team**

Continuing the Look phase, I became an active member of the school's SIT team and facilitated the team's action research process. On October 22, 2012, I met with the SIT team for about 1.5 hours after school. Seven of the initial eight members were present and included three teachers, the principal, the school counselor, and two parents. The team was convening for the first time for the 2012-2013 school year at this meeting. The participants arrived on time and appeared engaged and ready for the meeting. In addition to presenting information about this study, my goals for this meeting included re-enforcing each SIT member's role as researcher and decision-maker by asking open-ended questions and encouraging them to establish the agenda related to cyberbullying for future SIT meetings.

During the first SIT meeting, the principal introduced the purpose of the action research study. Using a Power Point presentation, I explained the relevant aspects of the study that included a definition of action research, the research questions, information from the literature
review, and my positionality (Stringer, 2007). I discussed the Look, Think, and Act phases (Stringer, 2007) of action research. I described the theoretical framework I was using to understand cyberbullying, based on Suler’s (2004) online disinhibition effect. All SIT members present acknowledged the importance of further understanding cyberbullying and the issues related to this problem. Each contributed to the discussion at different times. The parents were particularly participatory. They often turned to one another while talking rather than looking at me during the conversation. I discerned that they were very comfortable discussing school issues with each other based on the ease in which they communicated. The school staff members appeared to allow the parents to voice their comments and questions first, then participated after the parents had spoken. The meeting took place in the library with the tables and chairs arranged classroom style. This was necessary for this first meeting due to the presentation I provided during the meeting and the projector arrangement. The SIT team decided that the room should be arranged in a square for all future meetings to facilitate discussions amongst each other.

Many comments and questions were discussed during this first SIT meeting including: The need for parental understanding of cyberbullying issues and internet safety; creating a worksheet of tips for teachers and parents about the issues related to cyberbullying and social networking; surveying parents and teachers regarding their perspectives about the issues; addressing how the school is currently dealing with cyberbullying; developing partnerships with parents, students, and school staff to address the issues; and looking at how the school is addressing technology-related issues.

I distributed a two-page handout entitled *The Nine Themes of Digital Citizenship,* (retrieved from: http://digitalcitizenship.net/nineelements.html), that defined and described nine areas of norms of acceptable behavior with regard to technology use. This document provided
information that assisted the SIT team’s conversation about identifying the relevant topics related to cyberbullying and internet safety. These discussions provided a good place to start with the Look phase and contributed to the next SIT team agenda. Staff left the meeting with the assignment to Think about the information they learned and to write down questions that came up between this meeting and the next SIT meeting and to Look for further information to share with other SIT members that will assist with defining the issues related to bullying, cyberbullying, and technology use.

**SIT Two: Sharing Experiences**

The second SIT meeting occurred on November 27, 2012 afterschool. As an ongoing part of the Look phase, the agenda for this meeting included examining the information brought by team members and discussing its purpose within the study. One of the parent SIT members called the principal prior to this meeting to let him know that she could not participate on the SIT team and in this study due to getting a new job. The remaining seven SIT members stayed involved for the duration of the study. The second meeting included a review of the study, its purpose and confidentiality issues, and a review of the minutes from the first meeting. I reviewed my notes with the team and checked the accuracy of my interpretations from the first SIT meeting (Merriam, 2009). The team agreed that my notes were accurate. As facilitator, I was encouraged by the active participation and discussion that occurred during this second SIT meeting. Each member participated in the discussions. Members of the team brought samples and copies of what they were doing school-wide and in their classrooms related to bullying, cyberbullying, and technology use.

Sample lessons and materials included an overview of the technology teacher's curriculum outline, Second Step bully prevention lesson plans taught in the 7th and 8th grades,
and an article entitled *Social Networking: Blessing or Curse?* These documents were discussed followed by a general agreement by the SIT team that "quite a bit of activity is occurring to address bullying here." The team discussed what might be missing from the lessons based on new knowledge they had learned about cyberbullying issues. Specific information distinguishing cyberbullying from conventional bullying was reported as missing elements. For example, information regarding the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004), the permanence of digital communication, and legal issues for students were identified. A parent that was unable to attend this meeting gave the principal a packet of information to share with the team. The packet included social networking communications between teens that she had printed from the website www.stopbullying.org that described current issues with cyberbullying, and a sample handout for parents that defined cyberbullying and provided strategies for parents. These documents raised some questions about the "worries" that adults have about their children and online activity. Teachers and a parent expressed "being afraid" about not knowing and understanding what children are doing online. This concern was mostly in reference to student behavior occurring in the home.

During this meeting, the principal posed the question, "What is currently going on in the school that addresses student technology use, digital communications, cyberbullying, or online safety?" The SIT team took turns sharing their knowledge and perceptions about the school's existing activities related to this question. The following responses related to this study were discussed by the SIT team participants.

- Students are divided up at the beginning of the school year (first week of school) and in a "pro-active" way, rules and expectations are discussed. The technology teacher discusses technology-related expectations, safety, log-ins, and the student internet use agreement.
• In technology class, which is an elective course, general technology information, online safety, and internet information is presented. This is an exploratory class.

• The Second Step curriculum is implemented in 7th and 8th grade - mostly the bullying prevention portion. Cyberbullying is discussed as the "new" way kids bully. This gives the students continuity of language. The school counselor brought a copy of the scope and sequence for the lessons to the meeting.

• During the student advisories, there is a specific topic for each class. Bullying and cyberbullying have been topics in the past and there are grade level retreats for the students at the beginning of the year to teach and re-enforce leadership traits and skills among the students.

These discussions provided a solid base of information about the research question regarding stakeholder's experiences and understandings related to cyberbullying in the school. An article by an unknown author entitled: Social Networking: Blessing or Curse? retrieved from www.asca.org was brought to the meeting by one of the teachers. The information in this article resulted in a teacher asking the question, What is the middle ground to giving students opportunities and protecting them from harm? The group admitted to not being ready to address this question. Further thinking about this question needed to occur. Lastly, two additional questions were posed by the principal for future discussion, What is missing from this review? and What should be taught? The team did not seem ready to discuss these questions. No one offered any responses following these questions. I offered to document and set-aside these questions for a later date and the team agreed this would be the best plan until further knowledge was gained about cyberbullying. Team members agreed to look at a couple of web-sites, www.cyberbullying.org and www.commonsensemedia.org, for further information and middle
school scope and sequences for teaching cyberbullying prevention and digital ethics and bring thoughts back to the next meeting.

These first two SIT team meetings continued the Look phase. The team gathered and discussed information related to bullying, cyberbullying, technology use, and related topics, as they thought were appropriate to the agenda. Several documents were brought by team members and discussed during the Look phase. These documents further defined cyberbullying and provided information that improved the group's understanding of the issues. The list of Look phase documents is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Look Phase Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIT 1: Document Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Provided By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying Study Overview</td>
<td>Presentation handout about the action research study</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handout - Nine Themes of Digital Ethics</td>
<td>Informational handout</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Sequence for Second Step Bullying Prevention lessons for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades</td>
<td>Lesson Plans about Bullying Prevention used in the middle school at all grades</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Responsiveness to Bullying from <a href="http://www.stopbullying.org">www.stopbullying.org</a></td>
<td>Informational article detailing recommended school responses printed from website</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying: Steps to Increase Awareness from <a href="http://www.stopbullying.org">www.stopbullying.org</a></td>
<td>Informational handout about cyberbullying printed from website</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samples of student teasing and cyberbullying communication</td>
<td>Handout that detailed mean statements students had made online, unknown origin</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the Megan Pledge Program</td>
<td>Handout that provided details about a program in schools to reduce cyberbullying</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During these Look phase meetings, the descriptions of incidences of bullying and cyberbullying were varied and emotionally-laden, especially at the beginning. Some people responded with strong emotions to seeing and hearing about cyberbullying behavior. Others
recalled their own experiences of bullying and brought their significant experiences into the
discussions. When this occurred, the process was intentionally slowed down to allow for the
processing of emotions so that relevant and helpful knowledge resulted (Milner, 2007). The
contributions from the stories of bullying and how they differed from cyberbullying supported
the need for new and distinct school responses to cyberbullying.

A significant amount of time was spent discussing the school's use of technology and
internet programs. Online safety surfaced as a staff concern for students, both in the home and in
the school. At this point in the process, I perceived that the topic of using technology in the
school was going to be an important issue related to cyberbullying. The issue of how and when
to use digital technology and internet programs during school hours were discussed frequently
and became a regular topic as staff worked through the issues related to online access and safety.
Discussions about student internet use and safety continued to occur at most SIT meetings. This
topic required extensive conversations, as staff differed in their opinions about student exposure
to internet programs and information. As part of the Look phase, between the second and third
SIT team meetings, I conducted seven qualitative interviews with the participants. The results are
presented in the following section.

The SIT Team Interviews

During November and December 2012, I conducted seven 45-50 minute digitally
recorded individual interviews with each of the SIT team members. The primary purpose of the
interviews was to understand the experiences and perceptions of SIT participants regarding
cyberbullying issues and to further understand the impact of cyberbullying in the school setting.
The interview protocol is provided in Appendix B of this report. There were 12 formal questions
on the interview protocol. Each of the questions were asked during the interviews, although the
interviews varied slightly depending on the interviewees responses and my follow-up questioning. Attempts were made by me to establish a conversational tone during the interviews in order to create a relaxed environment and comfortable rapport. While conducting the first four interviews, I made some initial observations about the process. Wylie school staff were welcoming and helpful. They revealed this by showing up for their interview on-time. The school counselor, also a SIT team member, reserved a room for the interviews ahead of time and the school secretary helped during the process by directing staff to the location. The location was quiet and the interviews were uninterrupted. The participants were talkative and did not appear bothered by the digital recording of the interviews. The final three interviews occurred the first week of December. All SIT members appeared willing to participate in the interview process with only one of the interviews having to be rescheduled due to an unexpected student event. The qualitative interviews provided information and insight about the initial perspectives of the team and the impact of cyberbullying in the school setting.

The first steps taken in order to analyze the qualitative interview data included transcribing each interview, reading them over several times, and categorizing and coding information into units of meaning (Stringer, 2007). I categorized words and phrases into groups that were alike in meaning (Merriam, 2009). Common themes emerged in the data. As I engaged in this process, I first identified approximately seven possible themes. These themes were presented to the SIT team at the December 2012 meeting along with key information from the interviews. The team worked with the themes to condense them down to four distinct overarching themes. I also examined the "key experiences" (Stringer, 2007 p.103) that each participant described, which contributed in a useful way to the generation of the themes that emerged following the qualitative interview analysis process. Following this step, key statements
were identified that explained and supported the over-arching themes that emerged during this action research study (Stringer, 2007). The verbatim principle was used throughout the analysis to "reduce the propensity to conceptualize events through [my] interpretive lens" rather than that of the participants (Stringer, 2007 p. 99). Actual words and concepts from the participants were used. Member checking occurred at each SIT meeting and through email messages to individual participants (Merriam, 2009).

The first few interviews were also examined through the lens of the research questions and the purpose of the study in order to make sure that the questions were soliciting participant responses that addressed the research questions. No changes were made to the interview questions during the process, however, follow-up questions and member checking occurred in order to examine responses more thoroughly and correct any misinterpretations (Merriam, 2009; Stringer, 2007). I drafted memos that were used to document emerging ideas and themes along with my initial thoughts and reflections (Merriam, 2009). Quotes and statements posed during the interviews were presented to the participants both through email messages and in individual face-to-face meetings in order to clarify and correct information. The member checks for accuracy in interpreting information occurred several times individually and as a SIT group repeatedly over the course of the study (Merriam, 2009). As subsequent interview data was collected, the themes were condensed and refined resulting in four final themes emerging. The four themes that emerged from the interview data analysis were, (a) Frustration and Worry, (b) Inappropriate Exposure, and (c) Personal Views, (d) Professional Practice. These themes are thoroughly described and discussed in the next section.
Interview Themes

The four themes that emerged from the interview data analysis were: (a) Frustration and worry that teachers were struggling with regarding the over-whelming use of "screen time" by students. SIT team participants reported frustration and a strong sense of worry about the use of so much technology in the home and in schools rather than interactions with people and use of pencils, paper, and books; (b) SIT team participants expressed concern about the inappropriate exposure that is possible in middle school age students through their access to online information and programs. There seemed be resistance in using technology due to teacher and parent concerns about middle school students being ready to use the internet and being easily exposed to inappropriate information and activities online, including cyberbullying; (c) The personal views that teachers had about their own children related to online activities resulted in confusion and hesitancy in further exploring technology use in schools; and (d) The professional practice of SIT team members was influenced by the recommendations of educational agencies to use more technology and internet-based programs during school, while at the same time promoting the importance of building positive face-to-face relationships among students. These conflicts resulted in a hesitancy to incorporate technology into their professional practice.

Frustration and Worry

All seven members of the SIT team discussed the "over-whelming use" of technology by teenagers. Through various words, this concept was identified as a "worry" and "bizarre" phenomena. Teachers reported being "shocked" and "freaked out" by so much use. Another teacher commented that "students are up all night and wiped out the next day." This emerging theme was often followed by regret and frustration with statements such as "Not sure if that is a good thing, though, it's scary." Teachers worried that students were not learning how to do
research from books and other sources rather than online. They worried that students were not learning how to put their own thoughts on paper in their own words due to the ease of "cutting and pasting" from the internet. One teacher stated,

I think in the future, we are going to have to draw more and more on technology. I'm not sure that is a good thing. We are continuing to encompass all these tools that kids can use that don't involve human interactions and that's scary. So much of life is human interactions. So, we're getting to the point where kids are not learning these communication skills.

Although they used different words, most SIT team teachers communicated that they wanted students to "put away the gadgets and study for a test without all the electronic interruptions," and reflecting about a recent field trip a teacher stated, "I was shocked by how much students were in touch with their friends." The teacher wished the students would focus on what was going on around them. "I told them to tell their friends about it when they got home." These statements and the body language exhibited during the interviews communicated frustration and worry about the volume of "screen time" students seem to be engaging in at the middle school age level. Also commented were the student's "constant attempts to multi-task, which they are not good at, anyways."

Another teacher wondered reflectively,

From a selfish standpoint, how much do these kids learn when I ask them to study for a test? It’s really hard for them to put away all of this electronic gadgetry and just focus on the content and just study for a science test without Facebook, without their music, without texting.
Each member of the SIT team expressed some frustration and worry about student use of digital technology and also some regret about the loss of use of pencils, paper, and books for researching, studying, and writing, while at the same time recognizing that "maybe this is the new way." The conflicting feelings about computers and online activity were present throughout this study. While discussing cyberbullying behavior, SIT team members often reverted to talking about the over-whelming use of computers and cell phones by children.

**Inappropriate Exposure**

There was some sense of urgency to provide "opportunities in a safe, protected way" for students to access technology and internet programs, while at the same time protecting them from harm and inappropriate exposure. Discussions around this theme also included the topics of family values and the different messages that children are exposed to in the home. One SIT parent member remarked "technology is not the problem, it is about family values and the tools they are armed with." Parent monitoring of their children's online activity was considered an important factor in the technology conversation. SIT team members also discussed that 11 to 14 year olds are very trusting of others, and this worried them about their students on the internet. A parent added that "maturity matters more than age and we need to know the maturity level of our kids." She talked about her own child and stated that, "He's not a dummy, but he is so trusting. He believes that anybody that would be interested in trains are great people. He doesn't get it that train people doesn't equal good people all the time."

Teachers were also concerned about other issues related to the use of digital technology. They reported incidents of cheating, plagiarism, and the lack of face-to face time required to develop healthy relationships. "Students at this age don't think before they act, they react. With technology, that is a problem as you can't undo or pull back what has been sent." These concerns
were present at Wylie Middle School and the teachers were wrestling with them as they
developed new ways of teaching new core standards. The principal put it this way,

    Cyberbullying and technology is relevant right now. Our kids are dealing with it
    right now and it's all around. It's not something that is going away. It's something
    that we have to figure out how to get a handle on because kids are getting access
    and being exposed to things before, I believe, they're necessarily cognitively
    ready. They're not ready to protect themselves from some of the things out there.

A parent reflected near the end of the interview that, "I think another thing maybe is to teach kids
how to respect technology, have respect of the technology and it's a device that's very powerful
and at what age are you ready for that powerful device?" The SIT team discussed that students in
the middle school age range are not all at the same developmental level. Some may be more
prepared than others to manage online behavior.

    Personal Views

    Each of the SIT team members interviewed reported a personal story related to bullying
or cyberbullying that had affected them either as a parent or as a teacher. Most of them talked
about their experiences or their own children's that related to bullying or cyberbullying. The
topic of bullying appeared to be emotion-laden for most participants and stories told during the
interviews and team meetings often evoked emotions. An example of this type of story was told
by a teacher,

    Kids have no place to get away from what others are thinking. I was bullied in
middle school. Home was my safe haven. I did not have to hear the taunts of my
mentor 24 hours a day/7 days a week, as kids do today with social networking.
For the most part, teachers reverted to talking about their own children rather than discussing their students with this topic. A teacher reported her experiences following a highly publicized cyberbullying situation that had been on the national news.

I remember seeing something on TV a while ago where this parent was just...you know...their son had committed suicide because of cyberbullying that was going on right under his own roof. All of these things I see, I try to take in and use to be a good parent and to protect my kids, and I don't know if I think it's better to know that stuff is out there than not to know.

As researcher, I detected strong feelings in the SIT participants that conveyed care, concern, and commitment to improving bullying and cyberbullying situations in the school. School staff thought their small school size and the fact that students "grow up with each other" were advantages to reducing bullying incidences. Several remarked that, because their own children were middle school age, they were "freaked out by all the technology that can enter your home." Fears were often due to "all the horrible things that have happened to other students through technology." One of the teachers who reported that she does not let her children have much access to the internet stated,

I need to figure out how to deal with this because my oldest daughter now is saying, Mom, you know, technology is how kids are communicating with each other, how we're saying OK, let's go to the game. They're figuring out everything online and I'm missing that. I know she is, and I'm not sure what to do about it, because I'm terrified that someone is going to say horrible things about her online, and I might not see it and know how to help her. So, I think about my own
children and can hardly even think about the kids at school because I am in fear as a parent.

Members of the SIT team expressed worries about their own children with conflicting feelings regarding the use of technology in the home and in the school setting.

**Professional Practice**

SIT team participants were questioning the recommendations by educational agencies to use more technology and internet-based programs during school while at the same time promoting the importance of building positive face-to-face relationships among students. The conversations and descriptions that demonstrated the struggles and conflicts that teachers were faced with in their professional practice are further illustrated through the following excerpt from an interview with one of the teacher participants as she struggled with the potential harm and the benefits of technology use in her professional practice.

I think the problems are that they can get the information almost too easily. I don’t know and maybe that isn’t a problem, but I feel like the kids don’t know how to do research, but also, the way of doing research has changed. I think looking at books is a really good way to do research, but also using online information is good, but kids only want to go online and not use the library and look for the hard copied books.

This example expresses the conflicting feelings that teachers are dealing with regarding the new way of learning through technological advances. There is still an expectation that students show that they can do school work the old-fashioned way with books, paper and pen. Yet there was also the understanding that there were new ways of solving problems and answering questions. One teacher provided an example of her expectations,
[Students] don’t want to take the time to really look, read through it, and figure out how to say it and understand it. I think that’s a problem. Being able to look at a book, read it, take notes on it, close the book, and write a paper. I think is really important.

Teachers in this study were worried that students do not take the time to understand online material and relate back to the required learning. They expressed not knowing if this was due to distractions while on the computer or a lack of time spent studying the material.

During the interviews, the SIT team reported some ideas they had in order to address this complex situation. Their thoughts included teaching digital ethics and enforcing the expectations about online behavior, while continuing to talk to students about the issues related to cyberbullying. Teachers expressed their expectations of students by stating that "You teach them that these are the expectations and if they use it wrong, these are the consequences and enforce the consequences. I think it goes back to ethics, teaching it and then patrolling it."

They also expressed that teachers needed to keep an open mind about changing technology and apply them to the educational setting. One teacher stated his opinion this way:

I really do think that continuing to talk about it. I think teachers are going to have to be open about it. I think it's the way we are going. So, there is going to have to be a little give and take that way and then just educating them on what's acceptable and what's not and figuring out how we can control it, enforce it.

Teachers on the SIT team at Wylie Middle School desire a balanced approach that protects students, provides opportunities, and preserves the development of social skills and relationships through "real" face-to-face interactions. Interactions through the computer may not be acknowledged as "real" and therefore not valued in the same way that traditional teaching and
learning methods are valued. The principal remarked jokingly, "Maybe we should sit kids down in front of a computer all day." Not addressed in this study, yet considered briefly during a couple of the interviews is that some schools are being designed just that way across our country. This idea was a "scary" thought for some participants and one teacher remarked "Yes, there is hesitancy to use computers. I read somewhere that kids spend 7.5 hours a day on non-school related technology. Does that allow for normal social development in our kids?"

Teachers noted that recommendations to use technology in the classrooms seemed to be a priority for many educational agencies and yet, at the same time, recommendations that teachers spend time on their relationships with students was also a priority. Focusing more time on staff-to-student relationships while providing more computer time in the classrooms seemed contradictory to SIT team members. They discussed their frustration about managing both strategies with limited hours during the school day.

The themes that emerged during the interviews were mostly aligned with the literature review discussed in Chapter Two. In summary, intense worry and frustration about children's use of digital devices, student access to information that may be developmentally inappropriate, and personal opinions and values seem to result in hesitancy and reluctance to add more technology use in the classrooms through their professional practice. However there were several unique issues to the Wylie SIT team interviews. The effort to build positive face-to-face relationships between students and school staff felt contradictory to increasing the use of technology in school. The school's SIT team members were struggling with these competing objectives as they explored cyberbullying and the related issues in the school. Through the individual qualitative interviews, personal perspectives related to cyberbullying surfaced that affected teachers decisions in their classrooms. These themes offer a new contribution to the literature on
cyberbullying in regard to teachers' perspectives and concerns. In particular the finding that educator's personal perspectives and fears regarding technology use and cyberbullying affect their classroom decisions is unique to this study.

The Think Phase

The Think phase included exploring, analyzing, interpreting, and explaining the issues and problems (Stringer, 2007). Both the Look and Think phases were observed during each stage of the study, confirming the cyclical nature of the action research process (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Sagor, 2000; Stringer, 2007). During the Think phase, the SIT members participated in discussions about the issues brought up in the meetings. I analyzed the data derived from the interviews and shared the information with SIT members. The SIT members analyzed the data from documents presented during the meetings to further their understanding of the issues as they related to cyberbullying and technology use in the school.

SIT Three: Participant Feedback

The third SIT meeting was held on December 11, 2012 after school. Two teachers were absent and one left early from this meeting. Two teachers, one parent, the counselor and principal were present. The meeting began with a summary of the minutes from the previous meeting on November 27, 2012. The team had the opportunity to review the minutes and notes prior to the meeting and make corrections and additions over email before the meeting or face-to-face during the meeting. As a continuation of the Think phase, a follow-up discussion occurred related to the questions, What is missing from this review of cyberbullying? In response to this question, one teacher stated, "We really need to ask the other teachers what they think we should do." Other school staff thoughts, ideas, and suggestions to this cyberbullying conversation was preferred by the SIT members before final decisions were made. The team decided that a
staff survey would be implemented. The group wanted to further explore which survey tool would be appropriate. This decision was left for the next meeting.

Initial analysis of the interview data was presented to the SIT team followed by discussion and an opportunity for their input, as part of my "respondent validation" process (Merriam, 2009 p. 217). I shared an initial summary of the SIT team's responses to the interview questions to the SIT team. Following Herr and Anderson's (2005) quality criteria principles, I adhered to the validity criteria during this action research study. In order to gather information about the accuracy of my initial analysis and confirm that the results related to this school setting and the participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005), I reviewed interview responses and several broad themes from the SIT team interviews to gather feedback from the team. After each summary for each interview question, I asked the questions "How does that sound to you?" and "How does this apply to you?" For the most part, the SIT members agreed with my initial analysis. One teacher remarked "That sounds like us." At this meeting, the group discussed the broad themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009; Stringer, 2007).

Following the discussion about the interview data, the group members shared some information that they had brought to the meeting. One teacher shared some documents from the website www.cyberbullying.org. She informed the group that this website had information about cyberbullying from a research-based perspective. The documents included Tips for Teens about Cyberbullying and Tips for Parents. Several members wrote down the website stating that they would look at the website later. I shared information from www.commonsensemedia.org about educational materials, parent and student surveys, and lesson plans related to cyberbullying prevention. The group agreed to "check out" these two websites on their own and provide feedback at the next meeting scheduled for January 2013.
Since there were two SIT members absent from this December meeting and one had to
leave early, we did not take action on any items other than to examine the data further and to
decide to bring more information to the next meeting. A parent remarked that "It feels like we
are moving too fast, and we shouldn't make any decisions without more members present," and
that "the next meeting should be mandatory so everyone is here." I understood that at a school
meeting of this type in December close to the holiday break, that there might be low
participation. The principal suggested that he would have a discussion with school staff at the
next all-staff meeting in mid-January and would send me a summary of what the rest of the
school staff would like the SIT team to do next. I saw this as a positive development in that it
would bring in the voices of the school staff (Stringer, 2007). This action would also fulfill some
SIT member's request to know more about what other school staff think and what should happen
next and would address action research quality criteria related to both democratic and outcome
validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

SIT Four: Teacher Survey

The next SIT meeting was held on January 22, 2013 after school. All SIT members were
in attendance. The agenda for this meeting was generated by the SIT members during the month
of January. One of the teacher SIT members conducted an informal staff survey in January
regarding cyberbullying perceptions of school staff. Discussing the results of the survey was the
primary focus of this January meeting. The results contributed to the Look and Think process by
providing more information to the SIT team about the perceptions and understandings of most of
the Wylie Middle School teachers. Stringer (2007 p. 106) discussed that to achieve a "holistic
analysis" all factors likely to have an impact on achieving an effective solution should be
incorporated into the solution. The opinions of the remaining teachers on staff were important to
the SIT team members. Sixteen teachers responded to the survey, an 80% response rate. The survey was entitled "Cyberbullying Report Card" and was retrieved from, http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Report_Card.pdf. This survey is available to the public for use in its original form. The survey had 31 response items in the following six categories: General Assessment, School Climate and Culture, Curriculum and Education, Cyberbullying Response, Policies, and Technology. A complete copy of the staff survey is provided in Appendix C.

The survey was offered to all the teaching staff in paper form. Respondents used pens to mark their responses on the two-page survey and returned them to one of the SIT members mailbox. One of the teachers on the SIT team collated the results. Raw numbers were used to indicate the frequency that teachers circled the available responses, which were: "yes," "no," or "?" for each question. A question mark response meant that the respondent did not know if the item had occurred. I converted the raw numbers to percentages for the purposes of reporting the results and implications of the survey.

The General Assessment section asked school staff about their perceptions regarding how many students had been victims of cyberbullying or had been bullied and whether they thought cyberbullying was a significant problem in the school. Two-thirds (66%) reported that they did not know how many students were involved in cyberbullying and slightly more than one-half (56%) reported that they did not know if cyberbullying was a problem. Nearly one-third (31%) reported that they did not think cyberbullying was a problem, while 13% reported that cyberbullying was a problem. These results were not surprising to the SIT team. In fact, the SIT members agreed with the staff assessment in this section. As a group, the team agreed that we did not know if students were experiencing cyberbullying issues because students were not
reporting incidences to school personnel. What is not known is if cyberbullying is not occurring or just not being reported. A brief discussion occurred about research studies that describe that students may not report cyberbullying for fear of adults making the problems worse or fear of losing their technology privileges.

The School Climate and Culture section had four response items that addressed how well teachers believed that students were empowered to inform an adult and if teachers reminded students to approach them for help. This section also asked if staff believed that students thought inappropriate use of technology and cyberbullying would not be tolerated at school. Nearly all respondents (85%) replied "yes" that the school staff works to create a school climate in which cyberbullying would not be accepted among the student population. They also believed that school personnel regularly remind students to report incidences and that school staff would be available to help students with these types of problems.

The Curriculum and Education section asked 10 questions related to the information and education that the school provides to students, parents, and staff regarding cyberbullying, technology use, policy, and legal issues. For all but three questions, school staff responded "yes" that the school is doing an average to above average job of educating students about cyberbullying issues. Almost one-half (45%) thought that they were familiar with major court decisions related to cyberbullying and 60% were familiar with the laws in which the school district might be civilly liable for negligence in preventing or improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents. In this case, 40% of respondents relied "no" that they did not know if they understood these aspects of cyberbullying. The SIT group discussed addressing these areas in a future workshop with teachers in order to provide further understanding of the issues related to cyberbullying.
The Cyberbullying Response section asked six questions related to understanding how the school responds to incidents of cyberbullying. School staff reported that they believe that the school takes suspected and actual incidents of cyberbullying seriously and that the school has a relationship with local law enforcement capable of conducting computer and network forensic examinations, if needed (81% and 69% respectively). In this section, there were four response items where teachers responded with "no" or "?" when asked whether the school had a continuum of disciplinary consequences, a formal process to investigate incidences, a process of investigating off-campus incidences, and have an anonymous reporting system for students to report issues without being identified. The team agreed that school procedures and communication regarding cyberbullying issues needed improvement. Team members commented and discussed "how little we knew at the beginning of the study compared to what we know now" and that they endeavored to share what they have learned with all staff.

The Policies section asked questions regarding the school's policies prohibiting cyberbullying, cell phone use, and use of portable electronics. Respondents reported that they believed the school had such policies (88%) and communicated effectively about these policies to students and parents (81%). Only about 44% of staff thought that the school had a policy that included language about off-campus behaviors being subject to discipline. Regarding the Technology section, Most staff (81%) reported that they were aware that the school computers had website blocking and content-monitoring software installed on the schools' network to ensure age appropriate web-browsing on school computers. Eighty-eight percent thought the school avoided putting student information on the district's website to protect their safety.

This was an exploratory survey of teacher perceptions related to cyberbullying issues in the school setting. Just under two-thirds (63%) of the cyberbullying issues queried through this
survey resulted in favorable perceptions by teachers about the school’s overall response to
cyberbullying. Based on the survey results, the primary topics that may need further discussion
and follow-up were in the issues related to the education and instruction of students, staff, and
parents related to cyberbullying. The most important highlights appear in the percentage of "no"
and "?" responses in the Cyberbullying Response section, and specifically regarding disciplinary
consequences and formalized procedures for cyberbullying incidences. Teacher perceptions
about off-campus speech and discipline indicated that further communication about this topic is
needed. Teachers did not think that signs and posters about acceptable computer use and internet
use were posted in the school computer lab. The technology teacher, who is a member of the SIT
team, agreed that it was not posted for students to read and commented "I better get that up
tomorrow!" The overall score of "yes" responses across all questions was 63%, which is a D by
school grading standards. This teacher perception survey resulted in SIT members agreeing that
further education and communication about cyberbullying issues is needed among school staff.
Discussing this survey among the SIT team seemed to result in some reflection about the volume
of information they have learned throughout this study process so far. "Think about how much
we have learned?" was one comment. I observed many head nods after this statement was made.

The group spent some time during the fourth meeting discussing incidences of bullying
that they have observed this school year where students exhibited "shunning" behavior. Each SIT
member contributed to further defining the term "shunning" and described this behavior to me.
Shunning was thought to be used more by girls than boys at the school. This conversation was
helpful to discriminate between the noticeable bullying behavior and the hidden or “invisible”
bullying that occurs at the school and online. It was noted that shunning behavior seemed to be
the most common form of bullying observed in the school. I remarked that this behavior also
occurs online and described that students often "friend" each other on Facebook and then ignore their comments or "unfriend" them resulting in embarrassment and humiliation. Shunning was a new term that I learned about during this meeting. I remarked to the team that I had not heard this term prior and how it was related to bullying. I reflected that I had also learned new information about bullying and cyberbullying during the course of this study. The documents that were collected and analyzed during the Think phase of this study are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3: Think Phase Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIT 3 Document Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Provided By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tips for Teens <a href="http://www.cyberbullying.org">www.cyberbullying.org</a></td>
<td>One-page handout sample with information for students</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips for Parents <a href="http://www.cyberbullying.org">www.cyberbullying.org</a></td>
<td>One-page handout sample with information for parents</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Sequence for Cyberbullying Prevention for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade <a href="http://www.commonsensemedia.org">www.commonsensemedia.org</a></td>
<td>Learning Objectives for student lessons</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of Cyberbullying Prevention-full lesson plan <a href="http://www.commonsensemedia.org">www.commonsensemedia.org</a></td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of Parent Survey about technology and internet use in schools <a href="http://www.commonsensemedia.org">www.commonsensemedia.org</a></td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Public Schools Cyberbullying lesson plan <a href="http://www.seattlepublicschools.org">www.seattlepublicschools.org</a></td>
<td>Lesson Plan and Parent Letter</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIT 4: Document Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Provided By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spokesman Review newspaper article &quot;Whores of Spokane&quot; November 12, 2012</td>
<td>Newspaper article about Facebook cyberbullying</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying staff survey: Cyberbullying Report Card</td>
<td>Survey conducted by SIT members in January, 2013</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Updates for Teachers Ugly Facebook Posts: When Teachers Can and Can't Step In, November 2012</td>
<td>Article from newsletter for school staff</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before ending the fourth SIT meeting, I asked the question “Where are we?” A teacher commented that there was so much data “on the table” and that we needed to bring it together in a usable way. I suggested putting the information into a table or chart, so that the group could view the data together or "at-a-glance." The principal was very favorable to this idea and commented that "this would be really helpful." We decided, as a group, that this chart would be organized by the bullying prevention requirements in schools, as described in the school's policies. In addition, the chart would display the actions that the school has taken to address those requirements. I offered to start the chart and fill in the information based on previous SIT meeting discussions, interviews, and documents. The group decided that they would review the chart and fill in the missing information during the next meeting in February. The complete Cyberbullying Chart is provided in Appendix D.

**Enriching the Analysis**

As part of the Think phase, I engaged in "enriching the analysis" (Stringer, 2007 p. 106), by examining all the data from the study in a more wholistic way. First, I examined data from SIT team meeting discussions and the qualitative interviews. Then, I examined information from the Cyberbullying Report Card completed by the school staff that participated in the cyberbullying survey. Next, I analyzed the records and documents that were gathered throughout the study. Last, this information was compared and contrasted to the research evidence and the literature review that guided this study and then analyzed through the lens of the four research questions. This process assisted me with bringing in key documents and incorporating them into the analysis in a useful manner.

I created a crosswalk of information comparing the documents gathered during the study to my SIT meeting field notes and archival files in order to improve the accuracy in reporting the
Look, Think, Act cyclical narrative of this study. The outcomes of this enriched process are presented in the final chapter and organized according to the research questions. This process provided me a new way to Look and Think about all the data that had been collected, including the documents from each SIT meeting. Stringer's (2007) "enriching the analysis" process provided me with a way to "step back" from the study and Look at the data that had been collected and then Think about it from a different angle. This process also improved the accuracy and consistency in my reporting of the study activities.

The Act Phase

The Act phase involved the making of decisions throughout the action research process and the development of an action plan (Stringer, 2007). During the Act phase, SIT participants made decisions that improved their understanding of cyberbullying and led to the development of the final action steps that included responses to the issues that surfaced during this study. The principal communicated monthly about this study at school-wide meetings (Stringer, 2007), which included other school staff and the school board. For example, the principal added information about this study to the school's all-staff meeting agenda and asked the teachers their opinions and what they wanted the SIT team to do. This communication and involvement of other school staff may improve the likelihood that the team's decisions will be accepted by most teachers. The school board was kept apprised by the principal of the progress of the study at monthly school board meetings. The SIT team often took action on their own time to review documents and websites and conduct a staff survey with teachers. Decisions made by the SIT team also included the addition of student instruction and lesson plans that address student online safety and behavior, which were primary "worries" of the SIT members. During the study, the SIT team cycled back and forth between each of the three phases, as presented by Stringer.
The Look and Think phases were a part of each SIT meeting and each step throughout the study, including the final Act phase.

SIT Five: The Cyberbullying Chart

Attempts to further our collective understanding of cyberbullying issues during this phase occurred during the creation of a chart that described the information and knowledge collected by the SIT team up to this point. The team met on February 26, 2013 after school. All participants were present at this SIT meeting. Before the February meeting, I emailed the principal a draft of the Cyberbullying Chart for his review, and pointed out that a written internet safety plan, which is a key requirement under E-Rate was missing from the school's activities. The school superintendent, school technology director, middle school principal, and myself shared several emails between each other defining what the internet safety plan might look like. Together, the four of us decided that the work that the middle school SIT team had been doing through this action research study was a good place to start with creating an internet safety plan. We discussed over email, that the SIT team's internet safety plan could be expanded to include district-wide information. The internet safety plan created by the middle school SIT team would provide a template for a district-wide plan. The SIT team discussed the activities that would be included in the internet safety plan during the February meeting.

The principal sent out the Cyberbullying Chart over email to the SIT members prior to the meeting, so members had the opportunity to review it in advance. Most of the meeting was spent reviewing and completing the Cyberbullying Chart and sharing ideas for an internet safety plan for the school. The chart provided a means for organizing information in a usable format. The principal reported that he "appreciated" the chart for his own reporting requirements and understanding of the volume of information that has been presented and discussed during this
study. The chart assisted the SIT group in understanding the questions: (a) What have we done related to cyberbullying? (b) What is the evidence that these items have been addressed at school? and (c) What is missing from this list? The Cyberbullying Chart was augmented throughout the remainder of the study and used in the planning during the final action phase.

**SIT Six: Cyberbullying Lessons and Internet Safety**

At the final SIT meeting for this study, the team reviewed three websites that provided internet safety resources, tools, and lessons. The team decided that next school year, five lessons from unit one from one of the websites would be implemented across the three grade bands in the school. Further decisions will be made during the remaining SIT meetings this school year to address where and when the lessons will be taught and by whom. Expansion of the middle school's internet safety plan that was drafted during this study will occur at the district level. The Wylie Internet Safety Plan is provided in Appendix E of this report.

At this point in the study, decisions were being made quickly without much discussion and discourse. There appeared to be an improved understanding and an agreement that new lessons would to be adopted to address cyberbullying issues and internet safety for students. Before the closing of this SIT meeting, I handed out a written summary of the conclusions and outcomes of this study for participant review. I asked for feedback regarding this action research study's outcomes, as I had reported them. SIT members commented that they had "learned so much" about cyberbullying and social networking. A teacher commented that she "didn't even know there were federal regulations before." Their comments provided me with information that supported the increase in knowledge and understanding that the SIT team had experienced during this study.
Summary

This action research study took place during the 2012-2013 school year for the purpose of addressing one middle school’s cyberbullying issues by engaging a school team in a collaborative process to better understand their cyberbullying issues. This study used the middle school’s existing SIT team to establish a collaborative action research team, facilitated by myself. The design of this action research study was guided by Stringer's (2007) Look, Think, and Act model for the research process. During the Look phase of this study, the SIT participants gathered information, shared their perceptions, and participated in individual interviews related to cyberbullying. During the Think phase, the participants engaged in discussions and analyzed data, incorporating many documents and survey results to further their understanding. During the Act phase, SIT participants made decisions based on the data that resulted in the addition of student lesson plans and a school-wide internet safety plan that specifically addressed cyberbullying and the issues that surfaced during the study. Throughout the study, the SIT team cycled back and forth among the Look, Think, and Act phases multiple times. As the study progressed, the SIT team spent less time cycling through the phases and made decisions more quickly.

The action research process provided some structure and motivation that positively influenced the team's progression through the study. The SIT team seemed empowered to engage collaboratively in addressing cyberbullying and other technology-related issues that surfaced. The participants concluded collectively that they had "learned so much" and had increased their knowledge and understanding of cyberbullying. Towards the end of the study, the SIT team acknowledged that they understood cyberbullying issues in ways that led to the generation of new resources and tools that will be used in the classroom and school-wide.
CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Although devastating and worrisome, the Megan Meier cyberbullying incident that resulted in suicide, is thankfully rare (Bauman, 2011). Still, many children suffering from conventional bullying and cyberbullying experience horrific consequences that result in anxiety, skipping school, poor school performance, depression, and dropout (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008; Wong-Lo et al., 2011). More often, students participate in cyberbullying at home that leads to conventional bullying at school (Bauman, 2009; Willard, 2007). Similar stories were reported to have occurred at Wylie Middle School, although infrequent, the school had adopted the stance that "school staff will talk to students, both the bully and victim," that are involved in bullying and cyberbullying when the situation comes to staff attention, even when the cyberbullying originated at home. Information gleaned from the interviews had supported that the school staff and administration at Wylie take "strong action" and "does not mess around" when incidences of bullying and cyberbullying are reported.

The purpose of this action research study was to address one small public middle school’s cyberbullying issues by engaging a school team in a collaborative process to better understand cyberbullying and to generate interventions appropriate to the school setting. In preparing for this study, the following research questions provided guidance and direction, (a) What are the stakeholder’s experiences and understandings about cyberbullying? (b) What is the impact of cyberbullying in the school setting? (c) What interventions, in regard to cyberbullying, are appropriate in the school setting? and (d) How are the school’s cyberbullying issues and
responses understood through the lens of a theoretical framework related to online disinhibition and moral disengagement? This chapter will discuss Wylie Middle School's SIT team action research process and the results of the interviews. This study provided several findings that may contribute to the cyberbullying literature and the effectiveness of incorporating action research to address school personnel's problems of practice. The conclusions and findings of this study were presented as they related to the four research questions and the problem posed in the study site.

The research problem, as discussed in the literature review, suggests that school personnel lack clarity and understanding about cyberbullying, in part, due to the inadequacy of information, guidance, and resources (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011). As a result, school responses to cyberbullying are often inadequate and inconsistent. These issues were true for Wylie Middle School. The problem of cyberbullying turned out to be complex and multi-layered, as proposed. In addition, the school problem at Wylie included a rate of bullying that was "unacceptable," as determined through previous student surveys (HYS, 2010), school staff also agreed that they were "stuck" in effectively addressing cyberbullying issues due to the lack of understanding, guidance, and resources. The issues related to cyberbullying were layered among the SIT team's perceptions about student unsupervised internet access at home, "over-whelming" use of digital technology by students, lack of teacher and parental knowledge and understanding about technology, worry about student exposure to inappropriate information and activities, and safety concerns. Layered over these issues were school district liability for student online behavior at school and rapidly changing technology tools and programs. The developmental maturity level of middle school students coupled with online disinhibition was considered a "perfect storm" for serious student problems at the middle school grade levels. For these reasons, there was
resistance in using technology in the middle school as teachers and parents had concerns about middle school children being "mature enough" to use the internet.

SIT Team Experiences and Understandings

The first research question, What are the stakeholder's experiences and understandings about cyberbullying? was addressed during the Look phase of the action research process (Stringer, 2007) and through the analysis of the interview data. For the most part, the participants in this study understood cyberbullying from sources presented by the media and other sensationalized stories. The analysis of the interview data revealed that the experiences with cyberbullying by the SIT team were limited but they still communicated a sense of "worry" and "fear" that was mostly based on stories from others, such as the Megan Meier story. SIT participants had heard about cyberbullying incidents from high school students and parents, as stories had been related across this small district. Previous participation in workshops and professional development over the years had contributed to some teacher's knowledge about bullying, yet training related to cyberbullying was lacking. The significant worry of SIT team participants about student technology access and use was a finding that affected their classroom practice.

For the most part, SIT participants understood the formal definitions of bullying and cyberbullying, but expanded their understanding of the broader issues related to the school setting during the study. During the interviews, participants reflected on whether there were unreported incidents of cyberbullying that affected the students and wondered if students were not reporting cyberbullying due to their fears of losing access to their computers and cell phones. The school did not have a process in place for knowing about unreported incidences. Overall, SIT participant's perceptions were that there may be more incidences going on at school than
they know about. The SIT team agreed that more student information was necessary to better understand the problem of cyberbullying.

SIT teachers had fears about their own children related to online activities resulting in confusion and hesitancy in further exploring technology use in schools. This finding was discovered during the interviews following probing questions and conversation style of interviewing. As interviewer, I attempted to create a interview style that was more like a conversation that flowed back and forth between myself and the interviewee. This process allowed me to investigate the issues that surfaced in a more comfortable manner. I felt that I was able to probe into the issues with SIT members without much resistance. They discussed their frustrations about the "over-whelming" use of computers and cell phones by their students and that they did not want school activities to increase student "screen" time. This finding had an impact on classroom practice as SIT members reported that they valued face-to-face social relationships and feared that communication through technology would negatively affect the healthy development of student's social skills.

Teachers were also concerned about other issues regarding the use of digital technology. They reported incidents of cheating, plagiarism, and the lack of face-to face time required to develop healthy relationships. A teacher summarized the concerns this way: "Students at this age don't think before they act, they react. That is a problem as you can't undo what has been sent." These concerns were present at Wylie Middle School and the teachers were wrestling with them throughout this study.

Discussions that occurred related to participant's fears about internet access often resulted in discussions related to online disinhibition (Suler, 2004) such as anonymity and invisibility. The six factors that comprised the online disinhibition effect served to foster worry among team
members about student internet access during this study. The factors contributed to further
defining cyberbullying and the distinguishing characteristics that separated bullying behavior
from cyberbullying. A discussion of how the theoretical framework of the online disinhibition
effect will be addressed under the fourth research question.

Most SIT members commented that they had increased their knowledge and
understanding about cyberbullying, student technology use, and the impacts these issues have in
the school setting during the action research process. The principal commented as he reflected on
his own learning regarding technology use and that adult reactions that intended to protect
students often resulted in punishment for the victim of online abuse.

The kids still need to know that they can go to their parents if they need help
because this is that time when they're shooting for independence. This was the
first time I understood the amount of kids that will not report cyberbullying
because we, as parents, will come and protect you. I'm going to take your
technology away from you so that these people can't talk to you anymore. Well,
you’ve taken away a lifeline from a kid this age.

Access to new technologies and computers has had a significant impact on the way
students communicate with each other. The team learned more about the culture of teenagers and
the important role of digital learning and communication. Team members remarked multiple
times throughout the study about how much they had learned about cyberbullying. As a
participant in this study, I also learned new information about cyberbullying. For example, the
team discussed the term, "shunning" related to student behavior that they had observed that
school year. This was a new term that I learned more about during this study. I remarked to the
team that I had not heard this term prior or how it was related to bullying. During the final SIT
meeting, I remarked to the participants that I had also learned new information about bullying and cyberbullying during this study.

**Impacts of Cyberbullying**

The second research question, What is the impact of cyberbullying in the school setting? was addressed during the Look and Think phases of this study (Stringer, 2007) and identified two findings related to this study. The specific challenges that school staff at Wylie were struggling with included: (a) lack of understanding and supervision of student's computer activities, both at home and in school (Bauman, 2011); (b) lack of knowledge about the legal issues and concerns in schools (Willard 2007); (c) centralized solutions seem ineffective and time-consuming and therefore unrealistic on the local level (Beale & Hall, 2007). Reviewing the results of the staff survey about cyberbullying perceptions, teachers were likely ill-prepared to respond effectively to the issues in many of the areas surveyed. In addition, a finding related to the impacts in the school setting was the hesitancy in using technology in the classroom due to SIT participant worries and fears, as described in the discussion of research question one. The issues identified during this study were aligned with the national literature, as discussed in Chapter Two. Similar to the research reported in the literature review, Wylie wanted to develop localized solutions that fit their school culture and climate that their teachers, students, and parents supported.

SIT team members agreed that the impact of cyberbullying on students at Wylie Middle School was likely unknown. There had been several incidences previously reported to the school counselor, the principal, and a few teachers that involved cyberbullying that had occurred through student school email accounts, sexting on a student phone, and through social media at home. These incidences were described as concerns but not a "big problem." However, when
issues involving inappropriate student behavior surfaced, administrators made decisions to change teaching practices by limiting and, in some cases, ceasing activities that required online activities for school purposes. This finding had an impact on teacher practice in the classroom. For example, cyberbullying situations involving student email addresses and internet access by students attending Wylie had resulted in changes in school procedures and classroom activities.

The school administrators decided to not allow the use of student email addresses following mean messages being sent to some students. Cyberbullying situations involving student email accounts and internet access by students attending Wylie Middle School have resulted in changes in school procedures and classroom activities. Teachers were experimenting with students using email addresses to access internet programs for educational purposes and to send homework and papers to their teachers. Although the school requires an Internet Acceptable Use policy to be signed by all students and their parents, one student violated these terms by using their school email address to send mean messages to other students at school.

Another student used the email address to access an unauthorized website chat room. This was reported to be occurring at school and at home. School staff first discovered this activity and notified the parents. The school responded by ceasing the use of email addresses by students for school purposes. The impact resulted in teachers changing their practice of sending and receiving student work, feedback on papers, and instructions to students over email. This impact changed both the teaching and learning experiences of staff and students. This resulted in hesitancy in trying out new technologies and internet programs due to the school's role to protect students from harm and the school from potential liability. This was an example of how the use of online materials and programs, for educational purposes, can result in problems for schools. Ensuring the immediate safety of the students became the priority for the school administration.
during this situation. Protecting the school district from the liability related to student safety was also of concern. The ongoing debate among school staff addresses the question, How can the school protect the students while at the same time provide them with the skills and experiences that they will need in the future?

There was common understanding among the SIT participants about the school's response to the student safety issues, yet some disagreement about the decision to no longer allow email messaging to occur between teachers and students. Many aspects of this activity was proven to be successful and advantageous for learning. The outcome affected the methods teachers were using in classes. One teacher noted that, "I kind of got the results of what happened, it affected my class." and added that:

It didn’t matter if a kid didn’t have Microsoft Office at home, whatever they did at school, they could go home and log on and because of that account they could access information related to their assignment. That’s what I mean with the over-reactive part because now a lot of the sites that we go to, you have to register with your e-mail. Well, they don’t have e-mail at school, so now they have to do it at home and then if they forget, they can’t do what we’re doing. So, that hurts.

As described in the literature review, schools personnel may be slow in taking action initially and then react strongly when the situation escalates or is deemed unsafe. These decisions ultimately have an impact on student experiences at school and learning.

**Appropriate Interventions in the School Setting**

The third research question, What interventions, in regard to cyberbullying, are appropriate in the school setting? was addressed during the Act phase of the study (Stringer, 2007). The research problem addressed throughout this study suggests that school personnel lack
clarity and understanding about cyberbullying, in part, due to the inadequacy of information, guidance, and resources (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011). This action research study resulted in several action steps that improved the SIT team's understanding about cyberbullying and generated solutions to the issues that surfaced during this study. Several interventions that address cyberbullying were discussed and included the need to "keep talking about the issues." Since technology is a rapidly changing field, the SIT team concluded that this finding, to keep addressing the topic frequently, will encourage continued growth and understanding as changes occur. The SIT team acknowledged that they are going to have to keep talking about technology use in schools in order to keep up with the changes and issues that may affect the school setting. A teacher's comments summarized the importance of this commitment. "I really do think that continuing to talk about it and I think teachers are going to have to be open to it. Again, I think it’s the way that things are going." In order to make sense of all the information that was discussed related to cyberbullying, the SIT team decided to create a Cyberbullying Chart to display the information that was most important to the group. This chart provided a way for the team to view the data "at-a-glance." This chart was referenced during the Act phase of the study.

SIT members discussed the possibility of adopting a curriculum with a scope and sequence that addressed digital ethics and appropriate technology use at each middle school grade level in a more formal manner. Rather than the technology class being an elective class, the middle school would require that the class be taken by all students. The SIT team's lesson plans included responses to cyberbullying that were supported by the SIT team, locally designed from an existing product, and anchored in research-based strategies. Adoption of a curriculum that teaches digital ethics and includes cyberbullying prevention lesson plans was approved by SIT team members.
The team agreed that asking students about their thoughts and opinions would be an important consideration. The idea of a future student survey was discussed. In addition, the SIT members discussed surveying parents and designing a "Parent Night" with the main topic addressing cyberbullying and technology use by their children. They thought this information would assist and support the development and adoption of a formal curriculum. In addition, the SIT team realized that they had not formalized an internet safety plan, as required by federal regulations. Creating an internet safety plan was accomplished during this action research study.

For the most part, Wylie had implemented many of the recommended cyberbullying strategies discussed in the literature review. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) recommended several steps that support a healthy response and maximizes the learning opportunities present in schools. Wylie had several strategies in place prior to this study, including: (a) ensuring the safety of the student(s); (b) a process to inform law enforcement, legal counsel, and counseling services, as needed; (c) protecting the school from liability with cell phone use policies and internet use policies; (d) policies and procedures that adhered to state and federal laws. A few recommended strategies were missing from the school's responses and were discussed during this study, such as: (a) yearly instruction to students about digital ethics that included cyberbullying at all grade levels; (b) provide parent and family educational information; and (c) provide professional development to school staff about the problem and about the school's policy and procedures, related to cyberbullying. In addition, the school's cyberbullying policy required improvements and enhancements to include responses to off-campus speech. For the most part, Wylie Middle School had effective responses in place related to policies and procedures, but were lacking in areas related to student education and healthy practical experiences. These
suggested solutions to cyberbullying were more appropriate when combined with localized planning, problem-solving, and implementation (Hobson-Horton & Johnson, 2009).

**Online Disinhibition and Moral Disengagement**

This action research study was informed by the theoretical framework referred to as the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004). The fourth research question, How are the school’s cyberbullying issues and responses understood through the lens of a theoretical framework related to online disinhibition and moral disengagement? was addressed throughout this study during all phases of the action research process. As presented in the introduction and the review of the literature, the disinhibition of online behavior is the result of several factors specifically related to communication through the use of a digital device, such as computers and cell phones, rather than face-to-face. For this study, the phenomena of online disinhibition and moral disengagement were situated in the broader perspective related to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989, 2002; Bauman, 2009). Moral disengagement, a part of social cognitive theory, may occur online as a result of the disinhibition effect (Mason, 2008).

Inherent in online interactions were several phenomena that were distinct from face-to-face communication. Suler (2004) discussed six factors that may result in people saying and doing things in cyberspace that they may not ordinarily do in person. The six factors were referred to as: (a) dissociative anonymity; (b) invisibility; (c) asynchronicity; (d) solipsistic introjection; (e) dissociative imagination; and (f) minimization of status and authority. Collectively, these phenomena were referred to as the "online disinhibition effect." During this study, the first four factors were observed in the data that were analyzed through interviews and during SIT team meetings. A significant finding related to the theoretical framework of the Online Disinhibition Effect seemed to differentiate and further define cyberbullying from
conventional bullying (Bauman, 2009). Dissociative imagination and minimization of status and authority were not addressed and did not surface as factors related to this study.

SIT participants described some student behavior as "sneaky" and "impulsive" which led to behavior online that was regretted later. The counselor reported that students responded with "I don't know" when asked why they had said or done things online that resulted in problems for them. For the most part, staff reported that students in the middle school were not be able to articulate why they reacted online the way they did. The counselor reported that most students engaging in this behavior reported being angry at others while online and reacted spontaneously. Through the lens of social cognitive theory and developmental theory, it is not difficult to imagine how this typical middle school behavior coupled with online disinhibition might result in cyberbullying behavior. The SIT team agreed that the education of teachers, parents, and students along with reinforcement of the school rules was the most important role for the school, while protecting students from harm online during school.

The alignment of the disinhibition effect and moral disengagement provided a framework that the SIT team used to understand how social interactions might lead to cyberbullying behavior. These theoretical underpinnings helped explain to SIT members how cyberbullying may develop and persist during middle school and provided further definitions to distinguish bullying from cyberbullying. Bullying had taken on a new look through the use of technology and internet-based social media, therefore, the school responses to this problem needed to change to address cyberbullying issues (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). For example, addressing the disinhibiting factors presented by Suler (2004) in student lessons was suggested. New concepts related to Suler's (2004) factors would be added to the existing bullying prevention scope and sequence and adopted, officially for the 2013-2014 school year.
The next steps for Wylie Middle School will include approval of the proposed curriculum by parents and the school board before the lessons will be taught in classes next year. Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the new lessons will require further assessment next school year, as well. SIT teachers discussed the possibility of conducting a student survey to further their understanding of student's perspectives. During this study, SIT members reflected about what they thought students might want to learn about in regards to technology use in the school setting. A student survey would provide concrete information to the SIT team about what students want to learn. These actions were discussed as next steps for the Wylie Middle School SIT team.

Implications

The implications of this study were significant and may be useful at several levels. First, since there was only one elementary, middle school, and high school in this district, students attending the middle school may be positively influenced by cyberbullying lessons and resources that may carry over into their high school experiences. Potentially, most students in the district may be impacted by the outcomes implemented through this action research study. The principal continuously reported on the SIT team's progress to the elementary and high school principals, the school board and the school staff at Wylie Middle School. He shared information along the way in order to expand the learning of key district staff and to garner support for recommendations following the study. The action research process was instrumental in creating a pathway toward the development of solutions that the team could collectively endorse. The knowledge gained throughout the phases improved the outcomes of this study and were reflected in the final action plan. The SIT team appeared to improve their confidence as knowledge increased. This was observed through their ability to make final decisions with ease and without
cycling between the Look and Think phases so frequently. The process became more fluid and straightforward as the study progressed.

Second, a practical significance of this study was the development of new tools, resources, and knowledge about cyberbullying that may be shared with other schools and districts, if applicable. This action research study resulted in the development of new lesson plans that will be used in the classrooms and other resources that will be used school-wide. Creating interventions and responses to cyberbullying issues was a complex task. The SIT team discovered existing resources through the action research process that they were initially unaware of. The SIT team collectively contributed to the team's knowledge and understanding of cyberbullying that resulted in decisions that previously lacked solutions. Another practical significance was the realization by the team regarding the large amount of activities that the school was providing to students in order to prevent and intervene on bullying behavior. Prior to this study, the SIT team members did not realize how much effort was already being applied to address bullying. By creating the Cyberbullying Chart, the SIT members were able to view the activities at-a-glance and further understand their efforts both before and after this study. In addition, recognizing gaps in addressing cyberbullying, such as an internet safety plan, was discovered during this study. The team identified gaps and needs and therefore could begin to address them. The Cyberbullying Chart was a helpful resource during the ACT phase.

Third, a theoretical significance was this study's provision of information that incorporated the online disinhibition factors and proposed how school personnel might incorporate this new knowledge into their cyberbullying responses. This study contributed to the body of literature by analyzing the data through the lens of the online disinhibition effect and the factors suggested by Suler (2004). During this study, the first four factors were discussed as the
data was analyzed following the interviews and during SIT team meetings. The most important factors related to this study were: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, and solopsistic introjection. These factors seemed to define and distinguish cyberbullying from conventional bullying (Bauman, 2009). Discussions during SIT team meetings occurred regarding the developmental tasks of early adolescence (Erickson, 1993). Since building relationships with peers and developing independence are cited by Erickson (1993) as the primary tasks of early adolescents, providing information to students that supports healthy online relationships seemed critical to the team. These discussions resulted in SIT members understanding the importance in providing opportunities for students to effectively communicate and build healthy relationships, both online and offline. The specific social skills required to prevent cyberbullying and other online problems may be different from the traditional social skills that are currently taught to address conventional bullying. It was noted by team members that teaching these skills to students during the middle school years should be addressed in the curriculum in order to build the pro-social online skills. This is an area of study that may benefit from further research.

Finally, implications from the results reported from in this study provided new knowledge and insights to the body of research about how schools can respond effectively to cyberbullying problems from a local level. This study provided evidence for a collaborative process for responding to cyberbullying problems. The action research process contributed to the SIT team's progress in making decisions about interventions to cyberbullying that were appropriate to the school setting. Cycling between the Look, Think, and Act phases provided opportunities for members to learn and understand at their own pace and contribute information that was relevant to themselves and to the group in a timely manner. The team reported that they
had "learned so much" and wanted to share their learning with the other teachers. Administrators and teachers in similar schools may benefit from an action research process if they are struggling to agree about the type and amount of digital technology to incorporate into classroom lessons. They may benefit from an action research process that identifies the issues and brings clarity to them while moving the team forward with decisions. The Look, Think, and Act methodology allowed for SIT members to learn at their own pace. Collectively, the team eventually moved beyond their worries and made decisions that resulted in the approval of a classroom curriculum that will provide future students with knowledge and experiences regarding the ethical use of technology.

Summary

This study addressed cyberbullying issues that were specific to Wylie Middle School. Although the literature review identified that cyberbullying is perceived to be causing academic and behavior problems and negatively affecting school climate (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010), Wylie had additional staff concerns related to cyberbullying that were preventing them from making important decisions. These issues were related to conflicts caused by frustration and worry about student online use, lack of parental knowledge and supervision resulting in exposure to inappropriate information, and personal and professional issues and beliefs of teachers and parents that impacted school decisions. There were several unique issues to the Wylie SIT team that affected their decisions to incorporate technology use into their professional practice. The effort to build positive face-to-face relationships between students and school staff felt contradictory to increasing the use of technology in school. The school's SIT team members were struggling with these competing objectives as they explored cyberbullying. Through the individual interviews, personal perspectives related to cyberbullying
surfaced that affected teachers decisions in their classrooms. These themes offer a new contribution to the literature on cyberbullying in regard to teachers' perspectives and concerns. In particular the finding that educator's personal perspectives and fears regarding technology use and cyberbullying affect their classroom decisions is unique to this study.

The major outcomes of this study included collective understanding by the SIT team that cyberbullying and the related issues are complex, multi-layered, and emotional. SIT members shared their stories of bullying and their worries about middle school students and online activity. Their perceptions, both as parents and as teachers, influenced their decisions about incorporating technology use in their classrooms. They discussed their frustrations about the over-whelming use of computers and cell phones by their students and that they did not want school activities to increase student "screen" time. The SIT members discussed that they valued face-to-face social relationships and feared that communication through technology would negatively affect the healthy development of student's social skills. The team agreed that the school staff needed to "keep talking" about these issues in order to make the right decisions for students and prepare them for the future. Near the end of the study, team members commented about how little they knew at the beginning of the study compared to what they understood by the end. Through the action research process, a core team can be empowered and motivated to engage in a collaborative process to address cyberbullying issues.
CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS

While planning this action research study and anticipating events and milestones, I became aware of the immense undertaking and time-consuming effort that action research in schools involves. This is particularly of concern at a time in public schools when many initiatives and changes are taking precedent. Schools are under extreme pressure to push students academically and raise standardized tests scores, often at the expense of developing social skills and ensuring positive relationships. For students that are struggling to maintain healthy relationships and also achieve academically according to specific standards, this is a stressful time. This pressure for achievement is stressful for school personnel, as well. This study pushed academic achievement aside, just for a bit, and allowed Wylie Middle School to focus specifically on student social skill development, which was a fresh breath for me. Although, deep down, this middle school SIT team understood the positive correlations between healthy relationships and academic achievement, the intense focus on the social benefits of a pro-social climate in the school was clearly demonstrated. This group of stakeholders cared deeply about their students and strived to provide an environment that was both academically rich and socially supportive.

A couple of surprising trends emerged from the data and was noted in my field notes during the study. First, many students were reported by staff to be demonstrating increased knowledge in appropriate use of technology and digital ethics from year to year, despite a lack of formalized curriculum. The technology teacher recognized changes in student's knowledge and experience with digital technology from previous years and described it this way, "Now, this
group [of students] is better than the group I had two years ago. I don't know if it's because they are more familiar with it [technology]. I think they are more knowledgeable." Possibly, students were developing a higher level of sophistication, knowledge, and respect for technology as they experienced more exposure and at younger ages. Their parents may be more familiar with technology, as well. Children born using computers and the internet are now having their own children. Younger generations of parents and teachers may be much more comfortable with digital forms of technology than their older counterparts. A couple of teachers that were SIT members in this study were excited and energized about the possibilities for improving teaching through the use of technology. "I can see before I'm done teaching where every kid is going to walk in with their iPad and do their notes on their iPad and I don't have a problem with that. I like it." I don't know if this trend will result in less cyberbullying, however. In the future, the "worry" and "fear" about internet use and social networking may be reduced as student knowledge increases. Computer programs and tools are changing so rapidly. The themes and concepts that the SIT team worried about during this study, may be antiquated or non-existent in the very near future.

Secondly, a surprising amount of time was spent discussing technology use in the school rather than specifically cyberbullying. This issue related to cyberbullying required quite a bit of discussion and processing by the SIT team before decisions or actions could occur. Several teachers expressed resistance to incorporating more computer time because they valued face-to-face instruction. The cyclical nature of the Look, Think, and Act phases (Stringer, 2007) provided a way for this dialogue to occur in a manner that was effective in moving the team toward consensus so that ideas could be acted upon.
Continuing to explore ways to reduce bullying and cyberbullying among students through empowerment and social ethics is critical in our culture. Students will continue to need effective relationship skills and positive pro-social skills throughout their lives. Schools cannot afford to ignore teaching and fostering these skills, whether offline or online. As discussed in the literature review, attendance and behavior problems in schools may lead to school failure and is often fueled by bullying and cyberbullying. This behavior affects school success for many students. One teacher at the school remarked that student leadership is key in providing peer role-models as examples by stating:

We need very strong student leaders in our schools that can embrace an anti-bullying commitment that is school wide and starts at the earliest grades. I believe this will have a far greater impact than anything we can do in limiting and monitoring technology.

At the time of this study, Wylie Middle School was focusing efforts to incorporate the concepts and strategies of the program, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). PBIS principles include a disciplinary process that focuses primarily on positive behaviors and more specifically, teaching expected behaviors as a first step toward creating a positive school climate. The outcomes and action steps of this study were aligned with PBIS principles. As a result of this study, Wylie will be teaching positive digital skills that may lead to successful online relationships and behavior. Rather than focus on a disciplinary process that includes punishment, monitoring, and restrictions, the teachers at Wylie will teach expected online student behavior, which is preventative and supportive.

The SIT team will continue their learning this spring as they move forward with the curriculum approval process with parents and the school board. Understanding the perceptions of
their students and parents in regard to cyberbullying will provide additional information that can assist the SIT team with evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum next year. The SIT team now has a baseline of knowledge and information for moving forward into the digital age.

During the course of this action research study, I have learned that the issue of cyberbullying is complex and mired deep within biases about technology use, the internet, and the changing ways of teaching and learning. The SIT team at Wylie truly cared about the students and their families. Jeopardizing the safety and welfare of even one student was not worth the advantages that might result from online activities. This dilemma was foremost on everyone's mind as the SIT team worked through the study. From a parent perspective, I was impressed with this team's constant vigilance concerning student safety. As a school leader, I was debating the question that remained mostly unanswered during this study: How do we provide students opportunities while protecting them from potential harm? In the end, the group decided that education and instruction coupled with clear rules and monitoring was the proper balance to prevent cyberbullying and online problems. Still, I think the team is moving forward with mixed feelings and concerns. I think their movements will be slow and careful, which will likely improve the success of the cyberbullying action plan.

Upon final reflection about the success of this study, I acknowledge that the principal at Wylie Middle School was instrumental in providing the support necessary to complete this study. He provided the direction and vigilance for the topic of cyberbullying to maintain a priority despite competing demands during this school year. The school was simultaneously purchasing a new math curriculum, establishing a new homework policy, adopting new national Common Core Standards, and adopting Teacher-Principal Evaluation processes. Yet, the SIT team cared about bullying and was committed to improving their school climate for learning for the
students. In addition, there was a teacher on the team that I would describe as a "teacher-leader." She initiated the cyberbullying survey during the Think phase and brought several documents to the meetings that positively influenced the SIT team knowledge and understanding. The team benefited from her participation and leadership. Seeking out teacher-leaders from within a school is an important resource for school administrators and outsider/insider action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

This action research study positively influenced my leadership skills. I had many opportunities to practice the skills that I learned during the Educational Leadership program. Facilitating the action research process required me to be highly organized, plan ahead, and communicate effectively, both online and offline. Working with the SIT team required patience on my part, as team members cycled between the phases and effective listening skills as I interpreted information and facilitated the next steps. My own improved appreciation of teacher's immense care and concern for their students helped me intentionally slow down the action research process so that, collectively, the SIT team could identify all the issues related to cyberbullying and develop the most appropriate solutions for this school. This study renewed my hope that school staff not only care about academic standards, but also care about the social-emotional development of students.
REFERENCES


Healthy Youth Survey 2010 Survey Results (2010). RMC Research Corporation, Portland, OR.


**Appendix A**

**Wylie Middle School Study Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2013</td>
<td>Initial email correspondence with superintendent about study. First meeting with superintendent and principal to approve study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2013</td>
<td>Meeting with principal and school counselor to gather entry documents and begin the Look phase.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2013</td>
<td>First meeting with School Improvement Team (SIT).</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2013</td>
<td>Second meeting with SIT team. Establish email contact with SIT members to communicate individually about interview process and member checking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November - December 2013</td>
<td>Conduct interviews with SIT team participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2013</td>
<td>Third SIT meeting begins the Think phase. Ongoing email and face-to-face communication with SIT members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December - January 2013</td>
<td>Transcribe interviews and analyze data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>SIT team conducts school-wide teacher survey about cyberbullying perceptions. Ongoing checks for accuracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>Fourth SIT meeting. Analyze interview and survey data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2013</td>
<td>Fifth SIT meeting begins the Act phase. Analyze Cyberbullying Chart</td>
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<tr>
<td>February - March 2013</td>
<td>Review cyberbullying lesson plans and Digital Ethics curricula for approval. Team makes suggestions to district superintendent.</td>
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Appendix B

Qualitative Interview Questions for the Study “Middle School Responses To Cyberbullying: An Action Research Study”

(Submitted with IRB Exemption Determination Application, June 2012)

1. What is your role at Wylie Middle School (WMS)? How many years have you worked here?

2. How many years have you worked in education?

3. What interests you about participating in this workgroup about student cyberbullying?

4. How would you describe the strengths in technology use with teens?

5. How would you describe the problems with technology use with teens?

6. What are your thoughts and observations about bullying at WMS?

7. What are your thoughts about cyberbullying at WMS? Why do you think cyberbullying is such a problem?

8. What do you think are the gaps or missing pieces about the use of technology? What makes you think that?

9. Tell me about an incident that you are aware of or involved in?

10. What is WMS currently doing to reduce bullying and cyberbullying?

11. What do you think are "good" or "positive" next steps in regards to preventing cyberbullying? What should happen next?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
Appendix C

Cyberbullying Report Card Survey
# Cyberbullying Report Card

*From: “Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying”*

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.  
Cyberbullying Research Center

Is your school adequately addressing or prepared for cyberbullying concerns? Fill out this Report Card to find out. If you answer yes to all of these statements, you are prepared. If you answer no or don’t know the answer, you have work to do!

### General Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We know how many students at our school have been victims of cyberbullying.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We know how many students at our school have cyberbullied others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying is a not a significant problem in our school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School Climate/Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who witness cyberbullying are empowered to step up and inform a trusted adult rather than remain silent bystanders.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers regularly remind students to approach them for help if they are dealing with an issue related to cyberbullying or online safety.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is clear to students that the inappropriate use of technology will not be tolerated by school administration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We work to create a school climate in which cyberbullying is not considered “cool” among the student population.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Curriculum and Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are taught about acceptable computer and Internet use during the school year through presentations and assemblies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are taught about safe password practices and the protection of personal information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are taught about how to recognize cyberbullying and threats to their online safety.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are taught about how to respond to cyberbullying in an appropriate manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers know how to recognize cyberbullying issues and how to intervene in an appropriate manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We distribute materials to students and parents to educate them about cyberbullying.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We hold after-school meetings and events during the school year for parents and community members about online safety among youth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use older students to educate younger students about identification and prevention of cyberbullying and how to respond to it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are (and stay) familiar with the relevant major court decisions related to student speech using computers and the Internet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are familiar with the ways in which the school district might be civilly liable for negligently preventing or improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents, and we work to avoid them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cyberbullying Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We take suspected and actual incidents of cyberbullying seriously at our school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have developed and made known a continuum of disciplinary consequences for cyberbullying incidents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>We know when we can intervene in cyberbullying incidents that originated off campus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have an anonymous reporting system to allow students and teachers to report instances of cyberbullying without fear of retaliation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a formal relationship with a local law enforcement department capable of conducting computer and network forensic examinations should the need arise.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Cyberbullying Report Card

#### Policies

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our school has a clear cyberbullying policy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our cyberbullying policy includes language about off-campus behaviors being subject to discipline.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our school has a clear policy regarding cell phones and other portable electronic devices.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students know our policy regarding technology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents know our policy regarding technology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage about acceptable computer and Internet use is posted in school common areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Technology

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have Web site blocking and content monitoring software/hardware installed on our network to ensure age-appropriate Web browsing and communications.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We avoid putting student information on the district Web site.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Other Areas

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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Samer Hadioty, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University and Joshua W. Polikoff, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Together, they lecture across the United States on the causes and consequences of cyberbullying and offer comprehensive workshops for parents, teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, law enforcement, youth, and others concerned with addressing and preventing online aggression.

The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents. For more information, visit http://www.cyberbullying.org. © 2009 Cyberbullying Research Center. Samer Hadioty and Joshua W. Polikoff.
## Appendix D

### Cyberbullying Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements and Activities</th>
<th>Actions Taken</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prohibition of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Policy and Procedures, 3207 and 3207P - Components listed below:</strong></td>
<td>Adoption: revised on January 2011 to meet legal requirements.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Any school staff who observes, overhears, witnesses HIB must take prompt action to stop the behavior and prevent reoccurrence.</td>
<td>Annual staff training</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Definitions and processes are understood by school staff and students.</td>
<td>Annual staff training and student lessons</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Relationship of HIB law to other state laws is understood, i.e., sexual harassment and discrimination.</td>
<td>Annual staff training</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1. Prevention - In each school and on district website, HIB policy is posted along with name and contact information of school administrator and compliance officer.</td>
<td>Completed during study</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2. Annually, HIB law is provided in parent, student, and staff handbooks, available in offices/or hallways, and posted on website.</td>
<td>Included in student handbook, Completed during study</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3. Annually, students receive age-appropriate information regarding bullying and cyberbullying at orientation and other occasions.</td>
<td>Student Advisory, assemblies, Technology class, Formalized during study</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4. Incident Reporting Form is available in office or hallways, and on district website. This may be anonymous, confidential and/or non-confidential.</td>
<td>Completed during study</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5. Staff will receive annual training</td>
<td>Annual staff training</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on HIB policy and procedures, staff roles and responsibilities, monitoring common areas, and use of Incident Reporting Form.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D6. District will implement a range of prevention strategies including, classroom, school, and district-level approaches.</td>
<td>Second Step, Technology lessons, assemblies, Student Advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D7. Whenever possible, the district will implement evidenced-based programs that increase social competency, improve school climate, and eliminate HIB.</td>
<td>Second Step, Look into Digital Citizenship lessons for formalization, Completed during study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1. HIB Compliance Officer (CO) will be identified by district.</td>
<td>Superintendent indentified as CO during the year of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2. CO provides assistance to principal regarding complaints.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3. CO receives all Incident Reporting Forms, Discipline Referral Forms, and letters to parents providing outcomes to investigations.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4. CO is familiar with student information system and knows how to use this information to identify patterns of behavior and areas of concern.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5. CO oversees investigative process and ensures prompt, impartial and, thorough processes.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6. CO assesses training needs to staff and students</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7. CO provides OSPI with policy updates or changes.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8. CO facilitates meeting between staff, student, parents to develop a safety plan, when needed.</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9</td>
<td>Within 2 days of receiving an Incident Reporting Form, the CO or school staff must notify the families of students involved and refer them to the HIB law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E10</td>
<td>The investigation must be completed in 5 days of the initial report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E11</td>
<td>No later than 2 days following the completion of the investigation, the CO must respond to the families of the students involved in writing or in person stating the results of the investigation, violation of policy, if any, and process for appeal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E12</td>
<td>If corrective action taken, this must occur within 5 days of completed investigation and after contact made with families regarding the outcome. If under appeal, this may delay corrective action while due-process occurs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E13</td>
<td>Support for the targeted student must be provided, including a safety plan and immunity from retaliation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Requirements and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Actions Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electronic Resources Policy 2022 and 2022P</strong></td>
<td>Adopted revised version in June 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal electronic devices may be used to further educational and research mission of the district, however, school staff retain the final authority in deciding when and how students may use them.</td>
<td>Cell Phone Use Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The district reserves the right to prioritize the use of, and access to, the network.</td>
<td>Monitoring, filtering and restricting access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. District identifies acceptable and unacceptable use of network services. Internet Use Agreements with staff and students are recommended.  
   **Policy 2022 and 2022P**

4. District will provide monitoring and filtering of inappropriate content and use according to CIPA, E-Rate and district decisions.  
   **Filtering and Blocking program in use**

5. All students will be educated about appropriate online behavior, including social networking websites, chat rooms and cyberbullying awareness and response.  
   **Technology class, policies, student advisory, assemblies**

6. Included in student education are, safety and citizenship in online activities, copyright laws, ownership of work, network security and privacy, confidentiality, and No expectation of privacy.  
   **Completed during study**

7. Back-up of email correspondence for public disclosure will be provided.  
   **Back-up on server**

8. Understanding that all users of district's electronic resources will adhere to policies and that disciplinary action may be taken if violations occur.  
   **Policy in Handbook and discussed in technology class, student advisory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements and Activities</th>
<th>Actions Taken</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CIPA and E-Rate Requirements for school and library discounts</strong></td>
<td>Universal Service Fund certified compliance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Technology Protection Measures</td>
<td>Bocks and Filters</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Internet Safety Policy</td>
<td>Electronic Resources Policy and Internet Use Agreement</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Public notice hearing or meeting</td>
<td>One meeting to address policy and actions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adoption of HIB Policy that</td>
<td>See policy and procedures 3207</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
includes digital cyberbullying and harassment over the internet, computers and phones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements and Activities</th>
<th>Actions Taken</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology Course - exploratory</td>
<td>Offered to all students - elective, not required</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidenced-Based strategies: Second Step curriculum for 6-8 grades.</td>
<td>Implement bullying prevention portion</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Advisory lessons and discussions, bullying and cyberbullying prevention</td>
<td>Lesson Plans</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All school assemblies</td>
<td>Mr. Mojo-December 2012 Bullying Prevention</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Orientation - education about bullying policy</td>
<td>First week of school - special topics</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open House for families</td>
<td>Provide information about bullying prevention, electronic resources, and Cell Phone Policy.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Youth Survey</td>
<td>Students in 6th and 8th grades take a youth perception survey every two years about their behaviors. This survey addresses bullying, cyberbullying, and related topics. Last survey Fall 2012</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying presentation to all students in advisory class in 2011</td>
<td>PowerPoint delivered by student intern</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher survey about cyberbullying perceptions</td>
<td>Cyberbullying Report Card</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action research study addressing student cyberbullying 2012-2013</td>
<td>School Improvement Team addressed cyberbullying issues</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Wylie Middle School Internet Safety Plan

This plan outlines the steps implemented by Wylie Middle School in order to meet requirements established by CIPA and E-Rate regulations. The Internet Safety Plan provides the steps taken by the school to improve student awareness and understanding of appropriate online communication through social media and social networking. The school has also taken the following steps to prevent and reduce cyberbullying and other unsafe online activity.

1. Web blocking, filtering, and monitoring systems in place.

2. Parent letter and Internet Use Agreement form sent home defining the school’s policy and expectation of students. Parent and student signature is required.

3. Introduction to Technology course, offered quarterly.
   a. Scope and Sequence includes internet safety, both social and personal.

4. Student Orientation topics:
   a. Acceptable Use of Electronic Resources policy and expectations
   b. Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying policy and procedures, including cyberbullying
   c. Cell Phone Policy and expectations

5. Student Advisory – Lessons about bullying and cyberbullying prevention, being an upstander not a bystander

6. Assembly for all grade bands – Bullying and cyberbullying prevention

7. Staff professional development: School policies and procedures including, HIB policy, Electronic Resources policy, Cell Phone Use policy. Professional development about intervening on bullying behavior and reporting to administration.