

ON WHY CREATING AWARENESS ON CYBERBULLYING IS CRUCIAL

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INTRODUCTION

Internet, mobile devices, social media platforms are more deeply integrated into the social fabric of young people's lives than ever before. We live in a world where there is a constant need and pressure to post everything about our personal lives online and build an internet persona making it difficult for consumers of digital platforms to draw a line on what is real and what is not.

One of the pressing issues of being part of a digital world is being subjected to online bullying or cyberbullying. "Cyberbullying is a form of harassment and bullying that incorporate sending hurtful or threatening e-mails, text messages, or instant messages, disseminating rumors or posting embarrassing photos of others. Cyberbullying can be an extension of bullying that takes place through technology" (Gage, 2016).

Recently, the death of professional wrestler Hana Kimura from the reality show Terrace House sparked debates on how cyberbullying in Japan is proliferating. Her death at just 19 years old magnified the tremendous effects of online bullying. When I brought it up as a *quick writing topic* to my students last semester, I have read several reactions and opinions that deeply empathized with the cause of her death.

(Student A, B, C, are the same student for both quick writing topics.)

Quick Writing Topic 1:

Do you think Cyberbullying is one of the main reasons of Hana Kimura's death?

Student A:

Yes, I do. I think it is more painful and scary than we think.

Student B

Yes. I think that's one of the reasons she died. This is because, she was bullied on internet.

Student C

Yes, I do, I think Hana's friends were nice people, I don't understand why they couldn't help her. They should have cared for her and had notice she was experiencing bullying online.

Quick Writing Topic 2:

Do you think Hana's death could have been prevented? Explain your answer in at least more than 3 sentences.

Student A

Yes, I do. The writer should think once before writing. They should know how much damage it will cause and hurt someone, and she needed an environment in which she could tell her suffering.

Student B

Yes, I think she had seen many terrible comments before died. However no one tried to help her. We should stop this cyberbullying, and I think no one should see terrible comments.

Student C

I think her death could have been prevented if a third party was quick to notice and deal with the online bullying. In addition, it could have been prevented if her close friends stayed with her and helped her.

Whilst these responses reflected to some extent student's knowledge on what are the effects of cyberbullying and how it could have been prevented. It doesn't lessen the need for schools to emphasize and reinforce awareness about cyberbullying.

Anderson (2017) found that when young people experience cyberbullying, they tend not to report the harassment or the abuse. Most of the time, initially, don't see it as a serious problem, and more often they don't want parents or adults taking away their digital devices. Gordon (2020) states that bullying is all about power dynamics, someone being bullied online tends to feel powerless or weak. Another important thing to take note of is that many students consider bullying as only in forms of physical abuse because it is easy to pinpoint. Consequentially, without teaching students about cyberbullying, many students will fail to recognize when they are being cyberbullied. Posting mean or hurtful comments, name calling, spreading rumors, posting photoshopped photos without your consent, all constitute cyberbullying, yet to a teenager's eyes it may appear as if it was all just all part of the "norm" in social media.

Therefore, it is crucial that schools provide a clear framework and plan on how cyberbullying awareness should be taught in school, what one should do when they are experiencing it and most importantly who to ask for help.

What can we do?

As teachers we can integrate conversations about cyberbullying into our lessons about violence, self-esteem, seeking help, standing up for friends or preventing bullying (Anderson, 2017). It is also important that we explicitly tell students that bullying isn't just in the form of physical abuse but also anything that put their emotional health at risk. Furthermore, schools must continuously promote anti-bullying campaigns in the campus as well as provide a clear channel and clear direction on who and where to report and ask for help when they experience this form of abuse. Student administrative affairs should take it as a serious matter and should set clear policies that address what to do in case of

receiving reports on cyberbullying in campus and adopt codes of conduct that sets the consequences upfront. Adams (2020) pointed out that if schools are using technology to deliver education and instruction, they have a responsibility to educate students, how to use it correctly.

Whilst these suggestions offer a starting point on how we can address cyberbullying. I believe there are a host of opportunities where given the right attention and effort we can come up with an efficient framework on how awareness of cyberbullying can be taught in schools. Finally, and I believe most importantly we should all work together in providing an educational environment with positive online platforms and spaces where students can feel secured, respected, and nurtured at all cost.

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