Cyberbullying, Cybersafety and Digital Citizenship

School violence in schools has become a major concern for school systems and Governments. There are few days when there is not a report by the media regarding bullying, including cyberbullying by young people. To illustrate, forty-five states in the US now have "anti-bullying laws; in Massachusetts, anti-bullying programs are mandated in school and criminal punishment is outlined for even the youngest offenders" (The Crime Report, 10/10/10). The instances of kids bullying each other or their school mates through text messaging, Facebook and technological tools are increasing and authorities are concerned (TechWeek, 9/10/10).

According to Kevin Briggs, Vice Principal, "Even when cyberbullying originates from a home computer, administrators can get involved" (Centre Daily Times, 14/10/10). The consequences can be serious, for both the bullied and the bully. Where consequences are imposed, the offending students can find themselves in trouble. There are now instances where these inappropriate behaviours have longer term, negative implications for current educational outcomes of those students if they are suspended or excluded from schooling, and can impact negatively on their future job prospects.

In response to cyberbullying challenges within the wider challenges of school violence and bullying more generally, the Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence (QSAAV), formed in February 2010, had the task of develop recommendations for the government to support schools to address bullying and violence. The final report *Working Together Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence* (QSAAV, 26/10/10), released by the Queensland Premier and the Minister for Education and Training, makes eight recommendations about future directions for the government to continue to support Queensland schools to address bullying and violence.

The first recommendation foregrounds 'cybersafety', and it urges "all Queensland schools to adopt a cyber safety strategy" (QSAAV, 26/10/10) through consultation with students, parents and school staff, acceptable use agreements for students and school staff, clear directions about the use of mobile phones and other electronic equipment by students during school hours, regular review of the strategy, and inclusion of cyber safety within the school's teaching and learning program. Careful analysis of the report in relation to this reveals a suite of resources for schools being identified, and also encouragement of the identification of best practice.

The framing of this recommendation is both commendable and predictable. In discussing the report recommendations recently with Principals, albeit very informally, they understood that the 'wirearchical' (as Jon Husband refers to this) power relationships in a digital, networked world are very different from the 'command and control' hierarchical relationships schools and parents previously might have had with their students. From their first hand professional experiences with the challenges, the Principals believe that central to the solution has to be student agency in being good digital citizens in using technologies wherever they might be and whatever time they decide to engage in using them.

This is new territory and missing from the report is any reference to digital citizenship, which can assist in elevating the recommendations into action and positive outcomes. The experienced Principals I spoke with were looking for new practical guidance to these new challenges, such as cyberbullying, digital identity, digital security, and digital rights and responsibilities. Developing digital citizenship (see http://www.digitalcitizenship.net/) in our young people might well be worthwhile the QSAAV and schools exploring.

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Word Count: 536 words