Cyberbullying Prevention: The Development of Virtual Scenarios for Counselors in Middle Schools

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Concerns over an escalating cyberbullying problem have prompted educators to search for viable and safe methods to teach cyberbullying awareness and prevention techniques. While negative assertions about technology are disconcerting and cannot be ignored, online and mobile technologies continue to evolve and present positive and beneficial ways to teach students of today and tomorrow. With the value of technologies in mind, the challenges and obstacles in cyberspace and the virtual world need to be addressed. Thus, for school counselors, teachers and principals, an overarching challenge is presented by such questions as: (1) How do we teach students to protect themselves in digital environments and prevent negative interactions such as cyberbullying? and, (2) How can technology be used as a vehicle to educate adolescents and to raise their awareness of cyberbullying?

This study sought to develop meaningful and engaging virtual cyberbullying scenarios that reflect the educational needs of today’s adolescents. In order to inform and script these scenarios, a three-phase study with middle school youth was implemented. This study focused on middle school students because the literature has shown a peak in cyberbullying during these school years.

A student survey (Phase I) and focus groups (Phase II) informed two scenarios that were written and later developed in the virtual environment called Second Life (SL). Screen captured videos of the two scenarios were then saved for off-line viewing and assessment (Phase III, the present study). This study describes the development of the scenarios and implications for educational use in middle schools. With few studies that have recreated cyberbullying situations, assessing the effectiveness of such scenarios in education is important. Filling this gap can provide valuable, alternative educational methods to school counselors, school administrators, teachers, and other mental health professionals, and parents to help educate and prevent cyberbullying.


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