Anti-Cyberbullying Strategies for Elementary School Educators

By

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Abstract

This qualitative research study examines the question: How is a small sample of elementary school teachers designing and implementing gender inclusive lessons aimed at preventing cyberbullying; and what outcomes do they have on students’ understanding and prevention of cyberbullying? Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two elementary school teachers working in the Greater Toronto Area who actively educate their students about cyberbullying. Participants were contacted through convenience and purposive sampling. Interview transcripts were coded to examine emergent themes. Developed themes were then organized into five main themes. The themes included taking a proactive approach to address cyberbullying, the importance of collaboration as a means to address and combat the issue of cyberbullying, and the use of engaging resources and strategies to make learning meaningful for students. Further, the main themes discussed how participants noted gender differences in how students experience cyberbullying, but took a whole-class approach to addressing anti-cyberbullying education, and how participants indicated significant barriers that teachers and their students face regarding the issue of cyberbullying. Implications for the educational community and for my own personal and professional identity are discussed, and recommendations are made for teachers, school boards, and Faculties of Education to better prepare educators to incorporate anti-cyberbullying strategies into their elementary school communities.

Key Words: cyberbullying, elementary education, prevention strategies
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Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 3

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................... 8
1.1 Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................................. 10
1.2 Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 11
1.3 Background of the Researcher ................................................................................................ 11
1.4 Overview .................................................................................................................................. 14

Chapter 2: Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 16
2.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 16
2.1 Traditional Bullying .................................................................................................................. 16
2.2 Cyberbullying ............................................................................................................................ 17
  2.2.1 Variables of age and gender ................................................................................................. 19
  2.2.2 The problem with cyberbullying research .......................................................................... 21
2.3 Teachers Perceptions and Reluctance to Intervene ............................................................... 23
  2.3.1 Teachers’ perceptions of cyberbullying: The identity of the teacher .................................. 24
  2.3.2 The law ................................................................................................................................ 25
2.4. Anti-Cyberbullying Pedagogies: Intervention and Prevention Strategies ......................... 27
  2.4.1 Scholarly suggestions for best practices ............................................................................27
2.5. Conclusion ................................................................................................................................ 31

Chapter 3: Research Methodology ............................................................................................... 33
3.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 33
3.1 Research Procedures ............................................................................................................... 33
ANTI-CYBERBULLYING STRATEGIES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection ................................................................. 35
3.3. Participants .............................................................................................. 36
  3.3.1 Sampling criteria .................................................................................. 36
  3.3.2 Recruitment .......................................................................................... 37
  3.3.3 Participant biographies ......................................................................... 38
3.4. Data Analysis ........................................................................................... 39
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures ......................................................................... 40
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths ............................................... 42
3.7. Conclusion ................................................................................................ 43

Chapter 4: Research Findings ......................................................................... 45
4.0 Introduction ................................................................................................ 45
4.1 Teacher Participants Acknowledged That It Is Essential to Take a Proactive Approach to Address Cyberbullying With Their Students ................................................................. 46
  4.1.1 Teacher participants indicated that students should learn about cyberbullying early in their schooling as a way to develop the whole child ........................................ 46
  4.1.2 Teacher participants indicated that teaching “netiquette” to students is an essential step in addressing cyberbullying .................................................................................. 49
  4.1.3 Teacher participants suggested that educators should focus on using technology for positive purposes .................................................................................................................. 50
4.2 Teacher Participants Addressed the Importance of Collaboration as a Means to Address and Combat the Issue of Cyberbullying ................................................................. 51
  4.2.1 Teacher participants encouraged parent collaboration to clearly understand student/child expectations regarding technology use ................................................................. 52
4.2.2 Teacher participants encouraged teacher collaboration for support and to share resources and strategies ................................................................. 53

4.2.3 Teacher participants encouraged community collaboration to bring experts into schools to further educate students ................................................................. 55

4.3 Teacher Participants Indicated That They Use Engaging Resources and Strategies to Make Learning Meaningful for Students ................................................................. 56

4.3.1 Teacher participants recommended the use of online websites and applications ........ 56

4.3.2 Teacher participants recommended the use of hands-on strategies ................................................................. 58

4.3.3 Teacher participants recommended the use of discussion-based learning ................ 59

4.4 Teacher Participants Observed Gender Differences in How Students Experience Cyberbullying, but Took a Whole-Class Approach to Addressing Anti-Cyberbullying Education With Their Students ................................................................. 60

4.4.1 Teacher participants indicated that boys and girls experience cyberbullying differently 60

4.4.2 Teacher participants used a whole-class approach when creating anti-cyberbullying lessons, but did consider gender as a factor in designing lessons ................................................................. 62

4.5 Teacher Participants Indicated Significant Barriers That Teachers and Their Students Face Regarding the Issue of Cyberbullying ................................................................. 63

4.5.1 Teacher participants noticed the negative effects that cyberbullying had on their students’ well-being and academic performance as well as their personal well-being .......... 64

4.5.2 Teacher participants acknowledged other teachers’ reluctance to teach anti-cyberbullying lessons due to lack of resources ................................................................. 66

4.5.3 Teacher participants acknowledged keeping up-to-date with technology as a significant barrier but recommended strategies to overcome this barrier ................................................................. 67
### Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction.................................................................................................................. 70

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance......................................................... 70

5.2 Implications.................................................................................................................... 72

5.2.1 The educational community....................................................................................... 72

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice......................................................................... 73

5.3 Recommendations.......................................................................................................... 74

5.3.1 Teachers .................................................................................................................. 75

5.3.2 School boards.......................................................................................................... 75

5.3.3 Faculties of Education............................................................................................. 76

5.4 Areas for Further Research.......................................................................................... 76

5.5 Concluding Comments................................................................................................. 77

References........................................................................................................................... 80

Appendix A: Interview Consent Letter............................................................................... 84

Appendix B: Interview Protocol.......................................................................................... 86
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction: Research Context and Problem

Cyberbullying is one of the most difficult and concerning aspects to the growing accessibility of technologies in a new media age (Smith & Steffgen, 2013). Children have begun to access and interact with cyberspace at younger ages, and as a result have misused the internet as a means to bully and harass their peers (Smith & Steffgen, 2013; Shariff, 2009). According to Smith and Steffgen (2013), “Technology is currently travelling at a lightening speed seemingly beyond human comprehension. But behind the new devices, new apps and the mal-expression are people—just people” (p.291). The problem is that these “people” have the power to create detrimental harm on their victims. Amanda Todd was a fifteen-year-old girl from British Columbia who made national headlines after she took her own life because of online harassment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Prior to her suicide, she created a YouTube video describing her struggle with cyberbullying—a video that did not go viral until after her death.

Cyberbullying refers to the bullying and harassment of others by means of new electronic technologies, primarily mobile phones and the internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Eden, Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013; Smith & Steffgen, 2013). Cyberbullying has been found to be related to “negative psychosocial functioning among children who are victimized, including lowered self-esteem, higher rates of depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, suicidal ideation, and higher rates of school absenteeism” (American Psychological Association, 2004, p.1). Some researchers argue that cyberbullying is an exaggerated, low-prevalence phenomenon (Wölfer et al., 2013; Todd, 2014). A statement deemed unfathomable to many researchers who argue its effects are more severe than traditional bullying. This is because cyberbullying is often
anonymous, goes under the radar if not reported, there is less opportunity for adult intervention, and can include hundreds of people (Trolley & Hanel, 2010; Smith & Steffgen, 2013).

Age and gender are two variables that significantly influence a teachers’ inclination to address cyberbullying in their classrooms. There tends to be an assumption that middle school girls are the only people who experience high rates of online bullying as a victim or a perpetrator (Wölfer et al., 2013; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). However, when analyzing existing literature, Smith and Steffgen (2013) conclude that there were inconsistent findings among researchers regarding gender and cyber abuse. Some viewed boys as most likely to cyberbully, while other researchers indicated that girls were more likely to cyberbully; others found there was few or no significant differences (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Smith & Steffen, 2013; Bauman, Cross, & Walker, 2013). Englander (2013) highlights that by age eight more than 90 percent of third-graders are already interacting with other children online. As a result, some studies indicate that kids report being mean to each other online beginning around the second grade when they are approximately seven or eight-years-old (McQuade et al., 2009; Monks, Robinson, & Worlidge, 2012). Monks et al.’s (2012) study is an example of the very limited amount of research that is focused on primary-aged students. They use their research to urge the implementation of intervention and prevention strategies with this age group. The results showed a very negative response to cyberbullying and that victims were negatively affected by it. These results highlight how important it is that young children as well as staff and parents be educated on this issue before they engage in the use of the internet and cell phones.

There are several identified factors that weigh on a teacher’s willingness to implement anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms. Studies have shown that a teachers’ gender, education level, and the age of the students they teach affect their level of concern about
cyberbullying and their willingness to teach about it in their classrooms (Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013). Other studies indicate that a teachers age can also affect their ability to understand cyberbullying (Todd 2014; Bauman et al., 2013). It is often difficult for teachers to address cyberbullying because the lines are often blurred on what constitutes bullying or if it is a school issue when the bullying is done outside of school time. Stewart (2013) argues that schools have traditionally required students to trade some of their ‘free speech rights’ for protection from the negative effects of other students’ unregulated speech. Unfortunately, current school speech practice cannot wholly be applied to cyberbullying which often leaves schools unable to discipline cyberbullies. It also questions students right to privacy. Legislation, such as Ontario’s Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13) has been incorporated in all school boards to aid student victims of harassment and bullying, however a problem with terminology and existing legislation creates further ambiguities for teachers (Shariff, 2015).

The ever-changing rate of technology is a main problem with understanding cyberbullying because just as researchers believe they understand the problem, new technologies, websites, and youth online phenomenon’s emerge. The elementary curriculum is often “irrelevant and out of touch with young people’s lived realities” (Shariff, 2015, p.5). Therefore, on-going research on this topic is both valuable and required in order to confront the issues of cyberbullying as an elementary school educator in order to deliver relevant and effective lessons to students.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems regarding cyberbullying and the high use of technology, the goal of my research is to understand how educators introduce the conversation of cyberbullying into elementary primary and junior classrooms. I want to understand how educators design and
implement effective lesson plans that aim to prevent cyberbullying. I aim to share my findings with the educational research community who may use these findings to inform all elementary school teachers (regardless of the age of students, gender of teacher or students, or the teachers’ educational background) about strategies for, and potential outcomes from, anti-cyberbullying pedagogies in the classroom.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is: How is a small sample of elementary school teachers designing and implementing gender inclusive lessons aimed at preventing cyberbullying; and what outcomes do they have on students’ understanding and prevention of cyberbullying?

Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

• What factors do these teachers take into account when designing lessons on the topic of cyberbullying?

• What experiences and resources prepared and inform these teachers’ work on the topic of cyberbullying prevention?

• What challenges do these teachers encounter in this work and how do they respond to these challenges?

• What role does gender inclusivity play in their approach to cyberbullying prevention?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

As someone who has been both the victim and perpetrator of cyberbullying, I do feel that many students are unaware that their online actions are considered ‘bulllying’. I was ‘the perfect student’ in elementary school—straight A’s, involved in extra-curricular activities, never sent to the principal’s office, a student teachers relied on, etc.—so being in the middle of a
cyberbullying incident which ended in the vice-principal’s office was completely out of my element and I was completely shocked that it occurred at all. In the fourth grade, I was introduced to the world of instant messaging (IM) through a chat website called MSN Messenger. To my knowledge, this was by far the the most popular mode of online communication amongst junior elementary students in the early 2000s. Like most students, I spent hours every evening consumed by the virtual social circle which I had formed with my school friends; hours which were spent discussing any topic ranging from homework questions to juvenile gossip. The problem with sharing online content with peers is that just because a conversation is directly between three people in a chat session does not mean it will remain between this triad. MSN Messenger offers a feature in which you have the option to save all your conversations in a ‘message history’ folder. Even without this feature, most people are tech savvy enough to realize it is just as easy to copy and paste data into an existing document. In the seventh grade, an age where many girls are thirsty for drama, my friend and I had a fight which deemed us no longer friends. During this time of turmoil, my ‘ex-friend’ sought refuge with a girl who my friends and I did not like. Before this fallout, we would spend hours calling her names of every extreme, names I am not proud to admit. As a means of revenge, as well as out of hurt for the victim, these girls printed off all documentation of our harsh conversations, and her mother went straight to the vice-principal. This was in 2005 and the legislation and information on this form of bullying or how schools are to intervene was extremely scarce. A student who was extremely conscious about good behaviour and strived for perfection was suddenly in the middle of a very serious situation, because I was unaware of the consequences of putting derogatory information into cyberspace because I thought it was a private conversation.
In a strange twist of fate, the same person who I cyberbullied had cyberbullied me a few years earlier. However, I was unaware at the time that it was considered cyberbullying and as a result I brushed it off and eventually let it go. When I was nine-years-old, I received my first email account with Hotmail. At this age, it was used mainly to send silly chain letters, e-cards, and letters to friends. This was my introduction to the online world. Hotmail offers their users the opportunity to create a portfolio with basic information including a photo of yourself, name, nicknames, occupation, hobbies, etc. This section set me up for extreme embarrassment when my account was hacked and the information in these categories was changed. My photo was changed to an image of Shrek the ogre. My occupation was titled ‘being ugly’. After this joke was exhausted, I became the crazy meat lady. A photo of a dancing ham became my profile picture (I commend the creativity). As an adult, you see how silly this is; but you may also see how hurtful and damaging this could be to a young child. What was worse was that the person had changed my password so that I could not edit these posts. There is nothing more constricting than feeling trapped in the online world—knowing there is untrue and hurtful information about you that cannot be deleted. You ultimately feel stuck. There were two mistakes I made in this situation. First, being completely uninformed on how to protect myself from cyber hacking—making my password the name of my dog was not a good idea. Second, I should have reported this incident to an adult instead of keeping it a secret. Eventually, the girl who did it wrote a letter to me apologizing and told me the password.

What I now consider is whether or not there was a correlation between the two events—whether my anger from the first incident possibly sparked my intent to lash out online using negative words to describe her. Regardless of my motivation, from my personal experience it is evident that students begin using technology at a very young age. If I began to use email and IMs
in 2002, one can only imagine how young students are entering cyberspace as the access to technology expands. When Facebook first gained in popularity, it provided users with applications such as ‘honesty box’ and ‘compare people’. I remember receiving anonymous messages saying my legs were too fat, and being ranked rather low on a ‘hottest girls’ scale in comparison to my classmates. We now live in a world where websites and applications such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Vine are household names. Our world is completely digitized; new apps continuously being created which leaves young students vulnerable to online bullying and harassment.

It is important that I understand the ways that educators now implement anti-cyberbullying pedagogies into their school communities. There is a notion that cyberbullying only happens amongst middle school girls; but as we will learn, this is not always the case. Because children now begin to use technology at very young ages, they need to learn the vocabulary and gain an early understanding on the issue of cyberbullying. My greatest worry is that teachers will wait until there is a serious problem with cyberbullying in their classrooms. My aim is to focus on early intervention and prevention in elementary schools. Students must be taught to be aware of their actions in order to avoid the detrimental effects of peer victimization that come from being both victim and the perpetrator.

1.4 Overview

I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two elementary school educators about their instructional strategies for introducing anti-cyberbullying pedagogies into their school community. I intend to interview at least one male teacher and teachers that range in grade concentration (Grades One to Six). In Chapter 2, I will review the literature in the areas of cyberbullying intervention and prevention in elementary
schools. These anti-cyberbullying strategies should provide insight to young children as well as be gender inclusive. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4, I will report my findings and discuss their significance in relation to the existing research literature previously discussed. In Chapter 5, I will identify the implications of my findings which will be used to frame my own reflexive teaching practices as well as with the wider educational research community. These implications will be used to develop questions raised by the research findings and to direct future areas of research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of cyberbullying intervention and prevention strategies for elementary school educators (Grades One to Six). More specifically, I review the key terminology regarding bullying, particularly cyberbullying, and recognize the key problems that researchers suggest often obscures this topic. Next, I consider the key factors that may influence a teachers’ reluctance participate in cyberbullying intervention and prevention strategies in their classrooms. Lastly, I review literature that highlights successful intervention and prevention strategies in elementary school classrooms.

2.1 Traditional Bullying

Traditional bullying, commonly referred to as schoolyard bullying, is often seen as an inevitable part of school culture or a rite of passage for youth (Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Bullying has traditionally been defined as an aggressive behavior that causes intentional distress or harm, involves an imbalance of power or strength between the aggressor and the victim, and commonly occurs repeatedly over time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Englander, 2013; Smith & Steffgen, 2013; Shariff, 2008; American Psychological Association, 2004; Olweus, 1999). Bullying is demonstrated through physical or psychological (such as verbal) behaviours (Shariff, 2008; American Psychological Association, 2004; Olweus, 1999). Canadian studies indicate that 10 to 15 percent of children are bullied or engage in bullying at least once a week (Shariff, 2008). This behaviour often begins in kindergarten and involves variable degrees of severity all throughout elementary school and into secondary school classrooms (Shariff, 2008; Katch, 2001).

For many reasons, educators often do not recognize the severity of bullying, as it is often confused for teasing and may not see the psychological symptoms that a victim could experience (Shariff, 2008). Both boys and girls display similar levels of bullying, however tend to bully in
different ways. Boys are said to bully more often through overt, physical forms of bullying, whereas girls engage in covert, psychological forms of bullying (Shariff, 2008). Shariff (2008) suggests that, “In bullying, the perpetrators primary objective is the isolation and exclusion of certain peers…” (p.16). The stereotypical image of a bully is commonly one who is dejected and unpopular, however studies now indicate that most perpetrators display high leadership skills and academic achievement (Olweus, 2001). The top reasons for bullying include one’s ethnic background and religion, socio-economic status, lack of learning and sporting aptitude, being characterized as an over-achiever, and being labelled as different based on being a new student or speaking a different language (Shariff, 2008). The effects of bullying are very severe and have the potential to cause long-term psychological damage. Mental suffering from the social exclusion caused by physical and psychological bullying is enough to destroy the confidence of students and can have long-term effects on an individual (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Englander, 2013; Shariff, 2008).

### 2.2 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2010, but many scholars credit Bill Belsey, a Canadian who launched a cyberbullying website in 2003, with coining the term (Bauman, Cross, & Walker, 2013). Cyberbullying refers to the bullying and harassment of others by means of new electronic technologies, primarily mobile phones and the internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Eden, Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013; Smith & Steffgen, 2013). Thus, cyberbullying is often seen as an extension of bullying; however, some argue that the impacts are proven to be more severe since a victim is often unable to escape their online perpetrator. Todd (2014) claims that, “unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying can be relentless—shocking a victim anywhere at any time: alone in their bedroom, walking home from
school, or even on a family vacation” (p.146). There is also an immediate need for attention on the issues of cyberbullying as the problem is only going to grow as the majority of the population learns to communicate online (Todd, 2014). Beyond the continuing access to technological devices, the cyberworld is continuously advancing and becoming more complex. McQuade, Colt, and Meyer (2009) highlight that, “The internet, computers, and technological devices now make creating and conveying mean messages to individuals or groups potentially and tremendously more efficient and effective” (p. 3). These technologies now allow messages to consist of text, images, videos, and audio recordings to make cyber threats more contextually devastating.

There are many features that make cyberbullying more appealing than traditional forms of bullying. First, there is the ability to remain anonymous by hiding behind a false screen name or to steal someone else’s identity and communicate as that person (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Todd, 2014; Englander, 2013). Englander (2013) argues that online anonymity is more common during the elementary school years. Second, for socially anxious individuals who may have been the target of traditional bullying, the internet provides a forum to communicate without fear and creates the ability to seek revenge on bullies (Todd, 2014). Other reasons include inner feelings such as boredom, jealousy, experimenting with a new persona anonymously, or redirected feelings, as well as external motivations including avoiding face-to-face interactions (Smith & Steffgen, 2013).

In order to fully understand what cyberbullying is and where it crosses the line, one must look at different categories and types that have been recognized. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) highlight the many different modes of cyberbullying that young cyber users experience. They include: spreading rumours or private information, posting pictures or videos, impersonation,
cyberstalking (using technology to induce fear), and physical threats. One mode that often goes unnoticed is self-cyberbullying. Just as suffering adolescents may physically hurt themselves in a desperate search for emotional relief, some online users anonymously bully themselves in a similar way (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

It is also important to understand the apparent differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The key differences between the forms of bullying suggest that with traditional bullying you are more likely to visually see the effects (but not always), provides opportunity for adult intervention, small groups of people may be involved, and often reflects poor relationships with teachers and peers (Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Conversely, cyberbullying is often anonymous, goes under the radar if not reported, the perpetrator often shares a positive relationship with their teachers, it often goes underreported due to fear of loss of privileges, there is less opportunity for adult intervention, and can include hundreds of people (Trolley & Hanel, 2010; Smith & Steffgen, 2013). Another notable difference suggests that a common motivation that drives traditional bullying is the status that is gained by showing power over others, but with online bullying the perpetrator will often lack this advantage (Smith & Steffgen, 2013).

2.2.1 Variables of age and gender

Before introducing effective intervention and prevention strategies to their students, educators must be aware of who in their classroom are likely to be a victim and a perpetrator of cyberbullying. At the same time, teachers must not primarily rely on statistics as a means to decide if they should introduce cyberbullying pedagogies into their classrooms. When analyzing existing literature, Smith and Steffgen (2013) conclude that there were inconsistent findings among researchers regarding gender and cyber abuse. Some viewed boys as most likely to cyberbully, while other researchers indicated that girls were more likely to cyberbully; others
found there was few or no significant differences (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Smith & Steffen, 2013; Bauman, Cross, & Walker, 2013). It is suggested that this indecisive outcome may be the result of an inconsistency across studies due to differences in samples, methodologies, and historical changes (Smith & Steffen, 2013). According to a study by the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), boys initiate mean online exchanges earlier in life than girls do. However, by the middle school age, girls are somewhat more likely to engage in cyberbullying than are boys (McQuade et al., 2009). It is also believed that males are more likely to be bullied by other males, whereas females are bullied by both sexes (McQuade et al., 2009; Willard, 2007).

Hinduja and Patchin (2015) suggest that the genders engage in cyberbullying in different ways. Females are more likely to be bullied through text messaging and social media forums by spreading rumours. Females are more likely to bully with an intent to commit “social sabotage” by isolating their victim from peer groups. Males on the other hand are more likely to cyberbully via online games or by creating malicious website pages (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Many scholars argue that the middle school age is the most common age for cyberbullying, as this is a developmental period marked by high “drama” (Wölfer et al., 2013; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Peer conflict, cliques, rapid hormonal changes, and increased academic responsibility are just a few of the obstacles faced by this age group (Trolley & Hanel, 2010). However, cyberbullying is not limited to this population. Conversely, reports of cyberbullying have appeared at the elementary level, as young children are becoming more technologically advanced (Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Englander’s (2013) study on school-age children highlights that by age eight more than 90 percent of third-graders are already interacting with other children online. As a result, some studies indicate that kids report being mean to each other online beginning around the second grade when they are approximately seven or eight-years-old.
(McQuade et al., 2009; Monks, Robinson, & Worlidge, 2012). At the junior grade level, both genders now commonly engage in cyberbullying such as intentionally embarrassing others, harassment, intimidation, or making threats online threats (McQuade et al., 2009). Due to this high-immersion of technology and the emergent signs of cyber abuse at such young ages, it is evident that cyberbullying is no longer just an issue among middle and high school students.

However, Shariff (2008; 2015) points out the necessity for researchers to understand the varying roles that gender plays in this situation, as girls are more susceptible to serious forms of cyberbullying through sexual harassment and are more likely to be pressured into a newer online danger known as sexting (engaging in online sexual behaviours). Furthermore, although the current body of knowledge about cyberbullying is expanding, it lacks a more in-depth research approach focusing on adolescents’ perspectives on the problem. Very few studies have focused on cyberbullying among elementary school children (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Baas, de Jong, & Drossaert, 2013; Monks et al., 2012).

2.2.2 The problem with cyberbullying research

Among scholars, there were three common problems that occur when researching cyberbullying; they include problems with the definition, some bullying scholars argue that the topic is the exaggeration of a youth phenomenon, and the inability for researchers to keep pace with the ever-changing rate of technology and web programs.

Bullying-research pioneer Dan Olweus’ (1999) definition is commonly used to define bullying; it reads, “bullying is generally seen as intentional behaviour to harm another, repeatedly, where it is difficult for the victim to defend himself or herself” (Olweus, 1999 as cited in Smith & Steffgen, 2013, p.4). Traditional bully theorists often use this definition to apply to all strands of bullying. However, Smith & Steffgen (2013) argue that when researching
cyberbullying, one cannot be limited to this definition. First, Olweus’ definition suggests the bullying must be a repeated act. However, online, a single act (i.e. sharing an inappropriate photo) has the capacity to snowball on the internet. Thus, a single act by one perpetrator may be viewed, shared, and repeated many times by others. Is this still considered cyberbullying? (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Second, the often anonymity of online bullying reflects an act that is not motivated by a power imbalance. Is this still considered cyberbullying? As a result of scholars heavily reliance on generic definitions, Shariff (2015) argues that one of the main reasons why not much progress has been made in understanding cyberbullying is because the term is used “overboard” (p.10). It has become synonymous with the totality of all online behaviours of youth. The word cyberbullying has become so generic that researchers have no choice but to use it in the descriptions of scholarly research (Shariff, 2015, p.10).

Some authors describe cyberbullying as an exaggerated, low-prevalence phenomenon (Wölfer et al., 2013; Todd, 2014). Todd (2014) highlights specifically how Dan Olweus questions cyberbullying. He suggested that, “hyping online bullying, ‘may also create feelings of powerlessness and helplessness in the face of a presumably huge and ubiquitous cyberbullying problem’” (Todd, 2014, p.129). In Olweus’ opinion there is not enough evidence to explain the true magnitude of the phenomenon and thus scholars may be exaggerating the act. As a part of her own research, Todd (2014) took the opportunity to speak with Olweus regarding his thoughts on cyberbullying. It soon became very apparent that Olweus knows very little about the technology that makes cyber abuse possible. Todd (2014) claims Olweus “spends no time at all examining social media and other websites and apps that host the cyber abuse many are worried about” (p.137). This interview suggests that interest and knowledge of technology can affect a researchers concern or understanding of the detrimental effects of cyberbullying. The problem
with this however, is that highly valued scholars, such as Olweus, are able to influence many bullying researchers to possibly avoid or undervalue the topic.

The ever-changing rate of technology is a main problem with understanding cyberbullying because just as researchers believe they understand the problem, new technologies, websites, and youth online phenomenon’s emerge. In contrast to traditional bullying research, limited quality evidence is accessible to understand the social context and to recognize the chronological sequence of factors and consequences related to cyberbullying behaviours (Bauman et al., 2013). Also, this research has not kept pace with the rapidly increasing rate of young people’s access to information and communication technology (Bauman et al., 2013). According to Todd (2014), “Technology is currently travelling at a lightening speed seemingly beyond human comprehension. But behind the new devices, new apps and the mal-expression are people—just people. Yet, trying to understand abusers is unpopular and under-researched” (p.291). On-going research on this topic is both valuable and required in order to confront the issues of cyberbullying as an educator.

2.3 Teachers Perceptions and Reluctance to Intervene

Understanding teachers’ perceptions on cyberbullying, as well as reasons why they may feel reluctant to intervene, is useful knowledge in order to implement effective change. On a very basic level, this form of bullying is very difficult to monitor and supervise as an educator, primarily because it occurs outside the school setting and outside school hours (Shariff, 2008). In addition, adults often share in the belief that children are much more advanced in their knowledge of technology. As a result, they demonstrate a reluctance to becoming involved with cyberbullying or cyber education because their efforts would be ineffective since kids are “so far ahead of us” (England, 2013, p.80). Scholars have highlighted two main reasons why teachers
are reluctant to intervene, including teachers’ perceptions of cyberbullying based on their identity and as well as their students and limitations due to legislation.

2.3.1 Teachers’ perceptions of cyberbullying: The identity of the teacher

There is minimal research that pertains to the teachers’ point of view about cyberbullying (Eden et al., 2013). Research from the Ontario College of Teachers (2007) revealed that 84% of teachers reported having faced some kind of cyberbullying (against student victims or themselves). Another Canadian study also indicates that pre-service teachers recognize cyberbullying as a problem, and argue that education on the topic should be incorporated into teacher’s pre-service education (Li 2008). Eden et al.’s (2013) worldwide research study emphasizes a current positive shift in teacher’s perceptions of cyberbullying and their concerns about confronting the issue. However, their research also suggests that teachers’ interest and willingness to implement anti-cyberbullying interventions in their classrooms is not a universal concern. Studies have indicated that a teacher’s gender, education level, and their age as well as the age of their students affect their level of concern about cyberbullying and their willingness to teach about it in their classrooms (Eden et al., 2013).

Is is suggested that in comparison to males, female teachers are more concerned about cyberbullying, stated a higher belief in the school’s obligation to deal with cyberbullying and had more belief in the importance of being educated about cyberbullying (Eden et al., 2013). The same study also found a correlation between the professional background of a teacher and their level of concern about cyberbullying. Their education level affected how credible they found the school’s commitment to act on it. The analysis found that special education teachers were more concerned than mainstream teachers and are more likely to believe that the cyberbullying needs to be confronted (Eden et al., 2013).
Age is a variable more commonly discussed among cyberbullying researchers. Age can often affect a teachers’ knowledge about online social communication. Todd (2014) indicates that some adults who show disinterest in digital technology are “out of touch with the modern world” (p.137). As a result, these people do not take the time to understand how technology makes cyber abuse possible. Similarly, Shariff (2009;2008) discusses how parents and teachers rarely use the websites that children use for social communication. This lack of understanding contributes to a “digital disconnect” as they only comprehend a superficial version of what these websites offer to their children and students (Shariff, 2008, p.103). Further, the age of the students that are being taught also influences a teachers’ level of concern and involvement. Eden et al. (2013) found that educators who teach in elementary and middle schools believed in the school’s commitment to cyberbullying intervention and prevention more than did high school teachers. Teachers who taught younger children were also more confident with their ability to identify and combat cyberbullying. Educators shared the belief that the older the child, the more they were capable of dealing with cyberbullying on their own. Another explanation is that elementary school teachers are more concerned because they are more focused on the child’s well-being compared to high school teachers, who are more curriculum oriented (Eden et al., 2013). It is vital that scholars continue to research teachers’ perceptions of cyberbullying based on their identity. New insights could help promote an educator’s self-awareness and implement effective changes to one’s reluctance to introduce cyberbullying prevention and intervention strategies into their classrooms.

2.3.2 The law

It is difficult for teachers to address cyberbullying because the lines are often blurred on what constitutes a serious offense or if it is a school issue when the bullying is done outside of
school time. Stewart (2013) discusses how schools have traditionally required students to trade some of their ‘free speech rights’ for protection from the negative effects of other students’ unregulated speech. Unfortunately, current school speech practice cannot fully be applied to cyberbullying which often leaves schools unable to discipline cyberbullies. It also questions students right to privacy where many students challenge school suspensions and expulsions as infringing their rights to free expression (Shariff, 2008).

The schools’ responsibility to respond to cyberbullying is a grey area of jurisdiction. Trolley and Hanel (2010) went so far as to call it “virgin territory” for most school districts (p.49). In 2012, the Ontario government introduced the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13) which requires school boards to prevent and address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour among students in Ontario schools. These behaviours include bullying, discrimination and harassment. Bill 13 makes it clear that these behaviours are intolerable at schools. The law promotes respect and understanding for all students regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other factor. The bill also requires that schools provide programs, interventions, and other methods of support to both victims and perpetrators of bullying incidents. This relatively new act has been criticized because the government is perceived to be “sneaking in sections that provide it with increased powers of surveillance on unsuspecting people” (Shariff, 2015, p.95). Others have criticized the powers to search and seize digital equipment granted to police under the pretense of clamping down on cyberbullying (Shariff, 2015). It can be argued by many that a student’s rights are being infringed upon under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which includes “the right to be secure from unreasonable search and seizure” (Kitchen & Dean, 2010, p. 11). Further, the explicit term ‘cyberbullying’ is seldom used in Bill 13. In spite legal demand for intervention, the implicit terminology creates a miscommunication between legal
authority, school staff, parents and students, and therefore creates ambiguity for teachers who remain unsure on if, when, or how they should intervene (Shariff, 2015). As a result, the same legal system that can work to protect victims may also work in favour of the perpetrator.

### 2.4 Anti-Cyberbullying Pedagogies: Intervention and Prevention Strategies

Above all, teachers might ask why they should care about a phenomenon that most often occurs outside of the physical school property. The direct response argues that what happens outside of school can severely impact a child’s ability to function at or attend school. According to the American Psychological Association (2004), cyberbullying has been found to be related to “negative psychosocial functioning among children who are victimized, including lowered self-esteem, higher rates of depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, suicidal ideation, and higher rates of school absenteeism” (p.1). Additionally, the more interest that is focused on the topic of cyberbullying the more likely that change will occur. Todd (2014) argues that, “the answers matter” because they influence key decisions including which laws will be passed, which programs will be supported, and how diligently parents and educators will monitor online behaviour (p.134). A final important reason suggests that the elementary curriculum is often “irrelevant and out of touch with young people’s lived realities” (Shariff, 2015, p.5). This suggests that research can help redirect a teacher's focus and allow them to understand the lived experiences of their young students in order to create meaningful lessons.

#### 2.4.1 Scholarly suggestions for best practices

Some researchers use their findings primarily to highlight the urgent need to address cyberbullying at schools (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015;2012; Shariff, 2015;2009;2008; Smith & Steffgen, 2013; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Shariff (2008) argues that when combatting cyberbullying in schools, “there are no blue prints or rubrics, but there are guidelines” (p.227).
Snakenborg, Van Acker, and Gable (2011) validates this statement by arguing that most current cyberbullying programs are based on “practical beliefs about prevention and logical approaches rather than on scientific evidence” (p.94). As a result, many scholars provide generalized suggestions on how to introduce anti-cyberbullying pedagogies in the classroom. The recommendations appear to be helpful advice and ideas for teachers, however the suggestions are not age specific nor do they specify how effective the strategies are. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) offer a feasible recommendation for the intervention of cyberbullying. These steps include: creating an anonymous web-based reporting system, assessing the situation, informing service providers to ensure undesirable material is taken off the internet, and responding to the victim and perpetrator in an effective manner (the route of action varies). Teachers should also keep an open line of communication with the parents of all parties involved, as well as provide resources (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Shariff 2015; Englander, 2013; Willard, 2007). Shariff (2008) also contributes prevention strategies which include: legal literacy for teachers (case reading for building knowledge and preparation), using media literacy to educate students, building proficiency at home (encourage parent education and online monitoring), and raising student awareness to censorship.

Other scholars researched both traditional bullying and cyberbullying and combined prevention and intervention strategies to combat both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. While this method may be useful, it can also become problematic. Englander (2013) offers another intervention strategy called “the 9-second response” (p.105). This strategy targets gateway behaviours by defusing the behaviour before it becomes an escalated problem. The response system first suggests one must consistently notice gateway behaviours (monitor behaviour), followed by responding instantly to the behaviour (acknowledge and correct). The
problem with this method is that it was designed for traditional bullying and then was suggested to combat cyberbullying as well. As previously mentioned, teachers have a difficult time monitoring online behaviour. As a result, teachers must be conscious of how bullying and cyberbullying intervention and prevention strategies may differ and cannot be equally applied.

There is a current demand to understand the effect that specific anti-cyberbullying programs have on elementary school students. This demand is a result of the very few studies that have focused on this age group in understanding the effectiveness of anti-cyberbullying pedagogies (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Baas, de Jong, & Drossaert, 2013; Wölfer et al., 2013; Monks et al., 2012). Some researchers used their program strategies to also gain insight on student perceptions on cyberbullying. Baas et al. (2013) use an anti-cyberbullying program to understand Grade Six elementary school boy’s and girl’s perspectives on cyberbullying. This six-week program included weekly cyberbullying-oriented sessions. The research sessions were aimed to prepare students to create informative posters for their peers as well as other creative projects. The researcher’s role was to facilitate discussion and manage the group dynamics. Students were encouraged to speak with other children and adults about cyberbullying and make observations when using the internet. After full completion of the study, it was apparent that half the students had reported being cyberbullied. Similarly, Toshack and Colmar (2012) conducted a small-scale psycho-educational cyberbullying intervention with Grade Six girls. The program began by measuring the participants initial understanding of cyberbullying through a survey. Each student was then educated on safety strategies which could be used to detect and combat cyberbullying. Both studies indicated that students had become more empowered after completing the sessions. Students felt they were more aware of the problem and also the impact it has on victims (Baas et al., 2013; Toshack & Colmar, 2012).
Some researchers studied the effectiveness of specific prevention programs. Wölfer et al. (2013) focused on a specific cyberbullying prevention program called “Media Heroes”. The program was embedded into the regular middle school (including Grade Six) curriculum and built on several developmental and psychological concepts. The model is based on the “theory of planned behaviour” which aims to reduce cyberbullying behaviour by addressing knowledge and competencies. It introduces students to key definitions, legal rights and consequences, online security options, and training on social-skills (such as perspective-taking skills). The last element involved behaviour control which seeks to address strategies for cyberbullying victims. The students took a pre- and posttest which assessed for cyberbullying behaviours before and after the program through a questionnaire. The multi-level analysis clearly demonstrates the program’s effectiveness in reducing cyberbullying behavior within intervention classes in contrast to classes of the control group. Therefore, this study presents a promising program which prevents or highly reduces cyberbullying in schools. In a similar manner, Trolley and Hanel (2010) emphasize the PEAS Program (“Psychological, Educational, and Social response”) to meet the needs of all parties affected by cyberbullying. This program was not age specific. The two main components of the program include assessment and therapeutic responses. This program required a proactive assessment strategy. The therapeutic response must provide both prevention and intervention strategies. The psychological response must be met by meeting the needs, feelings, and thoughts and behaviours of all members involved. The educational response focuses on skill building through thinking, problem solving, social skills, stress management, conflict resolution, anger management, and overall life skills.

Monks et al.’s (2012) study is an example of the very limited amount of research focusing on primary school-aged children. Their study focused on boys and girls ages seven to
eleven years-old. The purpose was to view student’s perceptions on cyberbullying as well as their recommendations for coping strategies through a questionnaire. The results indicated that the majority of students found cyberbullying to be more upsetting than traditional bullying. Student’s recommended responses for victims of cyberbullying included telling someone, blocking messages, changing an email address or phone number, and reporting incidents to the authorities. Monks et al. (2012) used their findings to urge intervention work with primary-aged students. The results showed a very negative response to cyberbullying and that victims were negatively affected by it. Therefore, it is important that children as well as staff and parents be educated on this issue first before they engage in the use of the internet and cell phones.

2.5. Conclusion

In this literature review I viewed research on the topic of bullying, specifically the key terminology and variables of age and gender that inform cyberbullying research. Next I looked at teachers’ perceptions of cyberbullying and how the identity of the teacher as well as legislation often explains a teachers’ reluctance to engage in intervention and prevention strategies. Lastly, I reviewed literature pertaining to effective anti-cyberbullying strategies that are appropriate for elementary school-aged students. This review explains the extent that attention has been paid to cyberbullying and the rapid growth in the phenomenon. It points to the necessary need for teachers to acknowledge the issue in elementary schools. It also raises questions about the problems with cyberbullying research and how one might combat these issues in the future.

By focusing on the teachers’ implementation of gender inclusive anti-cyberbullying lessons in elementary schools (Grades One to Six), I hope to expand the research in the areas of cyberbullying intervention and prevention strategies that target younger students because research in this area is significantly lacking. In light of this problem, the purpose of my research
is to learn from a small sample of elementary school educators to understand what anti-cyberbullying strategies they have implemented in their classroom and school community. I also hope to learn about how they understand and navigate the phenomenon. This research will contribute to the necessary need to effectively educate students on the detrimental effects of cyberbullying as both a victim and perpetrator.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the research methodology used to address the use of anti-cyberbullying strategies in elementary school classrooms. I begin by introducing a discussion regarding the general approach, research procedures, as well as describe the main instruments of data collection. Next I identify the participants of the study, before describing the sampling and recruitment criteria and provide information about the participants. I then describe the data analysis procedures, before acknowledging significant ethical considerations that are relevant to my study. Lastly, I discuss some of the methodological limitations of the study, while also highlighting some of its strengths. I offer my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two teachers. Qualitative research focuses on “understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach” (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013, p.192). A qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour, and interactions (Merriam, 2002; Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008; Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). Merriam (2002) suggests that the key to understanding qualitative research is the idea that “meaning is socially constructed by individual’s interaction with their world”; a world that is not fixed, single, or always agreed upon (p.3). There are many constructions and interpretations of reality that are constantly changing over time (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research searches to understand the meaning behind these interpretations. With my research purpose in mind, qualitative research is of particular importance due to the
complex nature of the topic. Qualitative approaches are sensitive and adaptable and allow researchers to adjust elements of their research as it develops (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005). In this way, researchers have more control over the encounter and can make decisions in light of participant’s comfort levels. A positive space is created for personal connections among researchers and participants, “connections that may create more comfortable and open research environments” (Bauman et al., 2013, p.244). Participants may be more likely to trust researchers when a personal connection is established, leading to a more detailed understanding of the issue and subsequent strategies that can be used to prevent the issue of cyberbullying in elementary schools.

Bauman, Cross, and Walker (2013) suggest that qualitative research can expand and deepen our understanding of cyberbullying and provide directions for future research. Cyberbullying is a fairly new phenomenon, which generates an on-going body of developing knowledge. Due to the fact that technological communications and cyberbullying continue to emerge at alarming rates, qualitative research is said to be useful tool to explore this phenomenon in greater depth (Bauman et al., 2013). Qualitative approaches can assist researchers in comprehending understudied topics holistically, as “the evocative nature of the research process reveals the deep meaning of participant experiences” (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002 as cited in Bauman et al., 2013, p.242). Although qualitative studies are often self-contained to a specific period of time, participants are able to offer their full life histories to the research encounter (Bauman et al., 2013). In this way, qualitative research can inform a deep understanding regarding the general topic of cyberbullying which elicits the consideration of many variants including individual, family, and systemic concerns over time (Bauman et al, 2013).
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). The semi-structured interview guide delivers a well-defined set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable qualitative data. This method involves a formal interview in which date, time, and location are most often pre-determined and requires an organized list of planned questions to be discussed during the interview (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). However, the interviewer has the ability to follow a changed trajectory when new themes emerge to build upon their existing interests (Merriam, 2002; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are beneficial for addressing evolving topics because the approach provides insight on a participant’s experiences, meanings, and beliefs; as well as a comprehensive and detailed account about particular events (Bauman et al., 2013). Further, face-to-face interviews give the interviewer an opportunity to establish a rapport with their participant. It is also a way to create a safe and comfortable environment which can ensure that the interviewee is able to share their personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest, “It is through the connection of many ‘truths’ that interview research contributes to our knowledge of the meaning of the human experience” (p.316). Accordingly, establishing a positive relationship between interviewer and interviewee is extremely beneficial for generating meaningful data regarding the topic of cyberbullying.

I organized my interview protocol (located in Appendix B) into five sections. All questions were thoughtfully designed to generate meaningful responses from interview respondents. I began by asking questions regarding the background information of my participants. I then addressed educator perspectives and beliefs about cyberbullying, followed by
the ways in which my participants implement anti-cyberbullying strategies in their own classrooms and school communities. Next, I asked questions pertaining to teacher support and challenges they encounter regarding the implementation of these strategies in their schools. Last, I conclude the interviews by asking my participants about their professional goals in this area as well as any advice they can offer other educators who are committed to preventing cyberbullying.

3.3 Participants

Merriam (2002) highlights the importance of sampling criteria and recruitment strategies when she suggests, “since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p.12). In this section I review the sampling criteria established for participant recruitment, and I discuss the range of possible opportunities for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section that will introduce each of the teacher participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria was used to determine teacher participants:

1. Teachers have a minimum of five years of teaching experience
2. Teachers work in an elementary school setting (Grades One to Six specifically)
3. Teachers have knowledge regarding social media and technology
4. Teachers are passionate about and demonstrated commitment to preventing cyberbullying in elementary schools
5. Teachers have been actively implementing anti-cyberbullying strategies in an elementary school setting
In light of my research purpose and main research question, the participants that I interviewed have a minimum of five years of teaching experience. This is so that my respondents were able to offer a more holistic perspective regarding the incorporation of anti-cyberbullying strategies into their classrooms over time. Additionally, participants are elementary school educators, with experience working in primary and/or junior classrooms (Grades One to Six). This criterion was implemented because I am most interested in understanding how teachers introduce the topic of cyberbullying and preventative strategies to their students at younger ages. There is a significant gap in cyberbullying research on this age concentration. Furthermore, participants have a deep knowledge about social media and technology so that they were able to contribute a level of expertise to my research study. Lastly, my participants were required to be passionate about the issue of cyberbullying and the consequences it may have on their students. This passion regarding the issue of cyberbullying was anticipated to drive their active implementation of anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms and school communities.

3.3.2 Recruitment

An essential feature of any qualitative study is to select a useful sample from which data will be collected (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) states, “For nearly every study there exists sites that could be visited, people who could be interviewed, documents that could be read and analyzed” (p.12). The purpose of recruitment is to determine a sampling method that will generate the greatest amount of insight regarding the research purpose. There are many sampling methods, some of which work better for qualitative research than others. Since qualitative research does not seek to generate quantitative data, random sampling would not generate the most meaningful results (Merriam, 2002). Nonprobability sample designs, including availability sampling, purposive sampling, and respondent-assisted sampling are all more conducive methods
for qualitative research (Daniel, 2012; Bauman et al, 2013). Availability sampling (often known as convenience sampling) is a procedure in which certain elements are selected from the target population on the basis of their availability and for the convenience of the researcher (Marshall, 1996; Daniel, 2012). Purposive sampling (often known as purposeful or judgmental sampling) includes elements that are selected from the target population on the basis of their fit with the purpose of the study as well as with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Marshall, 1996; Daniel 2012; Bauman et al., 2013). Lastly, respondent-assisted sampling elements are chosen from a target population with the help of previously selected recruits. Essentially, previous participants make purposeful referrals to the interviewer. This type of sampling is often viewed as an extension of purposive sampling (Daniel, 2012; Bauman et al. 2013).

I used a combination of availability, purposive, and respondent-assisted sampling for the recruitment of my participants. My sampling method is purposive in that my participants were required to meet a defined list of necessary criteria. However, my participants were also selected based on the basis of their availability and convenience to me as a researcher. My participants were selected based on the pre-established relationships I have established through my own elementary school, volunteer experience, practicums, as well as through online research and networking.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Both participants of this study are certified elementary school educators in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. They are both current classroom teachers at publicly-funded catholic Ontario schools. Both teachers have at least five years of experience as an elementary school educator, and have actively implemented anti-cyberbullying lessons and strategies within their
classrooms. Each participant will remain anonymous through the use of a pseudonym.

Sophia

Sophia is currently a Grade Six teacher in her eleventh year of teaching. She started her career teaching the intermediate grades (Grades Seven and Eight) before moving on to work in the health and physical-education department at her school board as a professional learning network (PLN) teacher for six years. During this role she created resources and performed learning workshops related to HPE, which included the topic of cyberbullying, to educators within her school board. Three years ago she returned as a classroom teacher where she has taught Grades Five and Six. Sophia has a personal and professional interest in health and well-being as well as technology, and grew concerned about cyberbullying when her students were becoming both the victims and perpetrators of online bullying.

John

John currently teaches Grade Seven/Eight and is in his seventh year of teaching. He started his career teaching primary students (Grades One and Two) before teaching junior students for most of his career (Grades Four to Six). John is personally and professionally interested in technology, and routinely uses it as a teaching tool within his classroom. John began to actively educate his students to combat cyberbullying when students in his class were becoming victims of this form of bullying.

3.4. Data Analysis

Merriam (2002) suggests that when conducting qualitative research, “data analysis is simultaneous with data collection” (p.14). What is meant by this statement is that adjustments should be made throughout the research process. Merriam (2002) further claims that, “to wait until all the data are collected is to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data”
(p.14). As such, the process of data analysis does not begin when the final interview is transcribed; it is an on-going process. However, the process of coding does begin once a researcher finishes producing their transcripts. Qualitative coding is way of opening up avenues of inquiry (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In regards to qualitative coding, “we ask questions of data in order to develop, identify, elaborate, and refine analytic categories and insights” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.175). The process of coding is a commonly used data analysis approach for sorting text segments with similar content into separate categories completed to introduce major research themes (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Upon completion of my interviews, each transcript was coded individually and then categories of data and emergent themes were identified as they relate to my research questions. Next, I delivered meaning to these emergent themes given what existing research previously found as indicated in the literature review. Further, I recognized null data that emerged throughout my interviews and discuss its overall significance.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

The realm of research ethics is a part of the same changing world that both researchers and participants live in (Bauman et al., 2013). Accordingly, ethical decision-making processes always take place in a larger social context (Bauman et al., 2013). There are many ethical factors that must be considered in any interview process, including decreasing the risk of unforeseen harm, informing the participant about the nature of the study, ensuring the anonymity of the participants, and avoiding the risk of exploitation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Further, when discussing sensitive topics, such as cases of cyberbullying with teachers, there is often a ‘grey area’ and teachers may feel reluctant to disclose information about their students. As a
researcher, we have an ethical responsibility to protect our participants by preserving their privacy and confidentiality to instill a level of comfort.

This research study has been cleared by the board of ethics. Before an interview was conducted, participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their permission to be interviewed as well as be audio-recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed the ethical implications, and highlighted the expectations of participation which asked informants to participate in one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview. Participants were immediately notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research process, as well at their right to refuse to answer any interview question. The identities of all my participants remained anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and any identifying indicators related to their schools or students were omitted from public documents.

According to DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), “When the interviewer listens and reflects personal information back to the interviewee, the process may develop in unforeseen ways. This can result in unintended harm to the respondent” (p.319). As a result, it is important as a researcher to anticipate any unforeseen harms and minimize this risk. Given the research topic of cyberbullying, there was minimal risk that a particular question could trigger an emotional response from a participant, thus making them feel vulnerable. I minimized this risk by reassuring the participants throughout the interview and in the consent letter that they had the right to refrain from answering any question that they did not feel comfortable with, as well as reiterating their right to withdraw from participation at any time.

Respect for participants is another overarching principle of research ethics (Bauman et al., 2013). As a result, researchers have a duty to respect their participants as well as the data that they contribute to a research study. Upon completion of the transcript, participants had the
opportunity to review it and clarify or retract any statements before I used the data to conduct an analysis. They were also informed that all data will be stored on my password-protected computer and will be destroyed after five years. It was also indicated to informants that only myself and my instructor will have access to the transcript. Furthermore, they were informed that any valid information from their interview could be published in public forums.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Due to the ethical parameters of this study, there are some significant research limitations. First, the recruitment process was limited to the perspective of teachers, which consequently left other significant perspectives regarding cyberbullying on the sidelines—particularly the perspective of young students. Throughout my literature review, I noticed that there was a clear gap in the research regarding the understanding of young children’s attitudes towards cyberbullying. Bauman et al. (2013) suggested that, “qualitative research represents a rich opportunity to explore the perspectives of young people and the environments in which they interact, including the cyber-environments” (p.238). As a result, I feel there is still a need to seek information about young people and this particular issue. Also, the small sample-size of two participants did not provide a wide-ranging solution to my research problem. One could argue that I simply scratched the surface. Further, a longitudinal study could have been beneficial in order to understand the ways that teachers are/ are not implementing effective anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms (Bauman, 2013). Consequently, a mixed methods approach in which both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are integrated could contribute to a richer and more comprehensive study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). However due to time constraints these options were not plausible during a two-year program.
There were also methodological strengths to this research design. The small sample-size and semi-structured interviews provided a greater opportunity to learn from my participants in greater depth. Bauman et al. (2013) suggest that, “qualitative methods are also ideal in providing an in-depth examination of particular issues” (p.116). It also provided educators with the platform to speak to what matters most to them. As a researcher, the interview process created a space where data-analysis was an on-going process (Merriam, 2002). Semi-structured interviews have the ability to provide gateways into new topics of exploration that would not be available through fixed-methods such as surveys or questionnaires (Bauman et al. 2013). As a pre-service teacher, it was also beneficial to speak with experienced educators because it provided an opportunity to learn from my future colleagues about a topic I am passionate to learn more about. In this way, the research methodology used in this study provided a space where both the respondent and the interviewer could be reflective on their teaching practices.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology. I began by introducing the general research approach and research procedures by explaining the significance of qualitative research. I then described the main instruments of data collection by identifying semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data. I next identified the participants of the study, first by highlighting the recruitment criteria, followed by a necessary rationale for each criterion. Recruitment criteria stated that teacher participants should have a minimum of five years of teaching experience, work in an elementary school setting, have knowledge regarding social media and technology, are passionate and committed to preventing cyberbullying, and actively implement anti-cyberbullying strategies in elementary school settings. This specific participant criterion was chosen to best answer the main research questions asked and to speak to existing gaps in current
literature. Then I introduced my interviewees and provided a brief description for each selected participant. I also explained the recruitment procedures which involved nonprobability sample designs including availability sampling, purposive sampling, and respondent-assisted sampling. I continued by describing how I analyzed the data by examining interview transcripts to look for emergent themes through a coding-process. Ethical issues were then recognized and addressed by explaining ethics protocol. Ethics protocol included clearing the study by a board of ethics, as well as having a signed consent form which included the participant’s permission to be audio recorded and to transcribe the interview, as well as state the rights of the interviewee to withdraw from the study at any time. The identities of all my participants remained anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. Lastly, I discussed the methodological limitations of the study, such as a limited sample group, while also highlighting some of the strengths, such as learning from experienced teachers. In the next chapter, I report the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I present and discuss the findings that emerged from two semi-structured interviews that were conducted with TCDSB teachers who are committed to anti-cyberbullying education. The purpose of this research is to learn about anti-cyberbullying strategies that are conducive to elementary school students. While analyzing and discussing the data, I was mindful of my research question which asked, “How is a small sample of elementary school teachers designing and implementing gender inclusive lessons aimed at preventing cyberbullying; and what outcomes do they have on students’ understanding and prevention of cyberbullying?” I was also attentive of the experiences of teacher participants and the ways in which key findings are related to the literature discussed in Chapter Two. Participant responses revealed findings that are organized into five main themes:

4.1 Teacher Participants Acknowledged That It Is Essential to Take a Proactive Approach to Address Cyberbullying With Their Students

4.2 Teacher Participants Addressed the Importance of Collaboration as a Means to Address and Combat the Issue of Cyberbullying

4.3 Teacher Participants Indicated That They Use Engaging Resources and Strategies to Make Learning Meaningful for Students

4.4 Teacher Participants Observed Gender Differences in How Students Experience Cyberbullying, but Took a Whole-Class Approach to Addressing Anti-Cyberbullying Education With Their Students

4.5 Teacher Participants Indicated Significant Barriers That Teachers and Their Students Face Regarding the Issue of Cyberbullying
The main themes are further divided into sub-themes to identify and discuss specific findings. For each theme I will describe its significance in relation to my research question and sub-questions and discuss relevant data as supported by teacher participants. Each theme will then be discussed in relation to existing literature. Last, I summarize the key findings and highlight its overall contribution to the anti-cyberbullying research community.

4.1 Teacher Participants Acknowledged That It Is Essential to Take a Proactive Approach to Address Cyberbullying With Their Students

Teacher participants routinely emphasized the importance of taking a proactive approach to prevent the issue of cyberbullying. Sophia and John shared in the belief that anti-cyberbullying strategies should be implemented before young students begin to independently access technology. Taking a proactive approach to cyberbullying education was acknowledged as a preventative strategy that teachers could bring into their classrooms to address this issue. Specifically, participants discussed proactive strategies which included actively teaching young students the social skills and core values that are necessary to develop the whole child. Next, participants acknowledged the importance of teaching students about online safety before they are able to access the internet. Furthermore, Sophia and John encouraged the proper use of technological devices by establishing positive technology usage within their classrooms.

4.1.1 Teacher participants indicated that students should learn about cyberbullying early in their schooling as a way to develop the whole child

Both participants highlighted the importance of teaching students about cyberbullying early in a child’s education. Sophia claimed that students should be taught core values as a way to prevent cyberbullying “right from the start, even before they touch a computer.” Sophia and John emphasized the importance of taking preventative measures against cyberbullying by
focusing on the development of the whole child. They suggested instilling core values such as empathy, kindness, and compassion that will foster their students’ ability to recognize the difference between what is right and wrong. Both participants teach at Catholic schools and John stated his obligation as a Catholic educator to teach his students about the core values reflected in their faith. While Sophia did not speak directly to her faith-based obligation, she did echo some of the same core values mentioned by John. She described the ways in which her colleagues exemplify this proactive approach to developing the whole child. She said:

> It is so great to see the teachers really encourage the kindness towards others, empathy towards others, compassion towards others; and I think if they’re always working on those things then our hope is that it won’t escalate or snowball into something that is negative towards others whether it’s online or something in person.

Sophia expanded on her emphasis of teaching core values by stating that it’s better to prevent rather than have to react. She explained, “Things are going to happen unfortunately and you have to be reactive but taking every measure possible to prevent it from happening is really what I try to do.”

While there is limited research on elementary school cyberbullying and prevention strategies, cyberbullying has appeared more common at the elementary level as young children are becoming more technologically advanced (Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Based on their experiences, both Sophia and John understand the importance of acknowledging cyberbullying well before the middle school years. Baas et al. (2013) and Toshack and Colmar (2012) conducted cyberbullying interventions with junior students that involved teaching core values, where they highlighted this strategy as being beneficial for students. Both studies indicate that as
a result of this intervention students felt they were more aware of the problem and also more aware about the impact it has on victims (Baas et al., 2013; Toshack & Colmar, 2012). In relation to Sophia’s and John’s experiences with teaching core values, these findings indicate that there is some evidence that supports the development of the whole child in elementary schools as a way to combat cyberbullying by developing student empathy. Sophia’s and John’s strategy builds on Baas et al. (2013) and Toshack and Colmar (2012) studies by suggesting teachers begin this education even earlier, beginning in the primary grades. Similarly, Wölfer et al. (2013) and Trolley and Hanel (2010) focused on a specific cyberbullying prevention program called “Media Heroes” and the “Psychological, Educational, and Social response” (PEAS) program. The Media Heroes program included the development of key social-skills (such as perspective-taking skills) for middle school students and the PEAS Program focused on skill building through thinking, problem solving, social skills, stress management, conflict resolution, anger management, and overall life skills for students of all ages. These programs are examples of approaches to cyberbullying education which focus on the development of the whole-child. However, where teacher participants’ strategy differs is the specific mention of beginning core values and social skill training at younger ages. While scholars mentioned the success of teaching about these core values and social skills in the context of educating directly about cyberbullying, none mentioned this strategy as being used prior to incorporating cyberbullying education into the classroom. Sophia’s and John’s strategy combines and contributes to two separate ideas noted by scholars pertaining to the students age and the development of the whole child in relation to preventative cyberbullying education.
4.1.2 Teacher participants indicated that teaching “netiquette” to students is an essential step in addressing cyberbullying

Sophia and John highlighted that it is essential to teach students about ‘netiquette,’ commonly known as online safety and etiquette procedures, before students are granted access to technology at school. John stated that even before directly addressing cyberbullying in his classrooms, he began by consciously teaching ‘netiquette’ as a preventative approach. He said, “Originally there wasn’t a specific incident, it was just part of ‘netiquette’—what to do and what not to do on the internet.” Similarly, Sophia used the same term to describe this proactive approach to online safety. She described ‘netiquette’ as “words that you should be using, words you should not be using, things you want to avoid, right down to the fonts used because messages on social media can be interpreted differently even just by font size.” She also highlighted other ‘netiquette’ strategies such as protective usernames and passwords, not posting personal information, and avoiding comments about others. Evidently, both participants understood that technology is the reality of modern classrooms and so teachers need to educate their students on how to properly use it. John stated, “it’s the way of the future, so students use technology all the time now and they have to learn how to use it responsibly; they really need to be shown the ropes basically.” As the use of technology rises, it is important for students to become aware on ways to protect themselves from online perpetrators.

Without specifically using the term ‘netiquette,’ some scholars have applied this proactive approach to their own anti-cyberbullying programs. For example, Shariff (2008) highlighted the importance of raising student awareness to censorship as an essential component of digital citizenship. This includes teaching students about what they should post online and what should not be posted. Wölf er et al.’s (2013) “Media Heroes” program emphasized
important online security options such as creating secure passwords and increased adult surveillance for heightened student protection. Sophia and John have demonstrated a logical preventative approach which combines the strategies recommended by Shariff (2008) and Wölfer et al. (2013) which is useful not just in combatting the issue of cyberbullying, but also useful in the area of online security and identity protection.

4.1.3 Teacher participants suggested that educators should focus on using technology for positive purposes

Teacher participants worked to combat cyber-bullying by focusing on the positive uses of technology rather than emphasizing the ways that it can be harmful. They believed that educating students about its positive value could deter them from inappropriate usage. Sophia and John both understood that there are many benefits of technology and so, rather than shying away from it, they embraced it as a positive and prevalent resource within their classrooms. John described his personal and professional interest in technology, and stated that he used it often for teaching. He listed that he routinely uses interactive applications, *YouTube*, and recently started using *Google* classrooms. John identified that, “The overall goal is to have them [the students] use technology and the internet in a positive, constructive way…not in a harmful way.” Sophia explained using *Glogster* which was used to create interactive ‘all about me’ posters. In using this interactive tool for positive purposes, conversations about online safety were seamlessly embedded within. She emphasized using technology in engaging ways so that students are focused on the positive aspects of technology rather than seeking ways to harm others online. She stated that a primary goal for her in this area of education is, “to include a lot of new tech into student programming … so engaging kids in that tech in positive ways.” It was evident that both Sophia and John highlighted this strategy as a personal teaching goal.
This proactive approach seeks to address technology for all its positive attributes so that students are engaged online in productive ways. While few scholars directly address this proactive approach to anti-cyberbullying education, there are aspects of this approach that contribute to an overall goal of research in this area. Shariff (2015) suggests that the elementary curriculum is often “irrelevant and out of touch with young people’s lived realities” (p.5). It is suggested that research in this area can redirect a teacher’s focus and allow them to understand the lived experiences of their young students in order to create meaningful lessons (Shariff, 2015). This research shares a commonality with Sophia’s and John’s experiences in that teachers can use the positive aspects of technology as a way to create meaningful lessons that connect with their students’ lived realities. Both Shariff (2015) and teacher participants identified the importance of trying to stay in touch with students’ practical use of technology. However, Sophia and John have highlighted the importance of directing their students’ technology use in a positive manner to deter their participation in negative online activities.

4.2 Teacher Participants Addressed the Importance of Collaboration as a Means to Address and Combat the Issue of Cyberbullying

While teacher participants acknowledged that being proactive is a valuable preventative measure that is interwoven within the development of the whole child, ‘netiquette’, and the positive use of technology, they also emphasized the importance of collaboration. Collaboration is a useful strategy as it provides educators with learning opportunities and new resources, and builds a greater level of communication and support. Specifically, teacher participants encouraged parent-teacher collaboration so that teachers and parents can clearly explain their expectations for the use of technology and consequences of misuse. Next, Sophia and John discussed collaboration with their teacher colleagues as a way to share resources and strategies as
well as gain a sense of collegial support. Further, they encouraged community collaboration, such as partnerships with police officers, as a way to connect students with cyberbullying experts.

4.2.1 Teacher participants encouraged parent collaboration to clearly understand student/child expectations regarding technology use

Sophia and John acknowledged that one of their central roles as an anti-cyberbullying educator is to create parental awareness and to communicate what the technological expectations are at home and at school. Sophia began by stressing the importance of parental awareness. She states, “Getting parents on board with just monitoring more at home … making them more aware with what is going on and setting some parameters in place and helping them set up these parameters.” She also mentioned that very often parents are not aware that their children have created accounts that are often a springboard for online bullying. Similarly, John stressed that one of his roles as a teacher is to educate parents. He mentioned, “it’s important to help educate the parent because some parents might be unaware of what’s happening and the consequences.”

There is also a partnership that is formed between parents and teachers through this collaboration process. John stated, “I would hope it is a partnership, we’re supporting what they’re saying, and they’re supporting what we’re saying.” John was also mindful in mentioning a possible setback in parent-teacher collaboration. He suggested, “It also depends on the parents and how involved they are, schedules and what their life looks like… they may not have the time or energy to devote as much as they want to.” Thus, he suggests it is important for an educator to know their students’ families and build a level of communication in a way that is realistic for all parties involved. Sophia and John suggested the use of a class website to communicate important information with families.
Parent-teacher collaboration is a strategy that is widely recognized in the area of anti-cyberbullying research (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Shariff 2015; Englander, 2013; Willard, 2007). This strategy is particularly pertinent in elementary schools as students are still in the infancy of their technological usage and are still heavily dependent on their caregiver’s guidance and support. Shariff (2008) highly encourages building proficiency at home by encouraging parent education through relevant resources and online monitoring. Where teacher participants have added a significant layer is at the mention of knowing students’ families and what they can devote to this cause. It may appear as common knowledge to actively communicate with families, however it is pivotal to develop the strategies necessary to communicate effectively based on parent availability.

4.2.2 Teacher participants encouraged teacher collaboration for support and to share resources and strategies

Teacher participants recognized collaboration with their colleagues as a pivotal way to form a support network. John suggested, “Remember to look at your support networks. You have your administration, your fellow teachers, and maybe your board has guidelines you can follow.” They shared in this belief that gaining the support of their colleagues, including their administration team, would alleviate some of the anxiety that can come with dealing with cyberbullying issues. Both participants also highlighted their principals and vice-principals as primary contacts for support, not just in terms of material but also in terms of getting the word out there and devoting time to the cause. Further, they noted this collaborative approach as an important means to gain strategies and resources from colleagues. Sophia routinely utilized this approach and highly encouraged others to follow suit. She said:
There are so many things, such as courses, that other teachers have taken that I haven’t, which gives them the knowledge that I don’t have. And just asking and collaborating to learn more is a great tool to help kids be engaged and hopefully not choose negative choices.

John shared in this belief by describing his own experiences with colleague collaboration. He acknowledged that his colleagues have been very cooperative, supportive, and those who are not fully aware of cyberbullying are interested to find out.

Teacher collaboration is an approach that is routinely encouraged in school environments (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Surprisingly, much of the research conducted on anti-cyberbullying education speaks about specific program approaches but does not mention teacher collaboration as a strategy used in the creation of these programs. As a result, very little research emphasized colleague collaboration as a pivotal step in this area of work. However, there is research that observed the types of teachers who are most confident in incorporating anti-cyberbullying strategies into their classrooms and school communities. Studies have explained that elementary school teachers are more concerned about cyberbullying because they are more focused on the child’s well-being compared to high school teachers, who are more curriculum-oriented (Eden et al., 2013). Sophia and John both identified that their colleagues are very willing to learn about this issue because they have recognized the detrimental effects of cyberbullying. Their insights highlight that elementary school educators are willing to implement anti-cyberbullying education strategies if they are provided the right support system and resources; with teacher collaboration being an initial step in gaining useful knowledge and relevant resources.
4.2.3 Teacher participants encouraged community collaboration to bring experts into schools to further educate students

Sophia and John recognized that collaborating with members of the community, such as police officers, is a useful strategy to bring experts into the school to teach students about the consequences of cyberbullying. Legal personnel provided a real account of cyberbullying victims and perpetrators to illustrate to students the severity and realness of this issue. John spoke of his experience of having two community officers visit his school during a time when they were facing severe cyberbullying incidents. He explained:

They [the police officers] literally went through a slide-show presentation, with slides on each of the major apps that tweens and teenagers were using. They discussed the cons of each one, what the consequences are, and how it works. It gave real examples of things that happened… some scary stories.

Comparably, Sophia discussed a similar visit at her own school. She described the visitation of police officers as being a proactive approach. She stated that police should not only be involved once there is an issue, but rather they should be invited prior to there being an issue. Both teacher participants reported that students responded very well to these presentations.

Interestingly, there is a significant contrast in what teacher participants have stated in relation to existing literature. Sophia and John expressed the use of police officials as a positive preventative approach. Scholars often speak about cyberbullying education in relation to the law, to make students aware of the legal consequences of cyberbullying (Shariff, 2015; Todd, 2014; Kitchen & Dean, 2010; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). In this approach, students are taught that police involvement is necessary only when cyberbullying escalates, rather than creating strong relationships with police as a proactive educational strategy. Further, many researchers focused
on legal bills such as the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13) which requires school boards to prevent and address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour among students in Ontario schools (Shariff, 2015; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). People have criticized the power to search and seize digital equipment granted to police under the pretense of clamping down on cyberbullying (Shariff, 2015). While both approaches do highlight the various roles of police officers, Sophia and John promoted police as being a positive support to students and emphasised a level of approachability.

4.3 Teacher Participants Indicated That They Use Engaging Resources and Strategies to Make Learning Meaningful for Students

While collaboration was discussed as an effective strategy for building strong support systems and for the sharing of resources, teacher participants also noted that the use of engaging resources and strategies created the most meaningful lessons for student success. These resources generated a greater level of student understanding about the topic of cyberbullying. Specifically, participants recommended teaching students about cyberbullying through interactive websites and applications. Next they encouraged the use of hands-on strategies such as role plays or creating posters. Further, Sophia and John suggested implementing discussion-based learning through talks on relevant cyberbullying topics and emphasised that discussions should be ongoing throughout the year.

4.3.1 Teacher participants recommended the use of online websites and applications

Sophia and John discussed the importance of making student learning relevant and engaging by using online resources to educate students about cyberbullying. John emphasized that using technology to teach about cyberbullying is useful because it connects students to the source of the problem. He recommended using websites such as cybertip.ca which shares current
information about online safety and online news sources such as the *Toronto Star*. He also suggested using ‘bitstrips’ to create anti-cyberbullying comic strips. Sophia also suggested the use of online resources. She highlighted the importance of making sure content is grade-specific to make it relevant to students. She spoke very highly of OHPEA’s resources, especially a resource called *Connect[ED]*. She stated:

> The videos and activities in *Connect[ED]* are designed for their grade level so they’re not watching something that might happen to a Grade Three student… it’s not a generic video or activity, it’s focused on what Grade Six students may or have encountered; and then at the same time they’re engaging.

She also recommended this resource for lesson plan ideas. Further, Sophia suggested the use of applications such as *iMovie* to create public service announcements on cyberbullying prevention. While Sophia’s and John’s strategy is beneficial for student learning, John noted that access to technology might not be available in all classroom settings.

The use of online resources and applications is a strategy that connects students to anti-cyberbullying education in an engaging way. There is very limited research on programs that directly connect elementary school students to online resources as a means to learn about cyberbullying. There may be a research disconnect to students’ use of online resources due to the fact that many scholars focus on student’s personal experiences and understanding of cyberbullying rather than ways to combat the issue. However, Baas et al.’s (2013) anti-cyberbullying program encouraged students’ online presence. They encouraged students to make observations about cyberbullying when using the internet and report them back to their classmates and teachers. Further, Shariff (2008) encouraged teachers to use media literacy as a way to educate students on cyberbullying. A part of media literacy does include the exploration
of online resources and media. The strategies suggested by Baas et al. (2013) and Shariff (2008) contribute examples of using online websites and applications to discuss cyberbullying with students as suggested by teacher participants. These examples contribute to the overall discussion about using online tools to make student learning relevant and engaging.

### 4.3.2 Teacher participants recommended the use of hands-on strategies

Participants also encouraged the use of hands-on strategies to maintain student engagement and to create meaningful learning opportunities. The strategies shared by Sophia and John are also useful as they are easily accessible in all classroom environments. Sophia explained that she liked using this strategy with her class because “they’re up, active, engaged, and creating things.” They both suggested the use of role plays, dramatic skits, and public service announcements as a perspective-taking technique. For example, Sophia explained role plays as a way for students to “interpret different scenarios, different situations, what to do, how to react, how to deal with a situation if you see a friend doing it… things like that.”

Scholars noted the use of hands-on strategies as being a very effective tool in educating students about cyberbullying; as well as an important tool for gauging student’s experiences and attitudes towards it. Baas et al. (2013) used an anti-cyberbullying program to understand grade six elementary school boy’s and girl’s perceptions on cyberbullying. The research sessions were aimed to prepare students to create informative posters for their peers as well as other creative projects. After completion of the study, it was evident that students felt more empowered, were more aware of the problem and also the impact it has on victims (Baas et al., 2013). Evidently, the strategy discussed by Sophia and John of incorporating hands-on approaches may be effective in creating greater opportunities for students to gain a deeper understanding of material and to better demonstrate their knowledge.
4.3.3 Teacher participants recommended the use of discussion-based learning

Sophia and John also suggested the use of discussion-based learning by using relevant topics to add an element of realism to the topic of cyberbullying. John highlighted that he very often uses news articles as a way to begin discussions. He gave the example of discussing Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons who were two young Canadian teens who lost their lives because of the emotional pain caused by cyberbullying. He would ask his students critical questions such as, “What if it were you? How would you react?”; he also invited any students who felt comfortable to share their personal stories about their own experiences with cyberbullying. Similarly, Sophia described that having open discussions gave her student knowledge tools but also the emotional tools needed to feel comfortable expressing their concerns. Both teachers emphasized the necessity to repeatedly have these discussions. It cannot be a one-off conversation; it needs to be frequent and impactful. This way students are reminded of what they learned and understand the severity of the issue.

While discussion-based learning is explained by researchers, it is discussed in a different manner than how it is noted by Sophia and John. They describe this aspect of cyberbullying education as learning through the sharing of stories in order for students to connect with the topic. Conversely, researchers often use discussion in more of a lecture-based format, where teachers educate about relevant cyberbullying information, and students respond accordingly through questions and answers (Toshack & Colmar, 2012). While both strategies are effective, the teacher participant’s strategy draws on the core value of developing empathy. Baas et al. (2013) utilized aspects of this discussion-based strategy by encouraging their students to speak with other children and adults about cyberbullying. Their strategy correlates with the discussion
contributed by Sophia and John because they used the knowledge gained by students to promote and advocate for anti-cyberbullying education through the use of discussions on the topic.

4.4 Teacher Participants Observed Gender Differences in How Students Experience Cyberbullying, but Took a Whole-Class Approach to Addressing Anti-Cyberbullying Education With Their Students

While participants noted that they used engaging resources and strategies to make learning meaningful for students, the aspect of gender adds a deeper level of consideration in cyberbullying education. Based on their personal experiences dealing with cyberbullying, participants observed that girls and boys experience cyberbullying differently. However, Sophia and John both chose to create gender-inclusive lessons by involving the whole class. This is pertinent as it demonstrates how educators can use multiple strategies that are inclusive to all students, regardless of their gender. Specifically, participants recognized females as being both the victim and perpetrator of cyberbullying, whereas they have never encountered male cyberbullying incidences. Consequently, while John does consider gender while designing lessons, both teachers chose to take a whole-class approach to addressing the issue of cyberbullying with their students.

4.4.1 Teacher participants indicated that boys and girls experience cyberbullying differently

Sophia and John indicated that their personal experiences dealing with cyberbullying issues has involved female students as both the victim and the perpetrator. However, Sophia and John did mention that boys are involved as well. Sophia stated that the males in her class still participated in cyberbullying, but in a different way. She explained that the boys in her class contributed to cyberbullying by participating in schoolyard gossip which escalated the issue. She
described an issue which took place in her class regarding stolen passwords and hacked accounts:

Although, when this took place with the passwords last year, we did have some of the boys involved, not online but in the schoolyard wanting to get the gossip. So it escalated even in the schoolyard and that’s where everything was happening and confiding in each other about what was happening. So that’s what drew them in.

The observations made by Sophia and John contributed to a larger discussion regarding the variable of gender. Smith and Steffgen (2013) concluded that there were inconsistent findings among researchers regarding gender and cyber abuse. Some viewed boys as most likely to cyberbully, while other researchers indicated that girls were more likely to cyberbully; others found there was few or no significant differences (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Smith & Steffen, 2013; Bauman, Cross, & Walker, 2013). However, the findings by Sophia and John aligned with what Hinduja and Patchin (2015) argued; they suggest that the genders engage in cyberbullying in different ways. Females are more likely to be bullied through text messaging and social media forums by spreading rumours, whereas that males are more likely to cyberbully through gaming sites and other website forums. Shariff (2008; 2015) pointed to the necessity of researchers to understand the varying roles that gender plays in these situations, as girls are more susceptible to serious forms of cyberbullying through sexual harassment and are more likely to be pressured into a newer online danger known as sexting. This research demonstrates how Sophia and John may be right to notice these gender differences and further suggest the importance of understanding how students experience cyberbullying differently in order to create meaningful lessons. Further, Sophia made a significant contribution by identifying the ways that cyberbullying can extend beyond cyberspace and into the concrete environment. As stated by
Todd (2014), “unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying can be relentless—shocking a victim anywhere at any time: alone in their bedroom, walking home from school, or even on a family vacation” (p.146). As demonstrated by Sophia, this is the frightening nature of cyberbullying, the knowledge that it can move beyond the online realm.

4.4.2 Teacher participants used a whole-class approach when creating anti-cyberbullying lessons, but did consider gender as a factor in designing lessons

Although girls and boys experience cyberbullying differently, as stated by Sophia and John, both teachers chose to take a whole-class approach when educating students on the topic of cyberbullying. Both teachers expected participation of all class members during cyberbullying lessons. They believed that all students should be educated on cyberbullying, to build the skills necessary to prevent the issue from occurring. In giving her definition of cyberbullying, Sophia made no direct reference to gender, alluding that all people can get hurt by the “words or images that people post online.” Sophia encouraged having open-conversations with the whole class, rather than having isolated conversations with specific students. Similarly, John stated that he is always finds meaning through these types of situations by viewing them as “teachable moments” to be shared as a whole class. However, John did state that he considered gender as a factor when designing his lessons. He explained that this is a conscious decision based on his personal experience dealing with female cyberbullying. He used many examples of news articles in which females were the victims of cyberbullying. In this way, he used relevant new sources to illustrate a very authentic reality of what cyberbullying can equate to for young females.

Sophia’s and John’s decision to create an anti-cyberbullying program that takes a whole-class approach aligned with many of the studies on elementary school cyberbullying interventions. Very often, researchers focused on a group of boys and girls, as they were more
focused on the age of the students rather than their gender (Englander, 2013; Wölfer et al., 2013; Monks et al., 2012). Some scholars did however focus on gender to demonstrate the belief that boys and girls understand and experience cyberbullying differently (Toshack & Colmar, 2012). For example, Toshack and Colmar (2012) conducted a small-scale psycho-educational cyberbullying intervention with Grade Six girls with the intention to develop empowered female students in combating cyberbullying. While creating gender-specific lessons to address anti-cyberbullying education has its purpose, and may produce meaningful results, Sophia’s and John’s whole-class approach contributes to an inclusive classroom environment; where their students did not feel singled out based on their identity and all their students had access to information about how to combat the issue of cyberbullying.

4.5 Teacher Participants Indicated Significant Barriers That Teachers and Their Students Face Regarding the Issue of Cyberbullying

While the previous section discussed the variable of gender in cyberbullying education, this section addresses the challenges faced by teachers in educating their students in this area of work. These challenges are important to identify because it allows for teachers to become more self-aware and recognize areas where they can improve their own practice. Specifically, participants noted the immediate emotional and academic effects that cyberbullying had on their students. These observations enhanced and motivated their urgency in addressing this issue with their students. Next, Sophia and John discussed a teacher’s possible reluctance to educate about anti-cyberbullying education due to lack of effective resources. Further, participants noted that keeping up-to-date with the rate of technology is a significant barrier for all teachers in the work of cyberbullying education.
4.5.1 Teacher participants noticed the negative effects that cyberbullying had on their students’ well-being and academic performance as well as their personal well-being

Sophia and John noted that the negative effects of cyberbullying hindered their students’ emotional well-being and academic performance as well as their own emotional well-being. As a result of these observations, they highlighted how pivotal it is as an educator to teach students in order to combat cyberbullying in their classrooms and school communities. John described the effects of cyberbullying on his students’ well-being and academic performance by stating:

> It can affect their confidence levels; it effects their comfort level in terms of coming to school. So I think they often feel unsafe, uncomfortable, threatened, harassed... they're not coming to school with their A-game because they're just, there's something that's not making it right. And then from there they can't learn and it's not to the best of their ability if these other factors are involved and then it could potentially lead to depression.

He gave a personal example of one of his own students who was diagnosed with depression shortly after being involved with a cyberbullying issue. Sophia described her own students after dealing with cyberbullying and she stated that there were a lot of tears, hurt feelings, feelings of betrayal, and a lot of broken friendships. Both participants also highlighted the humiliation that comes with cyberbullying because of its ability to go viral very quickly. Sophia stated, “Cyberbullying can bring that humiliation to another level because there are so many ways that it can be shared again or shown to so, so many people around the world.”

Both teachers highlighted that the most challenging aspect in respect to their students’ well-being is how an educator may do all they can to teach their students and they still choose to make wrong choices. Sophia stated, “I think the challenging part, the difficult part, is that the
reality is that it does happen, it has happened” whereas John similarly said, “You think someone would learn but they don’t, so…” These quotes highlight many challenges educators face in their field; however, they are reminded that they must be persistent and continue implementing these anti-cyberbullying strategies in order to create meaningful improvements.

Many scholars dedicated much of their research to determining the ways in which cyberbullying manifests for students. They often discuss the psychological detriments of cyberbullying. The American Psychological Association (2004) suggested that cyberbullying has been found to be related to “negative psychosocial functioning among children who are victimized, including lowered self-esteem, higher rates of depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, suicidal ideation, and higher rates of school absenteeism” (p.1). Many researchers argue that the impacts are proven to be more severe than traditional bullying since a victim is often unable to escape their online perpetrator (Todd, 2014). Consequently, cyberbullying interventions often focus on the psychology of the students to determine their perceptions of cyberbullying and to combat unwanted behaviours. For example, Wölfer et al. (2013) prevention program titled “Media Heroes” involved behaviour control which seeks to address strategies for cyberbullying victims. Addressing cyberbullying to potentially prevent these detrimental effects through intervention programs such as “Media Heroes” as discussed by Wölfer et al. (2013) could be an effective way to help victims of cyberbullying by providing the tools they require to combat the negative feelings that manifest through unwanted online behaviour. Sophia and John contribute to this discussion by noticing the real impact that cyberbullying can have on students, and as a result the urgency and necessity of intervention through preventative education.
4.5.2 Teacher participants acknowledged other teachers’ reluctance to teach anti-cyberbullying lessons due to lack of resources

Participants discussed that some of their colleagues demonstrated a reluctance to teach anti-cyberbullying strategies when they were not provided with useful resources to help them. Sophia suggested that not having the right approach could create teacher hesitation. She emphasized that teachers worry that their lack of knowledge on the topic of cyberbullying could create more of an issue by putting ideas in the students’ heads. She explained that many teachers would often come to her asking for resources; she suggested that providing useful resources could motivate a teacher’s interest in educating their students on this topic. While John also noted lack of resources being a barrier for teachers, he described lack of technology as being the missing link. He stated, “They may not have the technical tools… so not every teacher will have a laptop and a projector. Not that you necessarily need it, but it would make life easier to show some videos... to make it more real.” As an extension of this, he stated that lack of technology in classrooms created both teachers and students’ unfamiliarity with technology.

Understanding teachers’ perceptions on cyberbullying, as well as reasons why they may feel reluctant to intervene, is useful knowledge to grasp in order to implement effective change. However, the reasons discussed by Sophia and John are very different compared to the reasons that other researchers have noted. Scholars have highlighted two main reasons why educators are reluctant to implement anti-cyberbullying strategies, including teacher perceptions of cyberbullying based on their personal identity including variables of age and gender and as well as their students’ identities and limitations due to legislation (Shariff 2015; Eden et al., 2013). The law happens to be a dominant factor noted by scholars that neither participant mentioned (Shariff, 2015; Todd, 2014; Kitchen & Dean, 2010; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). John did however
mention his school board policy, and the ways that this is used to frame his own policy on classroom technology use. School board policies, combined with new bills such as the “Accepting Schools Act” (Bill 13), may be improving teachers’ confidence in introducing anti-cyberbullying education in their classrooms.

4.5.3 Teacher participants acknowledged keeping up-to-date with technology as a significant barrier but recommended strategies to overcome this barrier

Sophia and John emphasized keeping up-to-date with the rate of technological growth as a major barrier in this area of work. Both teachers quoted that it is near-impossible to keep up with technological advancements. Sophia stated, “It’s still hard, I still don’t know enough. And even the technological devices themselves I find I’m always having to learn”. John, as a tech savvy individual, suggested workshops, blogs, magazines such as Professionally Speaking, and personal research as a way to keep as up-to-date as possible. Sophia encouraged taking AQ courses as a way to learn about new technology sources. She also recommended listening to what students have to say about the technology and social media websites they are using. She offered some very useful advice for anti-cyberbullying educators in learning about new technologies so that she can share in her knowledge with her students. She said, “Learn about technology as much as possible. It’s so important to at least to try to keep up with how it evolves and the new advances it makes. I think it is important so that I can speak to it first.”

Many scholars mentioned that keeping up with the rate of technological change is the greatest issue that cyberbullying educators and researchers face (Todd, 2014; Smith & Steffgen, 2013; Stewart, 2013; Shariff, 2009; 2008). Sophia and John share in this belief. Todd (2014) indicated that some adults who show disinterest in digital technology are “out of touch with the modern world” (p.137). Similarly, Shariff (2009; 2008) discusses how parents and teachers
rarely use the websites that children use for social communication. The ever-changing rate of technology is a main problem with understanding cyberbullying because just as researchers believe they understand the problem, new technologies, websites, and youth online phenomena emerge. Teacher participants used this knowledge to challenge themselves and their colleagues to continue learning as much as possible about technology through various resources and by directly learning from the students themselves.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I interviewed two TCDSB elementary school teachers regarding the implementation of anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms and school communities. Sophia and John shared useful and engaging anti-cyberbullying strategies and also contributed significant extensions to current literature. Particularly, participants highlighted the importance of taking a proactive approach to cyberbullying education through the development of the whole child, beginning at young ages. This involves educating to develop key social skills and fostering empathy. This strategy suggested that educators do not need to wait until their students are using technology to pre-emptively teach about it. This contributes to a larger discussion on cyberbullying education where scholars do suggest that teaching these core social skills may be effective to combat the issue of cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013; Toshack & Colmar, 2012). Additionally, teachers suggested collaboration with parents, colleagues and community members such as police officers, to build a positive support system, which benefits both students and educators. Many scholars echoed the necessity of parent-teacher collaboration in the pursuit to combat cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Shariff 2015; Englander, 2013; Willard, 2007), however researchers also noted the negative consequences of connecting with police officers in relation to the law (Shariff, 2015; Todd, 2014; Kitchen & Dean, 2010; Trolley & Hanel, 2010).
In this way, students may fear community police officers rather than feel safe to interact with them regarding the issue of cyberbullying. Sophia and John recommended that communication begin well before cyberbullying becomes an issue, as a way to build a trusting relationship. Further, John and Sophia encouraged on-going discussion-based learning as a tool used to openly talk about and share examples of cyberbullying and build a trusting classroom community. This strategy is used as a method to make learning meaningful and relevant to the students at all elementary grade levels. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications for these findings, give recommendations, and highlight potential areas for further research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the implications of this research study. I begin by providing an overview of the key findings of my research and discuss their significance. Next I discuss the implications of these findings for both the educational community as well as for my own professional identity as a teacher and as a researcher. I then make recommendations for policy and practice, which may be used by educational professionals, such as teachers, school boards and Faculties of Education. Next I identify and discuss important areas for further research. Lastly I conclude by summarizing my key findings, implications, and recommendations; and discuss their significance in relation to the broad topic of anti-cyberbullying education for elementary students.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are five main themes that emerged from the research study. First, teacher participants acknowledged that it is essential to take a proactive approach to address cyberbullying with their students. Both Sophia and John shared in the belief that anti-cyberbullying strategies should be implemented before young students begin to independently access technology. They discussed preventative strategies including teaching young students core values such as developing empathy, kindness, and compassion so that they are equipped with the skills necessary to make positive choices when they begin to independently interact with technology. Further, participants taught their students about netiquette, which is online safety protocol, as well as shared positive uses of technology as a way to motivate students while keeping them safe from possible online detriments.

Participants also addressed the importance of collaboration as a means to address and
combat the issue of cyberbullying. Educators are encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues, students’ parents, and community members such as police officers, as a way to share expectations, knowledge, and resources as well as build a greater level of communication and support. Teacher participants also indicated that they use engaging resources and strategies to make learning meaningful for students. The resources and strategies discussed by Sophia and John included the use of online websites and applications to use technology for positive purposes as well as for access to useful, age-appropriate lesson plans. They also encouraged hands-on strategies, such as role plays or dramatic skits, to maintain student engagement and to create significant learning opportunities. Lastly, participants discussed the importance of on-going conversations about cyberbullying through discussion-based learning such as sharing personal stories or current news articles. These strategies hold significance in that students are provided with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of material and demonstrate their knowledge in a purposeful way.

Teacher participants also observed gender differences in how students experience cyberbullying, but take a whole-class approach to addressing anti-cyberbullying education with their students. The observations made by Sophia and John contributed to a larger discussion regarding the variable of gender. Some researchers view boys as most likely to cyberbully (McQuade et al., 2009), while others indicate that girls are more likely to cyberbully (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015); others found there are few or no significant differences (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Smith & Steffen, 2013; Bauman, Cross, & Walker, 2013). However, regardless of how participants observe gender in relation to cyberbullying, Sophia’s and John’s whole-class approach contributed to an inclusive classroom environment, where students do not feel singled out based on their personal identity.
Lastly, participants indicated potential barriers that teachers and their students face regarding the issue of cyberbullying, which could contribute to a teachers’ reluctance to teach about cyberbullying education and prevent student’s from achieving academic and social success. Sophia and John discussed the negative effects that cyberbullying had on their students’ well-being and academic performance. Their observations echo what the American Psychological Association (2004) notes as the psychological detriments of cyberbullying. These detriments should be used as both a motivator to increase cyberbullying awareness, as well as to implement intervention and prevention strategies. Further, participants acknowledged that barriers such as keeping up-to-date with technology and locating useful anti-cyberbullying resources may hinder an educator’s ability to implement anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classroom. Although these are barriers that many teachers face, Sophia and John encourage educators to keep building their knowledge in this area of research. These challenges are important to identify because it allows for educators to become self-aware, increase motivation, and recognize areas in which they can improve their own practices.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research findings. I begin by discussing the broad implications of my research findings for the educational community—including educational professionals such as teachers, school boards, and Faculties of Education. Next I discuss the implications of my findings for my own professional identity as a teacher and as a researcher.

5.2.1 The educational community

The perspectives discussed in this study illustrate that students will continue to use technology at young ages. Some educators might only begin to discuss cyberbullying when there
is an existing issue at hand. As a result, education regarding cyberbullying may not occur until students have approached the middle school years. The school community needs to recognize the benefits that may exist in taking a proactive approach to anti-cyberbullying education. It is important for the educational community to understand the benefits of collaboration with colleagues, community members, and parents. Developing open lines of communication may help to establish meaningful relationships, gain knowledge, and to build on-going trust and support. Collaboration can help to establish rules and expectations and can ensure the overall safety and well-being of students inside and outside of the school.

Further, there are obstacles that educators may face when implementing anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms, such as lack of available resources. However, there are many anti-cyberbullying strategies that can be implemented within a classroom whether or not schools have access to technological devices. Teachers’ use of hands-on activities such as skits or role play, create public service announcements, or a discussion about a newspaper article or personal experiences is an accessible strategy that can help to stimulate meaningful discussion on the topic of cyberbullying. Teaching students to use appropriate social skills and core values to develop empathy, compassion, and kindness as a preventative approach to cyberbullying may act as an early childhood deterrent to negative online behaviour. If educators have access to technology, there are valuable, age-appropriate lesson plans and resources that have been created by professionals to teach young students about cyberbullying.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

Prior to conducting this study, I believed that there were no relevant resources available to support elementary school educators in implementing anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms. This belief developed because I myself had never experienced anti-cyberbullying
education at any level of schooling. I thought this ignorance to elementary school cyberbullying occurred at all levels of the education system. I have since learned that there are many practical strategies and tools available to assist elementary school educators that can increase awareness of cyberbullying issues, and could potentially contribute to the prevention of cyberbullying.

Further, I previously thought that a teachers’ ignorance to their young students use of social software was a primary reason why they chose not to educate their students on cyberbullying. Through the results of this study, however, I have learned that a lack of knowledge about accessible resources, an inability to obtain technology in the classroom, and a failure to keep up-to-date with the rates of technological growth are why some teachers are reluctant to implement anti-cyberbullying education in their classrooms. As an educator who has gained knowledge in this topic area, I am now motivated to inform other educational professionals about practical teaching strategies so that they too can feel confident and gain the support and resources they need to succeed in anti-cyberbullying education.

One of my greatest reservations within this area of research—as both a teacher and a researcher—was learning about how to keep up with the ever-growing rate of technological advancements. I have learned that keeping up with the rate of technology is a common struggle for most teachers and researchers in this field, and this should not be seen as a deterrent. Instead, the rate of change should be used as a motivator to continue learning through the exploration of applications, websites, news sources, academic articles, workshops, peers and, perhaps most importantly, from students.

5.3 Recommendations

In the pursuance of introducing anti-cyberbullying strategies in elementary school classrooms, it is necessary to implement changes at various levels of the education system. I
make recommendations based on my research findings to ensure that educators gain access to necessary resources and increase their confidence in an area of teaching that could positively affect the lives of their students. These recommendations are organized into three key areas: teachers, school boards, and Faculties of Education.

5.3.1 Teachers

The frightening nature of cyberbullying is that it is likely to continue to persist in our schools. With technological advancements constantly improving and becoming more readily available, it is essential for teachers to combat this issue through education. It is recommended that educators begin to teach anti-cyberbullying strategies right from the start of a child’s educational journey—before they begin interacting with technology on a personal level. This could start with the introduction of core values, such as fostering empathy and compassion, as a way to educate students about making right choices. Further, students should begin by learning ‘netiquette’ before they begin directly using social software. Teachers are also encouraged to create lessons that are relevant, age-appropriate, and engaging through a variety of tools and strategies. This should include the use of technology for positive purposes, if available, but also include hands-on strategies such as role play or creating public service announcements, or learning through group discussion about lived experiences.

5.3.2 School boards

School boards are encouraged to add anti-cyberbullying education for elementary students as a part of their board improvement plans. Boards should consider the implementation of anti-cyberbullying strategies as an element of creating a healthy school environment. School boards are encouraged to develop useful documents for their educators at all grade levels. These documents should include definitions, curriculum connections, connections to technology, lesson
plans, and where to access additional resources. It is also encouraged for boards to conduct professional development workshops in the area of anti-cyberbullying education which should provide kindergarten, primary, and junior educators, as well as administration, with practical knowledge, confidence, and support in this area of teaching.

5.3.3 Faculties of Education

It is recommended that Faculty of Education programs introduce anti-cyberbullying education as a mandatory component of their course work. More emphasis should be placed on anti-cyberbullying education through many of their courses. It is suggested that Faculties of Education introduce this area of work through their mandatory technology course, anti-discriminatory education (i.e. peace studies), health and physical education, as well as literacy and arts-based courses. There should be added emphasis on understanding and supporting the use of social software, the ways it can harm students, and how to successfully incorporate anti-cyberbullying strategies as a means to combat the issue and support pre-service teachers’ confidence in this area of teaching. Further, pre-service teachers should be offered opportunities to develop their knowledge in this area of work by being provided with workshops conducted by trained professionals.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In this section I outline areas of further research based on my research findings. In general, research regarding elementary school anti-cyberbullying education is very limited (DePaolis & Williford, 2014; Baas, de Jong, & Drossaert, 2013; Monks et al., 2012). However, within this grade range, most studies conducted focused on the implementation of anti-cyberbullying education strategies with junior grade students (Grades Four to Six). Teacher participants within this study were also junior grade teachers. There is a gap in the literature that
discusses anti-cyberbullying education for Kindergarten to Grade Three students. Learning from experts who implement anti-cyberbullying strategies with primary students has the potential to deliver necessary information about effective strategies that can assist a cohort of children who are often overlooked as being involved with cyberbullying.

Further, research regarding the effectiveness of anti-cyberbullying strategies would be very useful in deciding what works best. Because young students respond to information differently, a variety of strategies may work better with certain grades over others. Strategies developed in this study were very general in that they could be applied to most elementary grade levels. Information regarding the effectiveness of these strategies based on grade level could assist in creating meaningful change in the lives of young students. Further, in accordance with determining the effectiveness of these strategies, research regarding student attitudes and perceptions towards anti-cyberbullying strategies could help influence the decisions of educational professionals. The student voice is certainly missing within this study and would add a deeper layer of understanding.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I provided a short summary of my findings as outlined in Chapter 4, including a discussion about the benefits of taking a proactive approach to anti-cyberbullying education through the teaching of core values, netiquette, and using technology for positive purposes. My research also addressed the benefits of collaboration with colleagues, students’ parents and community members, as a means to share expectations, gain knowledge, and support. It was also noted that teachers should make anti-cyberbullying research meaningful through a variety of age-appropriate, hands-on and discussion-based strategies. Additionally, gender differences were observed in how students experience cyberbullying. However, taking a
whole-class approach to addressing anti-cyberbullying education can enable teachers to foster an inclusive classroom environment. I then discussed the barriers noted by teachers which may explain their reluctance for implementing anti-cyberbullying strategies in their classrooms. These barriers include a lack of resources and technology, as well as an inability to keep up with the rate of technological growth. Understanding these barriers can help educational professionals increase self-awareness and inform areas of growth and change within this area of work.

Next I discussed the implications of my research in relation to the broader educational community. These implications included a discussion on the importance of collaboration for positive purposes, as well as engaging in a variety of relevant anti-cyberbullying strategies to ensure that learning is meaningful for students. I then discussed the implications of my research in relation to my professional identity as a teacher-researcher. My research awarded me a new understanding about available anti-cyberbullying resources for elementary school educators, as well as reasons why teachers are reluctant to discuss this topic with their students. I will use my gained knowledge in this area of work to inform other teachers about useful resources, and to encourage others to also become a life-long learner in an area of research that is constantly changing.

I then made recommendations to three key areas including teachers, school boards, and Faculties of Education. I encouraged teachers to begin implementing anti-cyberbullying education starting in the primary grades. It is essential for educators to use a variety of strategies to create significant learning opportunities for all students. It is recommended that school boards create useful anti-cyberbullying education resources and provide professional development workshops to advance educators’ knowledge and confidence in this area of teaching. Similarly,
Faculties of Education are encouraged to integrate anti-cyberbullying education in many of their mandatory courses as well as provide workshop opportunities.

Lastly, I considered possible areas for further research, such as focusing on anti-cyberbullying education strategies for Kindergarten to Grade Three students. Additionally, learning about the effectiveness of anti-cyberbullying strategies as well as students’ perspectives on teaching strategies discussed in this research study can further aid in combatting the issue of cyberbullying in elementary schools.

Overall, I feel this study has helped to fill a gap in existing research regarding anti-cyberbullying strategies for elementary school educators. This research study can provide useful information for teachers, while highlighting areas in need of improvement for school boards and Faculties of Education by pointing to the need for resource support and professional development. By introducing anti-cyberbullying education to young students, I believe that teachers can potentially increase the safety and well-being of their young students both online and in the real world.
References


http://ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=2549


Appendix A: Interview Consent Letter

Date:

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Rianne Annis and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how elementary school educators implement anti-cyberbullying strategies in their own classrooms or school community. I am interested in interviewing educators who are knowledgeable and passionate about the implementation of anti-cyberbullying intervention and prevention strategies to elementary students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Rianne Annis
rianne.annis@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.
I have read the letter provided to me by _______________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about how elementary teachers implement anti-cyberbullying education strategies in their classrooms and school community for the purpose of preventing cyberbullying in elementary schools. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on cyberbullying and classroom prevention strategies. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How long have you been working as an educator in an elementary school?
2. Which grade do you currently teach? Which grades have you previously taught?
3. In addition to your role as a classroom teacher, do you fulfill any other roles in the school (e.g. coach, mentor, club leader, etc.)?
4. Can you describe your school for me? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)
5. What personal, professional, and/or educational experiences led to developing your interest in cyberbullying and addressing it in your teaching? What experiences helped prepare you for this work in schools?
6. How long have you been implementing anti-cyberbullying education in your classroom or school community? - Was there any particular incident that happened that initiated you beginning to address this topic? If yes, what happened?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

7. How would you describe cyberbullying to someone who is unfamiliar with the term?
8. In your view, what is the role of schools and teachers in addressing cyber-bullying?
9. Why do you believe that cyber-bullying education is important?
10. In your view, why might some teachers be reluctant to address cyberbullying issues with their students?
11. At what grade level do you believe students should be introduced to anti-cyberbullying strategies?
12. How do you understand the relationship between traditional forms of bullying and cyber-bullying?
13. Based on your experience and observations, how cyberbullying affect the students in your class?
14. How common would you say it is amongst the students in your class? In your school?
15. What indicators of cyber-bullying do you see?
16. How does cyber-bullying manifest for your students? (e.g. through what avenues/media, with what type of foci—humiliation, harassment etc.)
17. In your experience, do boys and girls participate in or experience cyberbullying differently? What have you observed?

**Teacher Practices**

18. What does cyber-bullying education look like in your teaching practice? (e.g. formal lessons, classroom resources like books and videos, visual aids like posters, participation in related school clubs etc.)
19. In terms of lessons on this topic, what curriculum do you align this topic with and why?
20. What factors and considerations do you take into account when designing lessons on the topic of cyber-bullying?
21. What are your overall learning goals for these anti-cyberbullying lessons—what do you hope to achieve?
22. Can you give me an example of a lesson that you have conducted addressing this topic?
   a. What were your learning goals?
   b. How, if at all, do you assess these lessons?
   c. What resources supported you in teaching these lessons? *listen and then probe for specific books, videos, websites, songs, guest speakers etc.
23. Do you address the topic of cyber-bullying when integrating technology and/or social media into your lessons? If yes, how do you do this? Can you give me an example?
24. How, if at all, do you communicate with parents about the topic of cyberbullying? In your experience, how do parents view the role of schools in addressing it?

**Supports and Challenges**

25. What challenges do you encounter in this work and how do you respond to these challenges?
26. How, if at all, do you keep up-to-date with the growing rates and advances in technology and social media sources in order to be aware of the kinds of technological media students may be using to participate in or experience cyber-bullying?
27. What school-based factors and resources support you in this work?

**Next Steps**

28. What are your professional goals in the area of cyberbullying prevention?
29. What advice do you have for new teachers who are looking to introduce anti-cyberbullying education into their own classrooms?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.