

# RK SIDE Tube and MySpace

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study, Professor Quing Li surveyed 177 students in two middle schools. She found that more than half (53%) of the students reported that they knew someone being harassed or intimidated on-line. Fifteen percent said that they bullied others using electronic communications tools. Recent studies reveal the following facts:

- ◆ 48 percent of Canadian students spend at least an hour a day surfing the World Wide Web;
- ◆ almost 60 percent of Canadian students use chat rooms and instant messaging;
- ◆ only 16 percent of students say they talk to their parents about what they do on-line;
- ◆ a 2004 British Columbia study of Grades 4 to 8 students found that 35 percent of students reported that they were threatened on-line.

From a school perspective, this may be a particularly difficult issue as, unlike physical bullying, cyber-threats are often sent anonymously and from home computers. And while cyberbullying can be as devastating as traditional forms of bullying, some students won't complain for fear that adults may overreact and the students will lose their mobile phone or computer privileges. In addition, victims of cyberbullying are afraid of reporting it, as they are fearful of possible reprisals and retaliation. They are afraid that the bullying will become worse if they report it.

## Prevention and Early Intervention

Principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, and teacher-librarians all share the responsibility of keeping our students safe from bullies. It is important for schools to educate students and

parents about the seriousness of cyberbullying. In this regard, teacher-librarians can take the lead in promoting curriculum-based, anti-bullying programs and ethical use of technology. These programs should focus on improving relations among members of the school community and creating a peaceful school culture. School council meetings, family literacy nights, and newsletters from the school and the school library can all support parents in understanding the problem and taking proactive steps to both protect and teach their children responsible on-line behaviour.

Software applications such as NetSupport (as described in the last issue of *The Teaching Librarian*) can help monitor students' communications while they are in school. Unfortunately, some of the most hateful messaging is done from home, and so it is important that teachers and teacher-librarians assist parents by noticing students who shy away from the computers, who seem withdrawn from their classmates, or who indicate that something is troubling them.

Excellent lessons and information on cyberbullying are available at:

- ◆ Media Awareness Network  
[www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca);
- ◆ Be Web Aware  
[www.bewebaware.ca](http://www.bewebaware.ca);
- ◆ Cyber Wise  
[www.cyberwise.ca](http://www.cyberwise.ca). ■

# cyberbullying in schools