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Dr. Steve Wells, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Gerald Giraud, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

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David Clinefelter, Ph.D.

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2010

Abstract

Principal Perspectives on Social Networking and the  
Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying

by

Heidi Stevenson Welker

MEd University of Dayton, 2002

BA Cedarville University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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## Abstract

Cyberbullying on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook has had negative effects on children at school. Cyberbullying disruption during the school day adds to the complexity of maintaining school operations, safety, and academic achievement. With the advancement of technology, there is a gap in the literature on the disruption in schools, particularly on schools' culture, from cyberbullying. In this exploratory qualitative case study, principal perceptions were investigated to better understand the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school and school disruptions as well as effective and ineffective interventions used to limit cyberbullying. The framework was based on the concepts of indirect aggression and reinforcement, suggesting cyberbullying is likely reinforced in social networking sites and with peers in the school. Ten middle school (Grades 5-8) principals within a suburban school district in the Midwestern United States were interviewed and a focus group of 5 principals was conducted. The district code of conduct, antiharassment, and bullying policies were used to support findings in this case study. For data analysis, notes and transcripts were reviewed and analyzed, identifying code words and patterns. The main findings, related to the 3 research questions, highlighted the importance of understanding principals' perceptions that prevention and intervention impact culture, indirect aggression, technology's influence on student behavior, and principals' roles in teaching, learning, and leadership. This study may promote positive social change by providing insight into the ways school employees may minimize physical and mental health issues that cyberbullying may cause students as well as improve communication with students' parents.

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## Dedication

This dissertation would not have been possible without God in my life. He has given me strength and guidance as well as opportunities to see me through this dissertation.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Joy Lynn Stevenson, who deserves all the credit for motivating me to be the best I can be, with the unconditional love, support, and encouragement that made it possible for me to complete this journey.

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This dissertation is also dedicated to my grandpa, Russell Higbee, who expressed that I would make a difference in the lives of many; little did I realize at the time, that later that would be in my profession as a teacher and school administrator.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Bullying among adolescents has been studied as a global phenomenon since the 1970s (Dussich & Maekoya, 2007; Li, 2006; Mason, 2008), and has been considered a rite of passage in adolescence for many school children (Swearer & Espelage, 2004). In recent years, bullying has come to include acts of cyberbullying. Electronic bullying is a more invasive type of bullying where parents, educators, and adolescents report feeling helpless to interrupt the behavior early in the process.

Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. (Belsey, 2004, p. 8)

With a better understanding of cyberbullying, schools, parents, and community can more effectively work to create safer environments for students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Willard, 2007). In an effort to determine the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of a school and disruption in school, input from school principals was gathered.

Social networking sites, like MySpace and Facebook, are available for students at schools and can create opportunities for abuse (Millard, 2006). Cyberbullying does not stop when the school day ends; this new terrain provides a means of communication that is not bound by physical space (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008). Many parents are unaware of social networking sites or instant messaging online, and they are sometimes oblivious to the content their children are accessing and activities their children are

engaging in on the Internet (British Broadcasting Corp., 2006). In addition, many parents are shocked to find that their kids have experienced bullying through the Internet (Smith et al., 2008). This lack of awareness in the home is equally in evidence at school (Smith et al., 2008). Administrators rarely gain access to or participate in social networking sites where their students gather.

Social networking events can affect student behavior in school. These events can “undermine school climate, interfere with victims’ school functioning, and put some students at risk for serious mental health and safety problems” (Feinberg & Robey, 2008, p. 10). Schools may be helpless to intervene if cyberbullying occurs outside school hours and off the property (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). When cyberbullying occurs outside school hours, schools have limited access to information and they cannot discipline students for outside school activities unless these activities come into school or threaten the school; any disruptions that come into school can have legal and school consequences (Bartsch & Cheurprakobkit, 2002). Cyberbullying has no boundaries or limitations; it can happen during the day or at night. The most significant part of cyberbullying, which sets it apart from traditional bullying, is the fact that cyberbullies can remain anonymous and say things online that they would never say to someone in person (Keith & Martin, 2005; Sparling, 2004). While cyberbullies can remain anonymous, the impact of repeatedly harassing, bullying, or sending messages can cause physical and psychological damage to the recipient that endures long after the incidents of ridicule have ceased (Willard, 2007). When a child victim of this harassment commits suicide, it has been referred to in the literature as “bullycide” (Marr & Field, 2001, p. xi).

Traditional bullying has many factors that may be associated with cyberbullying such as jealousy, power, and frustration (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). There is a gap in the literature on the disruption in schools, particularly disruptions to the school culture, from the abuse of social networking sites. I sought to identify perceptions of principals regarding the problem and principals' responses to the problem that will assist in reducing bullying. This study contributes to positive social change by improving awareness of cyberbullying. I investigated administrator perspectives to better understand the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to the culture of the school and onsite disruption in order to identify causes and cures of this dilemma.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Thirty-eight states have enacted laws to protect students from face-to-face bullying and harassment (Bully Police, 2009). However, bullying has gone virtual through a new technological form of harassment called cyberbullying (Anderson & Sturm, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). This problem affects people all over the world because cyberbullying can be anonymous and can occur 24 hours a day through the availability of the Internet via cell phone, computer, or handheld device (Erb, 2006; Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Cyberbullying has been the cause of several deaths and at least seven states have created laws against cyberbullying (Koloff, 2008). Ohio law requires school districts to post the number of bullying incidents semiannually on their website. Student names are protected (ORC, 2010). Cyberbullying incidents are not required to be posted unless the incident involves school bullying (ORC, 2010). School district administrators must report in writing the bullying incidents per building to the president

of the district board (ORC, 2010). As a result, cyberbullying incidents are informally discussed at the monthly district meetings. Some researchers have addressed cyberbullying issues (Shariff, 2008; Willard, 2007); but, few researchers have considered administrators' perceptions of cyberbullying on social networking sites and the possible disruption it causes in school. Cyberbullying has been analyzed from the perspectives of students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Underwood, 2003). Research on the perspectives of principals is limited. The research problem addressed in this study was to understand the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school and school disruptions as well as effective and ineffective interventions used to limit cyberbullying.

According to Coloroso (2003), when bullying occurs, intervening quickly with discipline can have positive effects: (a) shows the bully what he or she has done is wrong, (b) gives ownership of the problem, (c) creates a process to solve the problem (restitution, resolution, and reconciliation, and (d) leaves dignity (pp. 106-107). With the new antibullying laws and zero tolerance policies that are prevalent across the country, these are steps in the direction of curbing inappropriate behaviors.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative exploratory case study research design was used to address the research questions. In order to investigate the themes of disruption, improve safety and awareness in schools, and to address concerns in connection with social networking sites and the onsite disruptions they cause in school, a case study was an appropriate fit because it allows principals in one school district to share their perceptions of the experiences. A qualitative case study provides a reader with details that enhance a story

or event from a perspective or multiple perspectives (Creswell, 1998; Lichtman, 2010; Willis, 2007). The study took place in a Midwestern public school district with five middle schools and five intermediate schools. This district was an appropriate choice for the study of cyberbullying because there have been multiple cases of cyberbullying incidents that have been brought into the school building. Informal discussions of these events have occurred among principals and with the increase in students' availability to technology, cyberbullying has been on the rise. This Midwestern school district services approximately 21,000 students and is representative of other school districts that share similar attributes. There was a need to see how administrators respond to cyberbullying and what disruptions happen in the school because of these online behaviors and activities.

I evaluated the perceptions of 10 administrators who were principals of middle schools to understand the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to the culture of the school and onsite disruption as well as identifying effective and ineffective interventions used to limit cyberbullying. The middle schools were located in a large Midwestern city. I conducted three types of data collection: interviews, a focus group, and collection of school and district policies and local news articles from participants related to cyberbullying. The interview responses and focus group comments were coded, research questions were addressed, and themes emerged through the use of the qualitative software NVIVO.

The criteria for selection as a participant: (a) being a principal or assistant principal in Grades 5-8 in the selected school district and (b) willingness to share the

experiences with the investigator. The size of the total population is 19 administrators; however, if more than 15 participants agreed to participate in the study, then 15 participants would have been randomly selected.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

1. In the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school?
2. How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school?
3. What interventions and steps have been taken in the schools in this district to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate administrators' perceptions of the effect of cyberbullying on school culture, particularly disruption of their schools. I also sought to discern the principals' best practice efforts to limit disruption in school from cyberbullying. Awareness of cyberbullying in schools can create safer environments for students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Mason, 2008). Administrator perspectives may contribute to understanding cyberbullying and limiting school disruption from cyberbullying by creating learning communities that are engaging, respectful, and free from bullies.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the concepts of indirect aggression, and reinforcement. Indirect aggression, as through cyberbullying, is likely

reinforced in social networking sites and amongst peers in the school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a, b; Shariff, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008). Cyberbullying is a form of aggression that affects children's well-being and can escalate from hurtful language to physical violence and represent a cultural concern (Craig & Pepler, 1995; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Olweus, 1993a). The culture of a school may be affected by such indirect aggression, made possible by technological advances (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a, b; Willard, 2007). When school leadership and culture are enriched with core values, beliefs, behaviors, and policies, negative behaviors can be modified (Sousa, 2003). When leadership and culture of a school are lacking, relationships deteriorate and the culture becomes more tolerant of negative behaviors (Fullan, 2004; McEwan, 2003; Sousa, 2003). Behaviors that become reinforced over time become habits (Bandura, 1973). These habits influence the culture of a school building (McEwan, 2003; Sousa, 2003). This framework may contribute to understanding the factors that lead to cyberbullying disruption in school.

### **Indirect and Relational Aggression Contributes to Bullying and Cyberbullying**

When a child's goal is superiority and power, aggressive characteristics tend to be involved (Adler, 1927). According to Bandura (1973), aggressors utilize any means necessary to reach their goal even when the method to get there is irrational (p. 10). Freud (1933) believed that destructive behavior towards others protects the individual's own self. Bandura (1977) described the situation where the victim of bullying responds by becoming a bully later on in order to no longer be a victim. Punishment may cause the behavior to change but not necessarily (Bandura, 1973). Cyberbullying reduces feedback that might control bullying. Bandura (1973) supported this viewpoint with the work of

Rausch (1965), whose research found that hostile, face-to-face behavior received unfriendly responses and genial behavior did not.

### **Reinforcement Encourages Positive or Negative Online Behaviors**

Unfriendly and aggressive acts, according to Bandura (1973), are developed through social reinforcement and modeling. The aggression becomes a pattern of behavior and when observed by others with no consequence, becomes acceptable by the peer group and by the social cues (Bandura, 1973). Cues given by those around can dictate if the behavior will continue. Reinforcement of positive or negative behavior can take the form of verbal or nonverbal reactions. Cues of positive attention, affection, and satisfaction can help the behavior and offer a reward. Reprimands, rejection, or motions of disapproval can serve as a punitive measure (Bandura, 1973). Bandura explained that social learning theory developments had evolved to consider external influences on responsiveness. Human behavior has been tested to evaluate and analyze what stimuli reinforce and what consequences change behaviors. Since behavior can be reinforced by others, there is also the view that self-reinforcement is a strong motivator. Bandura (1973) demonstrated that aversive treatment can produce emotional arousal that can generate aggressive drives and, based on the effectiveness of the response, can create new responses or coping strategies.

Bandura (1973) delineated how aggression is prompted by the anticipated benefits; frustration and anger are segues to aggression but are not necessary. Adler (1927) identified aggressive character traits that allow people to manipulate others for their life goals; jealousy is expected to be the main culprit. Adler explained how

aggression is directly related to the personality. When a child looks at the world with views of despair, suspicion, or mistrust, the child tends to isolate and evade his or her tasks, and make bad decisions (p. 42). Adler, like Bandura, believed those who employed aggression to gain their desired outcomes believe aggression is righteous in nature (Bandura, 1973). Blame for the aggression is placed outside the individual responsible and when the aggression becomes disturbing to those around the perpetrator, punishment comes into play (Bandura, 1973). Bandura and Adler both conducted their research in face-to-face environments; however, their theories might have been altered had they been considering the online environment.

### **Culture Creates Environments Where Aggression Is More Acceptable**

Culture can create environments where aggression is popular. Deci and Ryan (1985) examined socialization of children and discovered that many behaviors, values, and attitudes are not intrinsically motivated or natural, but are nonetheless significant for operating in the social world. Some children participate in negative activities or behaviors that adults question, causing them to externally regulate children's behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Bandura (1973) noted when aggressive behavior no longer receives a reward, children move on; but, when aggressive behavior has some risk, it does not discourage children from their behaviors. Risk is less of a deterrent than withdrawal of reward. In the online environment, there are often no external rewards and the risk may be low, thus contributing to perpetuation of the behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a). "Antisocial aggression is the anticipated outcome when the reward outweighs the negative risks" (Bandura, 1973, p. 224).

Deci and Ryan (1985) explained that all extrinsic rewards have a controlling aspect, satisfy a need, and the behavior will continue as long as the reward continues. Adler (1927) described putting down others in order to gain power as a result of jealousy. While power and jealousy can contribute to aggression; positive culture can have the opposite effect. Culture is representative of the community, parents, students, and staff of a building (Sergiovanni, 2000). Principals and teachers are given freedom and entrusted with keeping children safe and the attitudes that principals and teachers exhibit model the behavior expected. These demonstrated behaviors also share the character of the building which is reflective of the culture. Culture can bring forth positive social change but it requires goals and constant evaluation and time for the implementation to occur (Sergiovanni, 2000).

### **Technology Has Increased the Ability to Bully**

Technology has increased the capacity of bullying. out of the new social networking tools cyberbullying by cell phone, email, texting, instant messaging, computer, electronic device, social networking sites, websites, pictures, and videos has emerged (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Li, 2006; Willard, 2007). Bandura (1973) asserted that aggression meets the needs of power, status, and resources, whereas injury to others is an added benefit (p. 3). Electronic communication has increased the distribution of information and enhanced the ramifications, consequences, and punishments of those who participate in online bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Russo & Arndt, in press). Cyberbullying has also gained popularity based on anonymity made possible by technology (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Cyberbullying reduces feedback that

might control bullying. Cyberbullies do not see the other person suffer and adults will not see them do the behavior (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

While suicide is an extreme consequence of cyberbullying, the availability and attainability of technology to bully allows it to happen at any time, most of the time occurring off school grounds (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008).

### **Leadership Can Increase Cyberbullies' Risk and Decrease Harm**

While aggression, reinforcement, culture, and technology are deemed as factors for bullying and cyberbullying, school leadership is another area that could be a contributing factor in reducing or allowing aggressive behaviors within a school. School principals are noticing cyberbullying problems (Beckerman & Nocero, 2003). Schools need to deal with cyberbullying and provide students with methods to prevent and reduce cyberbullying (Franek, 2006). This should be a priority for school leaders because learning happens best in environments that are free of intimidation and threats (Sousa, 2003). School officials need to be cognizant of the signs of cyberbullying and investigate when a student makes a claim (Franek, 2006). Consequences and policies applying to those students who cause cyberbullying disruptions need to address legal, emotional, and disciplinary outcomes (Franek, 2006; Russo & Arndt, in press). Collins (2001) suggested creating a culture of discipline that is supportive and encourages positive relationships on a daily basis. Consistency with a clear mission and vision allows for a transparent relationship that gains trust and respect (Sergiovanni, 2000). Effective leadership responds to the core changes in an organization that include bureaucratic, personal, market, professional, cultural, and democratic forces (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (2005) concluded that while expectations and curriculum are essential, relationships between adults and peers create the culture.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following definitions are to help the reader understand the study.

*Aggression:* Behavior that results in personal injury and in destruction of property. The injury may be psychological (in the form of devaluation or degradation) as well as physical (Bandura, 1973, p. 5).

*Bullying or victimization:* Bullying is when an individual is “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993a, p. 9).

*Culture:* According to Sergiovanni (1996):

An important factor in improving schools. Less obvious is the connection between culture and theory. The heart and soul of school culture is what people believe, the assumptions they make about how schools work, and what they consider to be true and real. These factors in turn provide a theory of acceptability that lets people know how they should behave. Underneath every school culture is a theory, and every school culture is driven by its theory. Efforts to change school cultures inevitably involve changing theories of schooling and school life (pp. 2-3).

*Cyberbullying:* A digital attack defined by Belsey (2004):

The use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and

defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others ( p. 8).

*Cyberstalking*: “Repeated sending of harmful messages that include threats of harm, are highly intimidating or extremely offensive, or involve extortion” (Willard, 2007, p. 10).

*Cybertarget*: A person who has been identified as a potential victim of cyberbullying (Willard, 2007).

*Cyberthreat*: Can be a direct “intent to hurt someone or commit suicide” (Willard, 2007, p.11) or distressing “clues that the person is emotionally upset and may consider hurting someone, self-harm, or suicide” (Willard, 2007, p. 11).

*Denigration*: Speech that is “harmful, untrue, or cruel” (Willard, 2007, p. 7).

*Flaming*: “Heated, short-lived argument” (Willard, 2007, p. 5).

*Harassment*: “Repeated, ongoing sending of offensive messages to an individual” (Willard, 2007, p. 6).

*Impersonation*: pretending to be someone or sharing information that reflects badly on someone else interfering with that person (Willard, 2007).

*Intermediate School*: A school of students in grades 5 and 6.

*Middle School*: A school of students in grades 7 and 8.

*Social networking*: Online utilities that allow users to create profiles (public or private) and form a network of friends; allow users to interact with their friends via public and private means (such as messages, instant messaging); also allow the posting of

user-generated content such as photos and videos (such as MySpace; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008, p. 121).

### **Assumptions**

This research was based on four assumptions. First, cyberbullying is a sign of aggression. “People frequently resort to aggressive acts because they produce desired results that cannot as readily be achieved through nonaggressive means, rather than simply to generate expressions of suffering” (Bandura, 1973, p. 5). While it can be assumed that cyberbullying is an act of mischief or a mean prank, I considered it a type of aggression. Second, it is assumed that participants answered the questions honestly. A qualitative case study is dependent on the participants sharing information, being articulate, and recalling the situations that they have experienced (Yin, 2009). It is assumed that the participants were truthful because confidentiality was guaranteed and participation was not required. Third, it is assumed that participants shared the cyberbullying scenarios that have impacted the school. It is assumed that the participants described, recalled, and explained the situations that occurred during their administration. Fourth, it is assumed that the personal notes and news articles are trustworthy, accurate, and up to date.

### **Scope**

The scope of the study was limited to identifying how cyberbullying can disrupt school, particularly in relation to the school culture. Each participant may have shared additional information beyond disruption at school, but those data were not analyzed. The

study was concerned with only the middle school (Grades 5-8) principals of one suburban school district.

### **Limitations**

Most cyberbullying research is limited to student bullying and student cyberbullying. This study may not be compared or generalized to other principals' perceptions of cyberbullying because with the new laws on bullying, cyberbullying has encroached on principal responsibilities (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Willard, 2007). The sample of Grade 5-8 principals in a single setting of a Midwestern city may not be generalizable to all areas of administration. In this qualitative study, other knowledge was discovered. Creswell (1998) discussed that one site is sufficient for a qualitative study; however, a multi district study would have added to this research.

### **Delimitations**

The research was based on data collected in a single, large suburban school district with selected principals from middle Grades 5-8 in the Midwestern United States. Guidance counselors, students, teachers, and parents were excluded from this study. Principals in Grades K-4 and 9-12 were also excluded from the study. This study was limited to principals' lived experiences. Since this study was limited to a small number of participants, this is a delimitation of the representation (Creswell, 1998). Since exploratory qualitative case study depends on description (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995), the success of an interview and focus group depended on the description and interpretation that the participants offered. School guidance counselors may have counseled the victims

and bullies of cyberbullying; but, they were excluded from this study. Students who were victims and bullies were not chosen for this research because the intent was to investigate administrator perceptions of cyberbullying that takes place through social networking sites in middle school.

### **Significance of the Study**

Previous researchers have focused on the effects of cyberbullying, what cyberbullying means, and how cyberbullying occurs, but have not discussed the disruption it causes in school. This study was significant because it shared the personal experiences and perceptions of principals. This study was also significant because it described the cyberbullying disruptions that schools have faced. This study may be meaningful to principals, school personnel, students, and community members.

This exploratory qualitative case study was significant because it: (a) increased knowledge, (b) explained principals' best practices, and (c) sought positive social change. Schools, parents, students, and community members need to understand the types of school environment disruptions caused by cyberbullying (Shariff, 2008; Willard, 2007). Only with this knowledge can schools increase the protection and safety of children (Shariff, 2008; Willard, 2007). According to Anderson and Sturm, (2007) the "recent rash of violence in schools has highlighted just how angry and helpless children can feel" (p. 24). Cyberbullying "is much harder to escape or avoid than face-to-face bullying" (p. 26). One reason is that the parental responsibility to monitor is difficult when parents and children relate differently (Beale & Hall, 2007) and monitoring is not conducted regularly or thoroughly.

Bullying can be experienced through direct and indirect aggression. Direct aggression is an overt physical assault or act; indirect is in the form of verbal assaults, gossip, and exclusion (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2004, p. 210). Bullying is a chronic problem that jeopardizes children's safety (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2004, p. 131). School administrators are facing legal responsibilities to interrupt these patterns with the enactment of state bullying laws.

Pearl, Bouthilet, and Lazar (1982) found that adolescents who spend a lot of time watching violent television shows were often more aggressive and less empathetic to victims of aggression. When a bully has bullied before and gotten away with it, the behavior did not change (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). Anderson and Sturm concluded that documentation should be saved and shared with school officials or with police to reduce problems or avoid future problems. Beale and Hall (2007) agreed that parents should speak with school officials even if their children were being bullied after school. When the behaviors do not stop, "as a last resort, parents may wish to contact an attorney about suing the parents of the bully for defamation, invasion of privacy, and intentional infliction of emotional distress" (Beale & Hall, 2007, p. 12).

Beale and Hall (2007) believed that "cyberbullying is emerging as one of the most challenging issues facing parents and school personnel as students embrace the Internet and other mobile communication technologies" (p. 12). Results of this study may be beneficial to investigators, parents, educators, politicians, and community members. The results of this study may provide insight on how to curb and cure cyberbully issues in school and may contribute to changes in school policies and rules. Stakeholders need to

take an active role to reduce cyberbullying issues and create a safer school environment for all students. With bullying and harassment policies in schools, increased knowledge, prevention, and intervention need to take place. Without the knowledge of incidents of disruption from cyberbullying, one cannot make positive changes within the school building to cease such incidents. Positive social change in schools may be achieved as this study contributed to cyberbullying knowledge from the principal's perspective.

### **Summary and Transition**

Bullying is a form of aggression that affects the lives of many students each year. This study will investigate the factors and themes of disruption, if evident, at the schools, generate strategies to improve safety and awareness, and serve to address the concerns in connection with social networking sites and the disruption they cause at school.

Cyberbullying is difficult to identify because many victims do not come forward (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a, b; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Koloff, 2008). Laws and policies have been implemented nationwide to assist in requiring action to be taken and students to be protected (Bully Police USA, 2009; Koloff, 2008). In chapter 2, I include the literature review on cyberbullying and its impact on schools. In chapter 3, I include details related to the methodology of this research study. In chapter 4, I provide the results of the study. In chapter 5, I offer a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

## Chapter 2: The Literature Review

In the past 5 years, 38 states have passed antibullying laws and seven states have passed laws against cyberbullying (Bully Police, 2009). Cyberbullying is a new manifestation of the bullying phenomena (Bully Police, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Koloff, 2008). Researchers have examined how students are cyberbullied, what types of cyberbullying they have experienced, and how often the cyberbullying occurs (Aricak et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Topcu, Erdur-Baker, & Capa-Aydin, 2008). These student experiences have been explored in the literature, but little is known about the school disruption caused by bullying through social networking sites.

Articles were analyzed for common themes after reviewing current peer reviewed journals from EBSCOhost utilizing Education Research Complete, ERIC and Academic Search, using the keywords of *cyberbullying*, *bullying*, *disruptions*, *schools*, *culture*, *leadership*, and *social networking*. The literature review assisted in determining the guiding questions. The organization of the review began from reading the literature on topics that may affect schools: (a) aggression and the nature of bullying, (b) the school's and principal's role in protecting students, and (c) the victimization and ramifications. The rationale for the conceptual framework and chosen methodology will be explained later in this chapter.

### **Aggression and the Nature of Bullying**

The content of this section provides an understanding of the theories of the motivation of bullying and views of aggression provided by Adler (1927) and Bandura

(1973, 1977). The psychological and sociocultural approaches of bullying as it relates to acts of cyberbullying and how these experiences can impact a child's social, physical, and emotional well-being will be examined.

### **Bullying**

Bullying is an aggressive behavior or act that negatively affects others (Mason, 2008; Olweus, 1999b; Rigby, 2002). Coloroso (2003) concluded that there were four types of reasons that students bully: (a) imbalance of power, (b) intent to harm, (c) threat of further aggression, and (d) terror to others. Only after school shootings took place did bullying receive major media attention and become a chief concern in U.S. schools (Espelage & Asidao, 2001). Greene (2006) stated that bullying is a violation of human rights and that aggression in any form is unacceptable.

Ohio law requires school districts to post the number of bullying incidents semiannually on their website. Student names are protected (ORC, 2010). Cyberbullying incidents are not required to be reported unless the incident involves school bullying (ORC, 2010). School district administrators must report in writing the bullying incidents per building to the president of the district board (ORC, 2010).

Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) described how negative peer influences and environmental factors contribute to bullying behaviors during adolescence. Espelage et al. evaluated the social context of bullying from the perspective of social learning and aggression. The results of the study demonstrated that adult interventions can play a significant role in reducing bullying opportunities. The more absent adult interventions are, the more bullying behavior goes on. Espelage et al. conducted a quantitative survey

with 558 students, Grades 6-8, of various genders and races from the midwest. From the study, 189 students mentioned that they spent more than an hour a day without the presence of an adult, which indicated that a third of this population is unsupervised, leaving opportunities for children to do what they want during that time period. With this open time period, parents may not allow children outside, so online communication could seem like a better alternative.

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying encompasses the use of technology to harass others and employs devices ranging from home computers and cell phones, to other Internet-capable technology (Shariff, 2008). Aggressive behavior and bullying cause violence in schools and represent a cultural concern (Craig & Pepler, 1995; Olweus, 1993a). Aggressive behaviors and cyberbullying have caused media attention (Huguenin, 2008; Koloff, 2008).

Anderson and Sturm (2007) commented on the public's reaction to cyberbullying and observed that "society is moving away from the attitude that bullying is just a part of growing up, to understanding the deep, emotional damage it can cause" (p. 24). Keith and Martin (2005) explained that a cyberbully can harass the victim while the unaware parents sit in the next room. The conflicts stemming from these cyber harassments are likely to arise at school on Mondays after the weekend; school becomes the territory where issues are settled (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007). The school day can be interrupted when information is posted online during school or outside of school or when peer relationships are jeopardized from these online activities. Anderson and Sturm (2007) explained that

children can be bullied online by those on their buddy list or by “social exclusion and malicious rumor spreading” (p. 27). With 21 million teenagers using the Internet, 16 million have reported using the Internet at school (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007). Kirby and Kaillio did not conduct their own research; however, they described the necessity for schools to be aware of cyberbullying and the access students have to harass and torment others during school hours and after. The impact of cyberbullying affects peer relationships, causes emotional damage, and leads in some cases to violence.

### **Effects of Cyberbullying**

Katzer, Fetschenhauer, and Belschak (2009) examined victims of cyberbullying using a quantitative methodology, polling 700 pupils from German secondary schools, Grades 5-11. Katzer et al. analyzed the forms of victimization that occurred on Internet chatrooms and the frequency of the behaviors (p. 26). The correlation between school and Internet bullying was examined to determine if differences exist between victimization in school and victimization in Internet chatrooms by identifying common themes with the use of the Olweus Bully and Victim Questionnaire. Chatting was one preferred way of communication for the age group surveyed, because students can instant message each other or multi-task with several things happening (Katzer et al., 2009). When surveyed about friendships, chat friends were almost as important as real friends, so the friendships developed online were integral to the adolescents (Katzer et al., 2009). Almost a third of the participants experienced being abused or insulted more than once a month, “31.6% reported being harassed for no reason, and 12.3% reported being teased” (p. 27). This

research demonstrated that victimization between school and the Internet go hand-in-hand. Virtual and school issues are interrelated.

Kowalski and Limber (2007) conducted research on cyberbullying with 3,767 students Grades 6-8 in the southwestern and southeastern parts of the United States and discovered that 25% of the females and 11% of the males had been cyberbullied in the last month. Of those bullied, 53.2% were cyberbullied by a student and 37% were cyberbullied by a friend; 13% of the girls had cyberbullied someone that was not a friend and 8.6% of the boys reported having cyberbullied. Eighteen percent of these students reported being cyberbullied within the previous 2 months. Of the students cyberbullied, 52% reported that the cyberbullying was done by a student at school, making it a concern for administration (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Kowalski and Limber demonstrated the need for administrators to be aware of cyberbullying, because some of the cyberbullying (52%) was done at school. Cyberbullying can cause significant problems for administration and students.

Aricak et al. (2008) explored 269 Turkish adolescents' experiences with cyberbullying. Aricak et al. concluded that 96.8% of the secondary students surveyed in Turkey were Internet users (p. 256). The main reason for using the Internet was for chatting, followed by homework, playing games, emailing, and then finally, surfing the net (p. 256). Of those students who were exposed to cyberbullying, 23.8% admitted they would not say what they said on the Internet to a person face-to-face (p. 256). Over 16% admitted giving a false identity (p. 256). Students who experienced cyberbullying felt that the following behaviors warranted cyberbullying: "(a) being teased, (b) spreading rumors,

(c) being insulted, (d) being threatened, (e) pictures displayed by others without consent, and (f) other” (p. 257).

Aricak et al. (2008) indicated that as Internet use increases, the belief of getting caught for cyberbullying decreases. Aricak et al. supported the viewpoint that cyberbullying is an indirect form of bullying that can lead to depression in victims and that the repetition of negative words can have lingering mental health problems. The research provided a contrast to traditional viewpoints of the profile of cyberbullies, and was beneficial as a way of seeing varying research on gender-based bullying. Aricak et al. acknowledged that a third of the students displayed bully behaviors and almost a quarter exhibited bully-victim behaviors. More research is needed to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Based on Li's (2006) research, 264 students, Grades 7-9 (130 males and 134 females), in Canada were surveyed by Li using a questionnaire. Of those surveyed, more than half self-identified as having above average grades and 40% self-reported average grades. The ethnicity of the students was 75.4% White, 6.4% Asian, 18% Black, Hispanic, Aboriginal or other. From the 264 students, 50% of the students had known someone who experienced bullying and cyberbullying at school. Students had actually experienced cyberbullying 25% of the time (p. 9). This research demonstrated that cyberbullying does come into school. Students may not report cyberbullying to adults because they do not believe that grown ups can do anything about it.

Andershed, Kerr, and Stattin (2001) studied 2,915 14-year-olds in a medium-sized county in Sweden who responded to a survey to identify if bullying in school and

violence on the streets involved the same people. They showed that bullying in school and violent behavior on the streets involved the same people. “Fully one-quarter of the boys who were classified as bullies were also frequently violent on the streets” (Andershed et al., 2001, p. 43). Andershed et al. looked at those violent on the streets and found that “63% of them were classified as being bullies in school” (p. 43). The researchers concluded that bullying is not an isolated situation, rather it is a reflection of an environment (Andershed et al., 2001).

Carlyle and Steinman (2007) examined sixth-12<sup>th</sup> graders in 16 school districts across a metropolitan area in the United States with 79,492 students being surveyed. Overall, 28.2% of students reported involvement in bullying behaviors. Carlyle and Steinman reported that 20.1% were bullied in the last year with sixth to eighth grades being the predominant grade levels of victimization and seventh and eighth grade years being dominant years of perpetration. Males were more likely to bully and be bullied than females. Native Americans were likely to be bullied but were also perpetrators of bullying along with African American youth (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007). This study took place over one large metropolitan area, but provided support that there are trends with perpetrators and victims and ages where these behaviors are likely to develop and occur and this research supports the need for further prevention.

Hinduja and Patchin (2008a) have been lead investigators in cyberbullying; together they analyzed the factors related to offending and victimization. Hinduja and Patchin related that the negative behaviors from bullying such as eating disorders, suicidal tendencies, truancy, and illness illustrate the need for understanding the

seriousness of this new form of victimization. They conducted an online survey to determine the cyberbullying phenomenon. Hinduja and Patchin (2008a) collected data from over 6,800 participants for a month. The survey was administered online, with the results indicating that male and female offending and victimization were closely related; male victims accounted for 32.7% of the respondents; female victims 36.4% and male offenders 18% and female offenders 15.6% (p. 141). Even with this, “girls were more likely than boys to report being victimized via email 13%, 9.7% respectively” (p. 142). This research was conducted as a convenience sample, those who visited a particular Website, but offered evidence that is congruent with previous research studies.

Maher (2008) addressed cyberbullying in an ethnographic case study of 22 students and their teacher at a primary school in Australia. Maher maintained that there are positives and negatives for Internet use and one of the negatives was cyberbullying. Maher utilized Vygotsky’s (1978) theoretical framework to explain that the social process uses pens and semiotic tools (p. 52). “In mediating interactions, the internet allows young people to interact with each other in new ways not possible in a face-to-face setting” (p. 52). The objective of this research was to “look at young people’s online interactions with a focus on instances of cyberbullying” (p. 51). Maher conducted the study over 12 months with children 11-12 years old. Nine different projects were created over the 12 months including one project where students could log in a chat room in and out of school without passwords. Students were not penalized for not participating; parents were given information so that they could investigate on their own, but none did.

All interactions were recorded, and students were aware that all information was saved. Students who were friends at school were also the friends they associated with online. Maher (2008) concluded that boys were more likely to be aggressive and use intimidation to prove a point, utilizing flooding so that no one else could respond. The bullying observed by Maher was mostly from the boys; however, it did occur with the girls as well. Girls wrote statements about others and signed another person's name instead of using their own. This tended to upset the girl about whom the information was written by their friend; the intention of harm was reached by the writer. The results indicated that even though cyberbullying occurs, it is not as devastating to children as some may think. It was also suggested that the lines between school and home are increasingly difficult to determine because email, chats, and other online social interactions occur all the time (Maher, 2008).

Topcu et al. (2008) surveyed 183 students in Turkey aged 14-15 years old. The research was conducted evaluating public and private schools. Their research indicated that 35% of public school students cyberbullied to kick someone out of a chat room (p. 646). Public school children were more aggressive than private school children when it came to cyberbullying. When the results of victimization were displayed from the private school students, it appeared that the emotional reactions of feeling nothing, not caring, being angry, sad, and embarrassed were less than those of public school peers (Topcu et al., 2008). However, private school students were more fearful and felt more isolated than their public school counterparts. The results of this research did not indicate that gender was a basis for more or less cyberbullying or harassment.

From the bully perspective, text messaging occurs more in school than at home, but victims felt that it happened more at home than at school. Slonje and Smith (2008) revealed the results of text messaging, email, phone calls, and pictures/videos with information on the bully and victim and if the incident occurred in school or out of school. Email, phone calls, and pictures or videos were seen by victims and bullies as more prevalent outside of school than in school, but evidence of it happening in school was present. In the months preceding the study, only 10% of those surveyed were bullied (p. 150). Cyberbullying incidents in the school occurred 5.3% of the time. The investigators did not identify that gender caused a differing result between bullying and cyberbullying.

The last major research of the social aspect of cyberbullying is from Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) who examined the perceptions of students ages 10-18 from a qualitative standpoint. In order to understand cyberbullying, these investigators organized 53 focus groups to identify the true cyberbullying behaviors of intentional harm, perceived harm, and repetition of negative online and offline behaviors. Vandebosch and Van Cleemput organized focus groups in order to ask questions related to repetition, power imbalance, and intended harm. Those who participated indicated that many times the sender is anonymous, but with the content of the message, the victim had a clue as to the identity of the harasser. From their research, “cyberbullying also differs from forms of harassment by strangers aimed at one well-chosen target (e.g., pedophile acts) or at a group of people (e.g., sending viruses or spam)” (p. 502). With cyberbullying, some attacks are viewed more seriously than others. With the Internet, students mentioned

negative aspects of the Internet such as “computer viruses, hacking, pedophilic attempts, cyberbullying, threats, spam, stalking, e-advertising, sexual intimidation, pornographic Web sites, webcam turned on, technical failure, health related problems, and content of web sites” (p. 500).

### **Social Networking and Its Potential Negative Effects on Identity**

Students have been found to leave themselves open to cyberbullying by people they would normally not trust. In one study, the profiles of 9,000 students representing all demographics on MySpace were analyzed by Hinduja and Patchin (2008b). They found 8.8% of the students revealed their name and 4% showed their instant messaging screen name (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b). Forty percent of the profiles were private, indicating that the student had to allow permission for his or her profile to be viewed; thus leaving 60% of the profiles available for anyone to see. This validated how students can become targets of cyberbullies because an open profile means one can send messages and receive messages from anyone, whereas a private profile allows only those individuals that the “owner” allows to see and communicate. The open profiles can be viewed and anyone can leave good or bad comments. MySpace and other social networking sites have had a role in relationships and social life.

Electronic communication is an adaptation of face-to-face communication and expands on the relationships and social life that adolescents have and can present unique challenges (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008, pp. 126-127). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) argued that electronic social networking helps to establish identity and allows for anonymity, exploration, and experimentation. While electronic social

networking can help with identity, it can also present challenges to a student's relationships and self-esteem (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Student relationships and self-esteem can be defined by students' friends, their number of friends, and who is on their top friends' lists (Coloroso, 2003; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). When friends publicly announce their list of top friends for people to see, this can affect the relationships with those friends who are not on the top of the list. In this light, the significance that adolescents place on peer approval can be detrimental (Coloroso, 2003; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Coloroso explained that "it's better to be in the in-group than to defend the outcasts" (p. 69). The leader of a group determines the outcast and everyone else in the group just follows (Coloroso, 2003).

The way in which adolescents communicate has changed. There is a reduction in the amount of face-to-face time students have with each other (Coloroso, 2003). While it is best for students to develop and maintain friendships in the online and real worlds, these online relationships lack boundaries and protection whereas real world interaction for most adolescents happens at school where there are staff to protect and monitor behavior (Coloroso, 2003). In addition, the ability to change identities and be someone else also can create problems (Erikson, 1959; Turkle, 1995), stealing the identity of a classmate.

The acts of identity theft or fake personas have caused feelings of humiliation, helplessness, and depression (Beran & Li, 2005). As an example, the term "mean girls" has become increasingly popular with the dramatization of movies such as *Clueless* and

*Mean Girls*. One of the most famous cyberbullying incidents involved Megan Meier and Lori Drew on MySpace. Megan committed suicide after flirting with “Josh” for a period of time, then Josh sent messages that indicated “the world would be better off without you” (Hewitt, Truesdell, Morrissey, & Breuer, 2008, pp. 67-68). Megan killed herself. Upon investigation, Lori Drew, a neighborhood mother, had been Josh (Hewitt, Truesdell, Morrissey, & Breuer, 2008).

### **Relational Aggression**

A video was spread worldwide after Victoria Lindsay was brought to a friend’s house in Florida and beaten unconscious by several girls while boys protected the house. Victoria was in the hospital for her injuries. After her attack was posted on MySpace and YouTube, the attackers were apprehended. The attackers were instantly famous for their actions because of media attention (Huguenin, 2008). In Australia, parents were encouraged to seize their children’s cell phones and watch their computer activities after two girls were forced to leave the school after becoming victims of cyberbullying (Patty, 2009). Patty described that MySpace had been the site in which 31 girls from one school were targeted in cyberbullying acts, including revealing sexual information and use of drugs and alcohol as well as accusations of social climbing (p. 1). These mean girl behaviors have extended from the school yard to the computer.

Relational aggression among girls is a serious problem that includes regular verbal assaults (Underwood, 2003). Of the girls who reported cyberbullying, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that those who harassed others were three times more likely to report being harassed themselves than girls not harassing. Ybarra and Mitchell reported

that the Youth Internet Safety Survey found evidence of online aggression based on telephone surveys with 1,501 youth 10-17 years old who were interviewed with a parent or guardian. Of the 1,501 youth, 19% reported being involved in perpetuating online aggression. Youth who were most aggressive tended to be computer savvy and those who reported they had difficulty with psychosocial challenges were typically depressed and had been targets of bullying. This study will be relevant to the study on cyberbullying because it describes the correlation of cyberbullies to school bullying. This study also demonstrated that students who report experiencing cyberbullying may also be cyberbullying.

Beran and Li (2005) reported that research in Canadian schools of students Grades 7-9 indicated that 69% of the 432 surveyed were aware of incidents of cyberbullying either happening to them or to someone they know, and of those students, 21% had been harassed numerous times. Participants in the study identified that cyber harassment was most prevalent: 53% by email and instant messaging and 25% of harassment via cell phone (Beran & Li, 2005). For this study, 193 middle class boys and 239 middle class girls were selected from ethnically diverse communities in Calgary. A 15-item survey was distributed and returned without names on the questionnaire. The open-ended questions asked about the incidents and devices used to cyberbully, whereas the closed questions inquired about the frequency of engaging in, hearing, or experiencing harassment, behavior, or emotions (p. 269). Indications from the research suggested that administrators will have difficulty controlling what students do on their

home computers and their personal cell phones; however, a student reported that someone had sent insults to the principal while death threats were received by others.

Cyberbullying can occur wherever students have access to a computer or phone (Feinberg & Robey, 2008); any electronic bullying during school can be grounds for discipline. Rapacki (2007) stated that teens use social networking sites to assist in their own development and identity formation. Currently there are over 100 million users on MySpace alone, not counting the other social networking sites (p. 28). These social networking sites have had tremendous impact on the socialization of students in school (Beale & Hall, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Giving a friend a password; exaggerating sexual, drug, or personal behaviors; and hacking can be damaging to anyone's reputation (Beale & Hall, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Rapacki, 2007).

Juvonen and Gross (2008) conducted a Web-based survey with 12-17-year-old youth to identify the incidents of bullying in school. Since the survey was conducted online, these youth were not from any particular region. The results of the survey offered implications for school policies, parent education, and strategies to prevent cyberbullying. Based on this study, those who had experienced cyberbullying were also likely to experience bullying in school. The Internet has merged a gap of loneliness with a sense of belonging, where children can communicate with others online at any time (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Rapacki, 2007). With the changes in society like the way students interact with each other (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), many students have sought attachment to their peers, which is distinctly a change from an attachment to their family as seen in past decades (Laursen, 2008). Increased attachment to peers and lessened

attachment to parents has caused relationship and communication problems (Laursen, 2008).

Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) reported that parents can keep track of children's online behaviors by monitoring or limiting their Internet access.

Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) determined that a strategy to stop cyberbullying is for parents to know what their children are doing. Parents may not understand how to establish limits and protect their teens from online behaviors and this lack of knowledge can create parent-child conflict (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), which creates a problem of reporting cyberbullying because many children think that their parents will take their Internet usage from them.

### **The School and Principal's Role in Protecting Students**

The increase in violence in schools indicates prevalence of bullying according to the National Center for Education Statistics and has become a social problem that has cultural, individual, and community implications (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007; Neiman, DeVoe, & Chandler, 2009). Neiman et al. gathered data from all public schools that participated in a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. Students from 25% of the schools reported bullying happened daily or at least once a week in 25.3% of public schools, with middle schools having the highest percentage of 43.5%. Among the rates of discipline problems within schools, bullying was the highest, reported by students in 25.3% in public schools, disrespect other than verbal abuse to teachers was reported at 10.5% with verbal abuse to teachers at 6%, disorder in the classroom at 4%, racial and ethnic tension at 3.7%, and sexual harassment among

students at 3%. Gang activities were reported happening in 19.8% of public schools; however, this was not ranked on a daily or weekly basis.

Neiman et al. shared that 92.5% of 3,484 public schools offered counseling, social work, or psychological, or therapeutic activity for students, 90.4% offered behavioral or behavior modification intervention for students, 90.3% of schools offered individual attention, mentoring, tutoring, or coaching of students by students or adults, 87.8% provided prevention curriculum, instruction, or training for students, 83.5% of schools offered leisure activities for students, 79.7% of schools utilized a sense of community or social integration among students, and only 25.7% of all public schools offered a hotline or tipline to report problems (p. 14). Sergiovanni (2000) believed that character building as well as leadership would enhance the culture of a school.

School administrators are left deciding how to handle cyberbullying with very few options available when working with negative student online behaviors. For example, when students bully, zero-tolerance policies are in effect in many schools that address appropriate behaviors and consequences such as suspension, expulsion, and legal ramifications. There is also the possibility that the culture of the school may shun a student who harassed other students. The culture could positively influence peer behaviors. Senge (1990) described leaders as those who strive to understand vision and complexity in order to move people to become productive members of society, so the principal has to be cognizant of the culture and use the tools of leadership to support and mentor the school staff and students to make a difference and encourage positive behaviors and attitudes (Crippen, 2004). Factors described as preventing school efforts to

limit crime included “lack of or inadequate alternative placements, inadequate funds, and federal, state, or district policies on disciplining special education students” (Neiman et al., 2009, p. 4). From the suggestions of the study of Neiman et al., there is a need to investigate the factors and themes of disruption in order to generate strategies to improve safety and awareness.

### **Court Decisions and First Amendment Rights**

Ashmore and Herman (2006) reviewed court cases in an attempt to explain the confusion surrounding the right to free speech when postings from the Internet are causing disruptions in schools (p. 2). The following are major court cases that centered on online behaviors and involved schools. Findings in the case of *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* held that a student’s online depictions of a decapitated teacher and solicitation of donations to have the teacher killed was a material disruption and warranted expulsion (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007). In *Dwyer v. Oceanport School District* the student, Dwyer, was removed from the school baseball team and was kept from going on a field trip because he maintained a website that criticized his teachers, expressed hate for his school, and encouraged others to post similar opinions on the website. The school district paid the student \$117,500 in a ruling that the district had acted illegally in disciplining the student for his website (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007), which is significant to this study because school districts have to evaluate free speech in relation to disruption in schools. Students are allowed their first amendment rights by law, but when free speech disrupts the school day, then the act may be punishable by the school district (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007). In another case, *Layshock v. Hermitage School District*, the U.S. District

Court ruled that a student's school suspension was unconstitutional. A jury trial will determine whether the student is entitled to compensation. The student posted a nonvulgar parody of the principal online, and it was ruled to be a material disruption.

New Jersey Public School Superintendent Thomas Flemming sent a letter out to members of the community stating that the district would take disciplinary action when "cyberbullying and other forms of victimization disrupt the safe learning environment of our schools" (Dyrli, 2005, p. 63). There have been numerous court cases surrounding MySpace and Facebook postings involving threats, comments, parodies, and status changes that impacted schools (*A.B. v. State of Indiana*, 2007; *Bethel School District 403 v. Fraser*, 1986; *Emmett v. Kent School District 413*, 2000; *Morse v. Frederick*, 2007; *Tinker v. Des Moines*, 1969).

In reaction to this new area of conflict, parents have sued school districts for failing to protect their children (Shariff, 2004). Shariff (2004) noted that typically when parents brought cyberbullying information to the schools, administrator and teacher responses were less than helpful including:

1. Assuming that the victims invited the abuse
2. The problem was blown out of proportion by parents and accused them of harassing the school
3. Assume that written anti-bullying policies absolved the school from doing more to protect victims (p. 225).

School administrators cannot supervise students outside school hours. When students are not in the building, it is impossible for the administration to police Internet

activities. Educators have typically been held to higher legal standards regarding Internet access in an effort to protect student safety, but it is increasingly difficult to keep students safe (Proudfoot & Hutchings, 1988). Since cyberbullying can negatively influence the lives of students, leaders must provide resources and training to maintain safe environments (Senge, 1990). This can be a problem with cyberbullying because most of the action occurs outside the school but can disrupt the school day.

### **Responding to Cyberbullying in School**

Cyberbullying has entered schools for a variety of reasons. Children are becoming increasingly independent and are often not receiving nurtured decision making at home (Laursen, 2008; Rapacki, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Nurtured decision making includes structured rules, guided discipline, and disagreements resolved by conversations (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007; McGuinness, 2007). Schools need to become aware of the societal and socioeconomic changes in order to meet the needs of students. Collins (2001) suggested creating a culture of discipline that includes disciplined employees, disciplined actions, and disciplined thought to guide and support people. When disciplined decision making occurs, the effects are consistent and coherent with the mission and vision of schools, which is what a principal's goal should be. When expectations of behavior are understood and those in the organization are aware of the consequences, empowerment of positive behavior is known and expected. This builds an environment of support, learning, and safety, especially if staff and students believe the control of the behavior is possible (Bandura, 1977). When there is a breakdown in the culture of the school, problems arise.

Cheurprakhobkit and Bartsch (2005) reexamined their data ( $N = 207$ ) from the responses of middle and high school principals in Texas regarding the security methods used to curb crime. The original survey responses had identified 18 activities that were deemed to reduce crime. They included: closed campus, checks/sweeps for drugs, drug education programs, rewards for attendance, group instruction to students, intrasport activities and non-school hours, police and guards, formal staff training on class management, formal staff training on gangs, sponsored community service, individual mentoring, character education programs, student court activity, surveillance equipment, criminal justice courses, metal detectors, family management strategy, and school uniforms (p. 242). Interventions such as these require active leadership and can contribute positively or negatively to the culture.

### **Prevention**

Cheurprakhobkit and Bartsch (2005) collected survey responses from 207 middle and high school principals in Texas. From their research, Cheurprakhobkit and Bartsch opined that the problems within schools were not solved by stricter dress codes, increased surveillance, or additional metal detectors. A representation of teachers and staff being visible in the hallways was perceived to be the fourth most effective way of improving security. Relationships between peers and adults can create an environment of respect in a school and represents a challenging curriculum and high expectations (Cheurprakhobkit & Bartsch, 2005). Consistent punishment, stricter punishment, and adhering to policies was the second most common comment by principals and the most significant response

was the support necessary by parents, community, students, police, and staff to help and provide resources to the school on a daily basis (Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2005).

### **Positive School Culture**

Mitchell, Longhurst, and Jacob (2008) suggested that in order to eliminate violence in schools, new ways of thought have to occur. Five steps were suggested that might cause a positive change in the school climate. Mutual respect, connection to an adult, problem-solving focus, code of openness, and peer helping can create the safe school that every child needs (p. 22). Parent and community involvement can make a difference in creating a focus on support for students in schools (Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2005; Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998).

Student achievement and student attitudes were viewed as significant in determining the school culture. When achievement and attitudes were high, school culture was deemed positive (Pritchard, Morrow, & Marshall, 2005). In the shooting at Virginia Tech, Seung-Hui Cho, the man responsible for the massacre, was teased during high school and treated differently, and though he suffered from Autistic Spectrum Disorder, his frequent struggles with others making fun of him was a contributor to his outburst of shooting (Mitchell, Longhurst, & Jacob, 2008, p. 15). Based on the videos found after the murders, Cho referenced Columbine and he also was noted as being “increasingly emotionally insensitive to others and psychologically charged by the thought of hurting others” (p. 15), which demonstrated that even years after high school, the vicious attacks of words seemed to have an impact. It is important to note that bullying does not always lead to violence, but “social ridicule, psychological

intimidation, and group rejection can be very devastating” (Mitchell et al., p. 16).

Columbine and Virginia Tech have created awareness that bullying is a problem in schools and should be investigated (Jenson, 2007). This study will seek to identify the impact of social networking sites on the culture of school and what role social networking sites play in acts of bullying in the school.

Cohen, Kincaid, and Childs (2007) assessed school-wide positive behavior support implementation using a qualitative study in Florida and Maryland. This evaluation was based on an instrument filled out by school administrators in order to determine the support implementation in their buildings. The research was conducted at 91 schools in Florida: including 30 middle schools, and at 14 schools in Maryland including 5 middle schools. Cohen, Kincaid, and Childs suggested that school-wide positive behavior support addressed poor behaviors and had a significant impact on the culture, discipline, and success of a school and reduced the number of referrals of discipline to the office. Some of the essential requirements of the program included: Positive behavior support (PBS), team, faculty commitment, effective procedures for dealing with discipline, data entry and analysis, expectations and rules, rewards and recognition programs, lesson plans for teaching expectations and rules, implementation plan, and evaluation (pp. 207-208). It was mentioned that some schools that are not involved in PBS still have lesson plan requirements and reward programs, but this does not mean the school is utilizing the positive behavior support system.

The United States Supreme Court’s 1999 decision of *Davis v. Monroe Board of Education* found that district administrators were found to be guilty of “deliberate

indifference” because they ignored student-to-student harassment when the administrators were aware of the harassment that Davis (student) experienced. A school district may be held responsible for cyberbullying or bullying if administrators, teachers, or staff ignore the reports of harassment. Follow up should occur with all reports of harassment or problems among students in the school, because bullying and harassment can lead to disruption in the school (*Davis v. Monroe Board of Education*). Harassment and bullying can cause major disruptions in school. This study will be exploratory and examine bullying from the principals’ point of view.

### **Ramifications of Cyberbullying at School**

The social implications of school bullying and cyberbullying have common links and victimization is not going to go away without intervention from school, society, and family (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Cyberbullying has no limits; it is a global problem that impacts the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of children. Children experience victimization during childhood by bullies at school (Luster, Small, & Lower, 2002; Meyer, 2009). Cyberbullying is a new version of an old issue. While the Internet has many positive attributes, it is a fairly unmonitored space (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

Anderson and Sturm (2007) capitalized on the detrimental effects that bullying has caused children: “scrutiny of psychologically damaging bullying among girls suggests that such aggression is just as damaging as physical aggression” (p. 26). Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) concurred that there are psychosocial characteristics of

bullies and their victims, and victims are at risk for mental health issues, the most common being depression (p. 175). Hunter and Borg (2006) conducted a quantitative study of 6,282 Maltese school children ages 9-14. The research revealed that girls were more likely to report bullying and seek social support (p. 814). Coping strategies were based on the experience of the child. This study was based on traditional bullying, not cyberbullying. Older students were 1.6 times more likely to do nothing about being harassed (p. 821). Students who were vengeful would get their friends to help them and report others' behaviors to adults to get the aggressors in trouble (p. 822).

Only when students feel that the bullying is very serious will they report it (Hunter & Borg, 2006). Hunter and Borg's study demonstrated how teachers and guardians need to be cognizant that occasional bullying occurs for many students, but only when it hits a serious point will they report it. Those who report bullying sometimes are identified as tattletales and may be bullied more than others because of their reporting (Hunter & Borg, 2006). Also from this study, emotions are good predictors of what is happening in students' lives, and students all cope with bullying differently (p. 824). The research on the traditional bullying offered information on student responses when bullying happened in school. Victimization can lead to retaliation and create school violence (Akiba & Han, 2007; Hunter & Borg, 2006).

Raskauskas and Stoltz (2004) gathered participants aged 13-18 from two different locations; west coast and a rural community with average household incomes of \$45,000 (west coast) and \$57,000 (rural). Adolescents ( $N = 92$ ) were surveyed to identify the emotions and coping associated with victimization. Raskauskas and Stoltz discovered

that chronic victimization leads to (a) academic failure in adolescence, (b) depression, (c) suicide risk, and (d) difficulty adjusting (p. 209). Victimization corresponds to loneliness and low self-esteem (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Forero, McLellan, Rissel, & Bauman, 1999; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001). Victimization leads to lower academic achievement and sometimes leaves the school clueless as to why the student is underperforming, especially when the harassment, cyberbullying, or bullying is occurring and no one has been notified.

Victimization patterns and behaviors should be analyzed to gather a deeper understanding of cyberbullying. Victimization impacts the total child and can create symptomatic behaviors of truancy and illness. According to Neiman, DeVoe, and Chandler (2009) middle school violence was on the rise for the 2007-2008 school year with “41 violent incidents per 1,000 students” (p. 3) while high school violence was reported at 22 incidents and primary 26 incidents per 1,000 students. Hinduja and Patchin’s (2007) research of 1,388 adolescents who self-reported online examined the different experiences of victimization that created problems for the participants: (a) ignored by others (43.2%), (b) disrespected by others (39.8%), (c) been called names (18.2%), (d) rumors spread by others (13.8%), (e) threatened (12.6%), (f) made fun of by others (9.9%), (g) picked on by others (8.1%), and (h) scared for safety (4.8%; p. 98). Delinquent behaviors of those surveyed self-reported that these behaviors occurred offline; approximately a third of the participants drank alcohol, more than a quarter cheated on a school test or skipped school, 18.4% assaulted a peer, 13% damaged property, 9.5% shoplifted, 7.9% smoked marijuana, 7.7% assaulted an adult, 6.1% ran

away from home, 5.2% carried a weapon, and 4.5% were sent home from school (p. 100). From those who were cyberbullied, 35% reported that they were not bothered by the harassment, but anger, frustration, and sadness consumed 65% of the participants (p. 101). These experiences and behavioral results of youth-on-youth victimization are alarming. Administrators need to be vigilant in monitoring students who harass other students or peers because coming to school should not be a fearful experience. From their research, deviant and delinquent behaviors are likely by those who have suffered a period of victimization.

### **Methodological Framework**

Overall, the research assessed was indicative that cyberbullying occurs globally; research has been conducted in the United States, Turkey, Canada, and Australia. The research examined students between the ages of 11 and 19 and surveys were the dominant choice for the research gathering, though Maher (2008) intensively studied the interaction of 22 students for over 12 months. Overall, each of these research studies provided information and knowledge meaningful for schools, parents, and community members.

While the previous research indicated that girls cyberbully more often, research has also shown that males were more involved in cyberbullying and bullying than females (Arıcak et al., 2008; Li, 2006). Arıcak et al. stated the same was true for victims (more boys than girls). While Arıcak et al. reported that victimization was more likely for boys than girls, Li (2006) did not note a significant gender difference when it came to the number of times a student was victimized. However, females were more likely to report

cyberbullying to adults than their male counterparts. Maher's (2008) results concluded that the boys who were bullied online were able to cope (p. 53). Maher also mentioned that bullying was consistent with males being more dominant than females. The girls bullied online, but they tended to use indirect strategies (p. 55). Maher concluded that boys tended to bully boys and girls tended to bully girls; there was no cross-gender bullying in this study. The differences in gender from research can show that cyberbullying is a problem globally and affects all people regardless of gender. Few, if any studies discuss the cyberbullying disruptions in school by gender.

The research of Hinduja and Patchin (2008a) indicated that cyberbullying occurred regardless of gender and the victimization tended to happen to the same kids that are bullied at school. In a similar study, Slonje and Smith (2008) conducted research on four categories of cyberbullying: (a) text message, (b) email, (c) phone call, and (d) picture/video clip with 360 adolescents aged 12-20 being surveyed in Sweden from eight schools. As students get older, investigators hypothesized that the likelihood of cyberbullying and phone harassment would increase because the access to the devices was increased. Another preconceived notion was that since boys are typically more physical, that the cyberbullying would be more prevalent with girls. The results of the study concluded that if a victim reported the cyber attack, it was to a friend or no one. Gender differences were few. A better understanding of media devices used by students would be helpful to administrators.

The research of Beran and Li (2005) was similar to the research of Slonje and Smith (2008) as both studies sought to identify the forms of cyberbullying and

cyberharassment from two different locations, Canada and Sweden, while the research of Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) looked at the true meaning of coping and perceptions of bullying/cyberbullying. The research of Beran and Li (2005) used the results to attempt to explain why adolescents continue to harass others. Slonje and Smith (2008) noted that availability and ease to remain anonymous impacted frequency of bullying online. Each of these research pieces is essential for an understanding of bullying and cyberbullying, age of the participants, frequency of the attacks, and the emotions the students experienced. These investigators substantiated the necessity of exploring administrator perceptions of cyberbullying. These articles all related to the student views of cyberbullying or bullying and how administrators responded. There is a need and gap in the literature to see how administrators respond to cyberbullying and what disruptions happen in the school because of these online behaviors and activities.

Gillespie (2006) noted that there are legal solutions when cyberbullying does not disappear. Communication offenses, harassment, and offenses against the person may be relevant in determining the illegality of one's actions. In the communication offenses, Gillespie reiterated that students cannot send "obscene, indecent or menacing communication or one that is grossly offensive" (p. 126) and that there "must be an intention to send the message" (p. 126). The construct of harassment came from the problem of stalking and harassment, which means more than one event (p. 129). Gillespie noted that those who have experienced ongoing harassment may petition for a restraining order. He also suggested that educating adolescents can do two things by "helping victims to understand the dangers and how to take simple steps to minimize any threat

and educating those who believe cyberbullying is harmless” (p. 135). Cyberbullying can cause real damage to people and sometimes education is not enough to stop the problem; that is when the law comes into play (p. 135). Recently, the case of Lori Drew was dismissed by Federal Court because individuals who use social networking websites often take on a different identity (Cyberbullying.us, 2009). This ruling will indeed cause new legislation to be passed to protect children such as Megan who were tormented by Lori. Now it is time to investigate the questions with qualitative design.

The review of the literature for this study revealed many gaps and deficiencies in prior studies that require additional qualitative exploration. Exploratory qualitative case study was selected because the experience of each participant is significant and can reveal the day-to-day disruptions in school. Qualitative research was chosen over quantitative research because qualitative research will allow for in-depth interviews and focus groups that will be inductive in nature whereas quantitative research is deductive and numerical in nature (Trochim, 2001). Quantitative research typically has a large number of participants and the questions are closed, whereas qualitative research typically has a small number of participants and the questions are open-ended. Qualitative research allows for subjective interpretation (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The study examined a Midwestern public school district with 5 middle schools and 5 intermediate schools. This district is an appropriate choice for the study of cyberbullying because there have been multiple cases of cyberbullying incidents that have been brought into the school buildings. Informal discussions of these events have

taken place among principals and with the increase in students' availability to technology, cyberbullying has been on the rise. This proposed case study was bounded by the choice to interview principals in one school district in the Midwestern United States. "Due to its demographics, which include a mix of races and a wide range of incomes, as well as urban, suburban, and nearby rural areas, this Midwestern city is considered to be a 'typical' American city, and has been used as a test market for new products by retail and restaurant chains" (Wolf, 2006). Some studies have suggested that the city may not be representative of the United States in future research (Business First of Columbus, 2004). This case study may increase validity of the findings for other school districts as the area has been used as a test market in the past. This suburban school district services approximately 21,000 students and may serve as a typical case for other school districts.

The principals interviewed for this study meet regularly once a month and have developed a common approach to the bullying or cyberbullying problem. This case study sought multiple perspectives on the problem of cyberbullying's effects on the school that were shared and have similar manifestations.

The objectives of this proposed study were analyzed to better understand the disruption that cyberbullying causes during school hours. The case study approach may identify outcomes or problems but should also identify the vantage points of multiple principals. A good case study will preserve multiple realities and seeks to identify patterns and unanticipated outcomes or relationships (Stake, 1995). Carlyle and Steinman (2007) reported sixth to eighth grade as the most predominant grade levels of victimization and seventh and eighth grade years being dominant years of perpetration.

In order to identify patterns, multiple sources of data were used for interpretation (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) discussed the six most common sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (p. 101). This case study used three of Yin's six common sources of evidence because these sources are more accessible and will hopefully raise awareness so schools can create safer environments for students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Mason, 2008; Yin, 2009).

### **Summary and Transition**

In this chapter, I examined aggression as it relates to bullying and cyberbullying, school culture as a means of addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and administrative responsibilities in setting consequences for bullying and cyberbullying. In this chapter, I revealed current literature which reviewed the characteristics of victims and bullies as well as the disruption that bullying and cyberbullying can cause. The literature explained the dangers and disruption that cyberbullying can cause. In the next chapter, chapter 3, I elaborated on the design of the study. In chapter 4, I discuss the results of the study and in chapter 5, I present a summary of the findings and an interpretation of the findings in relationship to the literature.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This project was an exploratory qualitative case study seeking to understand the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to the culture of the onsite school disruption as well as effective and ineffective interventions used to limit cyberbullying as described by middle grade principals. The rationale a qualitative case study as the methodology and the research questions, role of investigator, target audience, data collection, protection of the participants, and how data were analyzed is explained. In order to investigate the themes of disruption, strategies to improve safety and awareness, and to address concerns in connection with social networking sites and the disruptions they cause in school, a case study was an appropriate fit because it allows principals in one district to share their perceptions of the experiences (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The guiding research questions were:

1. In the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school?
2. How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school?
3. What interventions and steps have been taken in the schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been?

Creswell (1998) described the rationale for conducting a qualitative study. First, the nature of the question should begin with how or what; second, the topic needs to be explored; third, there is a need for detail, and fourth, individuals should be studied in their

natural environment (Creswell, 1998, pp. 17-18). This case study was based on what impact and what factors contribute to disruption and how it affects the culture of a school.

### **Research Design of the Study**

The exploratory qualitative case study design was chosen as a process to understand and represent a social or human problem through inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lichtman, 2010). Johnson and Christenson (2004) identified that qualitative research allows the investigator to (a) get close to the phenomenon, (b) value and use his or her own experiences, and (c) seek understanding of the phenomenon (p. 362). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) clarified that qualitative research is conducted to understand complex ideologies whereas quantitative research is utilized to “establish, confirm, or validate relationships” (p. 95). Trochim (2001) summarized that qualitative investigators focus on ontological assumptions, which take into consideration that each person is unique and has had different experiences. Qualitative research is an appropriate choice because it is conducted in order to understand meaning and the world (Hatch, 2002). I examined a Midwestern suburban public school district with 5 middle schools and 5 intermediate schools. This district was an appropriate choice for the study of cyberbullying because there have been multiple cases of cyberbullying incidents that have been brought into the school buildings. Informal discussions of these events have occurred among principals and with the increase in students’ availability to technology, cyberbullying has been on the rise. I investigated administrator perceptions of cyberbullying that took place through social networking sites in middle schools within a suburban school district in the Midwestern United States. One school district was chosen

as the study site because in that district there are common principles and policies in which situations such as cyberbullying are handled. The cyberbullying phenomenon is growing and by focusing on one district assisted the researcher in understanding the phenomenon as it occurs with similar leadership and policies in place. The qualitative research paradigm used three methods to collect data including the use of interviews, a focus group, and copies of school policies and local news articles on cyberbullying. The case study encompassed excerpts that are reasonable in length, narrative, and comprehensible (Hatch, 2002).

Qualitative research allows data to be collected in a narrative manner that seeks to understand the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lichtman, 2010). Qualitative methodology has five main strategies according to Creswell (1998): (a) biography, (b) phenomenology, (c) grounded theory, (d) ethnography, and (e) case study. Each of these strategies has strengths and weaknesses. A biography was considered for this qualitative study, but rejected, because it “focuses on the life story of an individual” (p. 49). Phenomenology was considered, but not chosen because according to Johnson and Christensen (2004) it focuses on the culture of a group with shared beliefs and values. This research method might have worked if the research was assessing middle school students’ experiences. It would not so easily allow for investigation of the busy administrators’ specific experiences. Grounded theory was considered but rejected because it is based on the study of an event being experienced by the individual and a theory needs to be developed, which was not the focus of this study (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lichtman, 2010). Ethnography was considered but rejected

because this requires the investigator to study a specific culture or ethnicity in a specific region and observe the patterns and behaviors (Creswell, 1998; Lichtman, 2010).

Ethnography would be less effective in gleaning the perspective of principals' experiences of cyberbullying disruption in their schools. The case study was chosen because the research was focused on several administrators' experiences with cyberbullying. I utilized multiple sources of evidence in order to understand the perspective of middle grade principals in a large Midwestern city.

### **Role of the Investigator**

My role as investigator in this study was to select and interview participants, interpret participants' responses, and analyze cyberbullying experiences and strategies to prevent them. In addition to interviews, a focus group and the collection of school policies and local news articles were used in the process. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) stated that the investigator must be able "to interpret and make sense of what he or she sees is critical for understanding any social phenomenon" (p. 133). The investigator-participant working relationship began with contact by email or mail, which explained the intent and purpose of the study, the participant's role in the study, and the benefits of this study for the participant and society. Since I am employed by the school district in which the study was conducted, a staff brochure with principal names and contact information identified prospective participants. A consent form was signed before any interview was conducted. In order to establish an investigator-participant working relationship, I explained by letter why the research was being conducted, why the

potential participant was selected, and how the information would be used (Lichtman, 2010).

### **Population and Sample**

I selected a Midwestern suburban school district that has 5 middle schools and 5 intermediate schools with 19 principals in total, but removing myself left 18 principals to participate in the study. The largest group of principals worked with grades 7-8, including Sasha, Cameron, Casey, Ashley, Riley, Rory, Ashton, and Hayden. The school district was contacted by letter seeking permission and consent to recruit administrators as participants in this study (Appendix A). Once the district granted approval and Walden's IRB approval ( #06-23-10-0307395) was granted, the 18 intermediate and middle school principals in the district were contacted by email or mail with a recruitment letter asking for participation (Appendix B, C). Eighteen principals were contacted and 10 chose to participate. The focus group selection included 4 randomly selected principals who were interviewed and 1 randomly selected principal who did not participate in the interview with the total of 5 principals participating in the focus group; this was from the total of 18 principals (Appendix D, E).

A convenience sample was assembled from the first 10 administrators who volunteered for the study from among 18 principals in 5 middle and 5 intermediate schools. The goal and justification for the sample size of 12-15 is suggested because the study is grounded in thorough questions and answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A smaller sample size would not allow for as much input in order to test reliability of the research questions. The total population of middle grade principals is 18 and a sample of 12-15

represents more than 50% of the total population. It was unlikely 100% of the principals would volunteer, particularly as data were collected in the summer, after the close of the academic year. This sample size of 10 represented the principals. The validity of the study will be stronger with the number of replications or experiences (Yin, 2009). With fewer than 12 principals responding, I sent additional emails and letters after 3 days. There was no attempt to balance by gender. The focus group had 5 participants; additional members were sought but responses indicated that they could not participate.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I complied with the requirements of the IRB in the design of this study. I adhered to Lichtman (2010) with keeping the privacy of the participants; information will be kept confidential with the use of passwords on computer stored notes and documentation. Locked storage for notes, tapes, and transcriptions will be kept for at least 5 years. Prior to the collection of data, I let the participants know that their identities would be replaced with pseudonyms. In addition, participants signed a consent form. I also emphasized that at any time the participant could withdraw. Participants received a copy of their transcript for approval to ensure their contributions were accurately represented and their identity protected.

### **Data Collection**

Once approved by the Walden University IRB ( #06-23-10-0307395). Three types of data were utilized. The data collection started with interviews, followed by a focus group, and collection of supplemental documents.

## **Interviews**

I created interview questions and the expert panel assisted me in developing, modifying, and creating the interview questions. The expert panel consisted of Dr. Russo and Dr. Leone who provided assistance in restructuring some of the interview and probing questions. The restructuring occurred to improve the clarity and specificity of the questions. Some of the questions required adjustments in order to be succinct. Russo, is Panzer Chair in Education and Adjunct Professor of Law at The University of Dayton, holds a Juris Doctor and Doctor of Education, has published over 700 articles and books on education law, including the topic of sexting. He teaches a variety of education law classes in the School of Education and Allied Professions and School of Law. Leone, Adjunct Professor at the University of Dayton and Ashland University, has obtained an Education Doctorate and currently teaches educational politics, school law and ethics, superintendency, and numerous other courses. Dr. Leone has also served as Superintendent of Schools in several school districts as well as winning the State Open Records Lawsuit with an Ohio Supreme Court Decision 7-0. Dr. Leone has served on the State Teacher Retirement Board, and has received numerous leadership awards as well as an Ohio Ethics Award in 2005.

The interviews assisted me to gain an understanding of the relationships of cyberbullying on social networking sites and the relationship of cyberbullying to disruption, particularly to the culture of the school, as well as investigating the effective and ineffective interventions to limit cyberbullying. The questions allowed the participant

to reveal the experiences and incidents that have occurred. Although each story was unique, it was predicted that emergent themes would develop. The interview encouraged the participant to share experiences or stories evoked by each question. Interviews were primarily conducted on the phone, one participant could not participate on the phone and asked for the questions to be sent and the participant returned the answers. Each interview was about 20 minutes in length and conducted on the phone. Follow-up probing questions were utilized in order to clearly understand the essence of the participant's experience. Probing questions were asked to allow me to better understand the phenomenon.

After written authorization from the participants, I set up an interview date and time to present the specifics of the study and interview the participant using the interview protocol. Appendix F contains the questions that I used for the interviews. Appendix G demonstrates the alignment of research questions to the interview questions. I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed following the interview. After the transcription, participants were sent the transcribed interview for their reference and to ensure that what the participant said during the interview was accurately transcribed and the intent was shared correctly. Six of the 10 interviewed principals responded, indicating that no changes were necessary. Three of the focus group principals clarified inaudible words which made their participation more clear. If I did not hear back I assumed the transcription was acceptable. Once the interviews were conducted, I spent time reading over the interview transcripts, identify impressions in bracketed notes, and organizing the presentation of the material (Hatch, 2002). The dissertation committee had access to the

transcripts. The rationale for the use of telephones for both interviews and the focus group was based on my desire to provide the opportunity for the principals to share their perceptions in the privacy of their own location without distractions. Use of phones allowed participation from a broader geographic range since most of the principals were on summer vacation.

I followed up with the participants to ensure their voice was heard, interpreted, and understood. I identified a colleague to assist in a review of the interviews and themes. The colleague was someone knowledgeable in the area of cyberbullying, but not involved in the study. The colleague's opinions of cyberbullying were not relevant because the individual and I read the interviews and discussed themes identifying comparisons of each interview. Peer review can be beneficial to identify challenges to and insight of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

### **Focus Group**

After the interviews were conducted, 8 randomly selected principals were contacted to participate in a focus group. The goal was to have 6-8 participants. The focus group had 5 participants who requested that a phone conference be held. After the focus group was conducted, notes and audiotape were reviewed and analyzed. The purpose of the study was shared at the beginning of the focus group meeting. In the event that audiotaping was not possible for the focus group, detailed field notes were taken to ensure accuracy of the discussion. The participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers (Hatch, 2002). The focus group triggered ideas that may not have emerged in an individual interview (Lichtman, 2010). Participants were not coerced in

their responses, participants were asked to share their experiences in their own words. Appendix H contains questions used for the focus group. Based on data analysis of the preceding interviews, these focus group questions were derived from an analysis of the interviews.

### **Documents**

Public access documents were collected by me and I gathered documents from the principals, if suggested by the principals as being relevant to the focus of the study. Documents can provide additional information that might have been mentioned in the interview or in the focus group (Yin, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Once the interviews and the focus group comments were transcribed by me, important meanings and patterns emerged; some expected and some unexpected (Stake, 1995). When the themes were identified and repeated, redundancies were isolated (Stake, 1995). I recognized, interpreted, and substantiated claims, meanings, and experiences (Stake, 1995). I also utilized the qualitative software NVIVO to assist in coding the interviews and focus group remarks. I clustered information into a matrix and put evidence within the same category (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I removed the names of individuals as well as those of their school to keep the information confidential. The matrix and evidence were used to assist in identification of patterns (Yin, 2009). Excerpts from the transcripts were used to support major points (Hatch, 2002). During the coding process, I went by sentence or paragraph to identify a name or code that represented what participants had expressed.

Since coding is heuristic without a specific formula (Saldana, 2009), I read over the transcripts of the focus group and interviews several times. Notes were taken and words and phrases that were used with more than one participant were highlighted. Once the code words were identified, I clustered codes into a matrix and five major themes emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). I chose the codes based upon the conceptual framework and literature review as well as emergent themes in the interviews and focus group discussion. *Prevention and intervention impact culture, indirect and relational aggression, technology, teaching and learning, and leadership* emerged as major codes (Adler, 1927; Bandura, 1973, 1977; Coloroso, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2000; Sousa, 2003; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Categories were identified from the highlighted words and phrases and revised numerous times, which caused themes to expand or collapse. A colleague and I also sat down and went through the transcripts and categories with possible themes I had identified and agreed on the five themes. The detailed description provides a narrative of the administrators' perspectives and experiences of cyberbullying. The documents were used as supplementary material to address the research questions. The detailed interview transcripts, field notes and transcript from the focus group, and documents have been stored.

### **Increasing the Validity of the Study**

Validity for qualitative research has a different meaning than it does for quantitative research (Creswell, 1998). For qualitative research, validity is a strength based on "trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility" (Creswell, 1998, pp. 195-196). Trochim (2001) stated that there are four criteria to judge research quality from the

qualitative approach: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (p. 162). Credibility is whether the participant is believable (p. 162). Transferability can be enhanced by identifying assumptions (p. 162). Dependability will account for the changes in the interview setting and the replication of the results (pp. 162-163).

To increase validity, I utilized several types of data - interviews, focus group, and public documents - as well as sent the transcripts back to the participant to ensure that the meaning and words used were the intent (Braud & Anderson, 1998). I also used qualitative software NVIVO to analyze the interviews and focus group transcripts. I utilized peer review to read, identify, and compare themes with a colleague who was knowledgeable in the area of cyberbullying, but was not a principal in a school (Appendix I). The data were shared by making connections between each theme and whether the sources of data had similarities or differences. The various methods of data collection and analysis were used to gather information regarding cyberbullying experiences in middle school from the principals' perspective.

### **Summary and Transition**

This section of the research study proposal described qualitative case study as the best methodology to address the research questions and the methods for data collection that included interviews, focus group, and supplemental documents for this study. This study was rooted in the experiences of principals. This study sought to understand the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to the culture of the school and onsite disruption as well as effective and ineffective interventions used to limit

cyberbullying described by middle grade principals. I discussed how validity and ethical considerations were to be maintained. Chapter 4 will detail the findings of the study and interview, focus group, and document data will be dispersed through the findings to support the themes that emerged from principal experiences. Chapter 5 will describe the interpretation of findings as well as share recommendations for action.

## Chapter 4: Results of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to investigate administrators' perceptions of the effect of cyberbullying on school culture, particularly the disruption of their schools. This chapter begins with a description of the data collection, recording, coding, and analysis. Analysis of the 10 interviews, the focus group, and the documents resulted in five themes. Three sources of data, interviews, the focus group, and documents, were utilized to triangulate the findings. The findings are presented by these five themes, each in relationship to one of the three research questions. Findings related to the first theme, prevention and intervention impact culture, will be presented in response to the first research question, in the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school? The theme of indirect and relational aggression and the theme of technology as a source will be presented in relationship to the second research question, how do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of bullying on social networking sites to disruption at school? The themes of teaching and learning and leadership will be presented in relationship to the third research question, what interventions and steps have been taken in schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do the principals perceive them to have been?

### **Findings**

The principals who agreed to participate were interested in this research study and how they could contribute. During the interviews and focus group session, the principals seemed comfortable discussing their school, cyberbullying, and disruption within their

buildings. A general overview of the findings will be followed by the research questions and specific findings related to each theme.

The principals shared a wealth of knowledge regarding cyberbullying and cyberbullying disruption within their school buildings. General findings regarding cyberbullying incidents included principals' experiences that cyberbullying caused disruption more often in 7-8 grade buildings than 5-6 grade buildings. Middle grade students were reported to cyberbully most often after holiday breaks or summer vacation. Many principals mentioned that once cyberbullying activities happened online, it was only a matter of time before the messages and problems came into the school. Most often, indirect aggressive behaviors were responsible for school disruption. The use of technology as a means of bullying was reported to be prevalent in the middle grades. It was mentioned that parents checked their children's MySpace and Facebook pages but found it difficult to monitor what their child was texting. The cyberbullying disruptions per building ranged from 4 instances in a 5-6 buildings compared to 75-100 incidents a year in a 7-8 building; one principal in his estimate reported that 60-70% of bullying started on MySpace and then went to text messaging, then came into the school building. One principal mentioned, in his estimate, that once bullying occurs online, there is a nine out of 10 chance that the incident will come into school and the principal or counselor will have to take care of the situation.

The thematic findings will be addressed based on each research question. The themes that emerged from coding of the interview transcripts and the focus group transcript confirmed the following five themes: prevention and intervention impact

culture, indirect and relational aggression, teaching and learning, technology, and leadership.

### **Research Question 1: Prevention and Intervention Impact Culture**

The theme of prevention and intervention impact culture emerged from the first research question: in the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school? The theme of prevention and intervention impact culture includes three subthemes: enforcing the code of conduct, expectations, and respect, which are addressed below. The theme attends to the ways that principals perceive of the importance of preventing cyberbullying to protect the culture of the school and the safety of the students as well as the ways they can intervene to build on and develop the school culture. The theme of prevention and intervention impact culture describes the rules, guidelines, and appropriate behaviors within the school environment. This theme outlines the principals' perception of successful approaches and the opportunity for success when crisis situations occur. Prevention and intervention are the acts of a principal to create and maintain a positive school climate. The theme emerged from interview and focus group analysis and was supported by the literature review.

**Enforcing the Code of Conduct.** All the principals reported that they enforce the district code of conduct. The established code of conduct describes the code and a violation of the policy may result in suspension, expulsion, or exclusion from school or school activities. The code also indicates that discipline may occur for misconduct that occurs off school grounds when it is connected to a school, school event, school official,

or the property of a school employee or official. The district code of conduct on bullying is stated and posted in all buildings within the school district. The policy on harassment, intimidation, and bullying reads:

A student shall not exhibit any intentional written, verbal, or physical act toward another particular student more than once, that causes mental or physical harm, and is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student (South-Western City School District Code of Conduct, 2010, p. 1).

Cyberbullying can be the source of misconduct in any of these settings, depending on the situation.

All principals mentioned that the code of conduct outlines the consequences and gave examples of scenarios which can make schools safer. It was mentioned by Cameron that institutional messages are not effective; however, it was mentioned by Rory that “being out and about, talking to students, getting a good feel of what is going on in the building during lunch and in the hallways” prevents and curbs cyberbullying.

Many of the principals explained that cyberbullying and cyberharassment have impacted the culture of their buildings. In the interviews, all principals indicated that MySpace and Facebook cyberbullying situations had entered their school buildings. All principals also indicated that texting was a problem. Nine out of the 10 interviews indicated that the cyberbullying started outside of the school and had caused a disruption in their school buildings. Casey elaborated:

It takes up a lot of your day. [It] damages the culture of the school. Cyberbullying has created something that has carried over into school, then fighting and people take sides; parents come in and [say] "look what this person wrote on MySpace. Look what this person said", and expect the school to discipline for what is going on... but they also don't understand our jurisdiction only goes so far and so if it happens at school we can take care of it, but what a kid is writing on a computer at home we have no authority over it [what kids write] It has created a large conflict.

Five principals mentioned that a scenario such as Casey described was common and noted that many parents believe that the school can stop all problems because the students attend school together, but parents tend to just want a quick solution for the problem even when their own child is involved.

Hayden shared that sexual pictures were a significant problem last year and caused a change in the culture of their building.

This year was the first year we had issues with pictures that were sexual in nature, I would say that it has changed the culture, because it spreads like wildfire and it is all they talk about and what they talk about, then when they heard how we handled the situations, with their parents, and police...[Parent involvement and discipline has] ultimately made the culture of the school better, with how the students are using their phones and what they are sending on their texts, with the girls not sending pictures of themselves, with the boys... sending a message of not soliciting that type of picture from girls.

**Expectations.** All 10 of the interviewed principals expressed that the code of conduct, rules, procedures, and expectations are made clear to staff, students, and parents in a variety of ways. Hayden mentioned that there are responsibilities that administrators have legally in regard to educating students on the policies for antidiscrimination, harassment, and bullying. Six of the principals felt that it was important for homeroom teachers to go through the code of conduct and policies with their students. While that method has been efficient for most schools, Sasha described how the teachers have acknowledged the rules and went beyond the rules and added a personal touch within their building using student actors. “We have chosen to be more proactive with presentations with the district’s code of conduct, using that information to develop our presentations [to our students], class meetings, and then with [an] information video using [our] students as actors”. Interviews addressed that school culture is representative of the community and its core values and norms. It was stated during several interviews that principals who enforce, listen, interact, and connect with parents, staff, students, and the community are able to set the tone for the school building. The actions of the principal, whether or not the principal enforces punishments and consequences for bullying and other situations, builds trust or distrust. In addition, principals mentioned that conversations with parents helped establish meaningful relationships that strengthened the culture of the building. While expectations contribute to having a positive school culture, a necessary ingredient is respect.

**Respect.** Principals reported in the interviews that expectations and consistency provided a culture that was respectful. During the focus group, Ashley explained that any

school “can work with culture, respect, and positively work with each other.” Part of working together is the identification of problems. Casey described how bullying is respectfully handled when it is brought to the school office:

Most importantly, working with that student, who is a perpetrator, most of the time it is a self-confidence issue or ... they [sic] feel insecure...[we work] with that student to help them [sic] stop behaving in that manner. [We also] work with others, to show them how to handle that situation, because it can [quickly] create and spiral into a giant battle.

In three principal interviews, the way the school responds has opened communication as well as making the parents and community aware of the technology has created a better culture within schools. Several principals acknowledged that technology will continue to increase and schools need help from parents and the community to protect students. One participant, Cameron, focused on cyberbullying as an opportunity to teach kids about technology and that a school’s focus should be on how to teach them how to use it, while Rory’s perspective was different. He maintained “the district policy on bullying is clear; I think there is a lot we can’t do, parents need to be aware that there is a lot that goes on outside school that we can’t control.” Alexis believed that the influence the school resource officer has built positive relationships with students. This relationship does not involve giving disciplinary consequences. Involved parents are invited into school to go through the cyberbullying messages and see the proof of what was said on Facebook and MySpace. Hayden, Cameron, Riley, and Alexis felt that parents were glad to be a part of the process.

Eight principals stated that cyberbullying was punishable when it causes a disruption of school. The district defines disruption of school as:

A student shall not by use of violence, force, noise, coercion, threat, intimidation, fear, passive resistance, or any other conduct cause disruption or obstruction of any lawful mission, process, or function of the school. Neither shall the student engage in such conduct for the purpose of causing the disruption or obstruction of any lawful mission, process, or function of the school if such a disruption or obstruction is reasonably certain to result from the student's urging. (South-Western City School Code of Conduct, 2010, p. 1)

There are 11 offenses mentioned under "disruption of school," the last of which is using electronic devices that disrupt the school or activities.

### **Research Question 2: Indirect and Relational Aggression and Technology**

How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school? The themes of indirect and relational aggression and technology emerged from the second research question. Indirect and relational aggression were first identified from the literature review and supported by the interviews and focus group analysis. Technology emerged first from the interviews and focus group analysis and supported by the literature review. Indirect and relational aggression will be addressed first.

**Indirect and Relational Aggression.** Indirect and relational aggression has caught the attention of schools. Three principals mentioned that many students involved in aggressive acts have an audience and operate in a group or pack. Many times a person

is a part of a social group and gets “outed” or excluded from the group’s activities and is then ostracized and harassed online and at school. School policy indicates that schools should be free of discrimination and should provide a safe environment for all students. This can become a challenge when indirect and relational aggression is involved. The principals are familiar with each of their own school’s unique cultures. The principals described reasons why the culture has been influenced. Principals reiterated that aggressive words were used to cyberbully. Ashton offered one of the reasons that students respond to cyberbullying:

So much of their self-worth and self value is what others think about them...they lack the social skills about what to care about; don’t really have the capacity for ignoring what their peers say about them. Also, we talk with parents and try to help them understand how it happens: computers are in their own bedrooms and parents don’t check what is going on. Parents are not aware of what their students are doing.

Many of the students are taking advantage of technology and saying what they want, when they want. Four out of the 10 principals acknowledged that girls were more vocal in school about cyberbullying. Rory and Ashton responded in the focus group with reasons on why they believe girls are more involved. Rory explained further:

They have become more responsive to it. [Girls] respond in a pack, they tend to talk a lot, talk and text a lot, before it would require face-to-face, now it does not involve face-to-face. Actually [the girls are] a lot more likely to talk about others without face-to-face. I don’t like this person so I am going to tell them what I

think online. They don't understand how severe it can be with the cops and where it can go.

Ashton had a reason that boys do not respond in the same way. "Boys don't care; they aren't going to take the time to type out a response." Sasha mentioned:

Mean girls, they don't let things go. A boy will have a beef with someone...they get over it in a few days and will be friends. Girls hold a grudge and will still have the [same] issue from months ago. Issues happen over the summer or before school starts...break times. Sometimes the girls just don't like each other.

Based on the interviews, there were other reasons why cyberbullying has gained popularity among students. Riley elaborated:

I think the motivation comes from struggling [to gain] control of power [and] of one student feeling slighted. [They] build support against the other person, controlling issues with someone else. They find that joining numbers helps that control. Again it's that developmental age vying for status, vying for identity, and if it is threatened in any way, then what they want to do is to be more aggressive.

While sometimes people don't like each other, sometimes it is more about peer perception. Hayden explained:

Kids are trying to keep up a reputation that their peers think have with them, one of them, when you sit and talk with the kids, they [sic] are not really like that, but they [sic] need to keep the persona and keep what is expected of them [sic]. It is not really a motivation, but it is easier for them [sic] to be that mean person, behind their [sic] computer, because it is not face-to-face...they don't have the

nerve to say to someone's face, but easier to say behind a computer and they will get a reaction, whether positive or negative, mostly just a reaction.

Riley and Hayden brought forth information that racial slurs were becoming part of the cyberbullying problems within their building, but not toward someone with a different ethnicity than their own. Riley mentioned that racial words were used most commonly. Sasha and Peyton expressed that profanity was also used to intimidate. The comments were normally forwarded on to others.

Other name calling took place that was not racial. Casey stated:

Name calling - [the] "he said, she said" piece. [It] doesn't have to be direct name calling; "a friend told a friend that this person said this about that person". Middle man is in the mix... Someone is going back and forth.

Hunter described that the issues seemed to stem around a "boyfriend situation or name calling such as ugly and fat" which then led to exclusion, then it revolves around exclusion. In addition to what students have said to each other, principals gave their thoughts on the motivation behind cyberbullying. Alexis summarized that most of the problems are centered:

around girlfriend or boyfriend issues; where girls were a very tight knit group, went to a party, talking about other girls, friendships broke up. Also, neighborhood issues with jealousy or anger over people talking about child's mother or extenuation of conversation kids have at school or on the bus.

Cameron reflected that problems and events stay within the neighborhood and, if they go outside the neighborhood, the person who takes them outside the neighborhood would

gain the reputation as a snitch. The reputation of a snitch is social suicide. With Casey's school, the motivation for cyberbullying tends to be insecurity or self-confidence problems and can be magnified when someone is dating a person another person likes. Rory has had varying reasons presented by students for cyberbullying; mostly they "have had it with the other person, something that was perceived wrong or something...argument with boyfriend breaking up with them [sic]...never one specific thing." Most of the principals experience that students have trouble with social situations that upset them and respond rapidly without thinking about potential repercussions. Hunter described within his building that it is about "kids not knowing how to make friends and be friends and it is hard for kids at our age."

**Technology Increases Disruption.** Technology is a theme that emerged from the second research question, how do middle grade principals perceive the relationship of bullying on social networking sites to disruption at school? Technology was also a theme that emerged from the third research question, what interventions and steps have been taken in schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been? Several interviews indicated that technology has increased the opportunities for adolescents to bully each other. Technology has presented opportunities through phones, computers, and other electronic devices to send messages 24 hours a day with little supervision. Technology problems presented by principals included: cyberbullying, threats, inappropriate pictures, and mean or profane language sent through social networking sites, email, and cell phones.

It was mentioned in two principal interviews that anger, jealousy, and frustration would lead a student to write something on an online wall, but students lack the ability to say those things in person. One principal mentioned that technology makes it easy to say things one would not necessarily say otherwise. Another principal suggested the biggest problem is when a student hits the send button, the message cannot be taken back and it is out in cyberspace.

Four of the principals described that a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend could start the postings on MySpace and Facebook. Friends would easily become involved when the information was forwarded to another friend and eventually would spiral out of control. The comments, threats, words, and pictures would be talked about at school and cause a disruption that a principal would have to try to work out.

Cameron expressed what many of the principals described regarding cyberbullying.

It is an avenue that they are using...before it was whispering to each other, between classes or telephone calls, now [technology is] more preferable and you can forward it to more people. Cyberbullying is an issue but the same bullying that has been happening for years. The kids just have the technology and opportunities in front of them to do it more or they use it because it is instant. You can't take it back.

It can be difficult for students to make good decisions when cyberbullying is prevalent and can happen 24 hours a day. Cameron described:

Instead of beat[ing] them, you join them. Use technology for the good and teach kids how to act. [We] are given the great responsibility with the schools. I am not sure if anyone [has] really shown [the kids] how to use [the technology]. I am not sure that there is anything going on, with teaching kids, we teach kids to say thank you, excuse me, and be polite and how to act when they have a conversation with somebody, but do we consciously make an effort to ask what do you do with your cell phone when you are texting messages, when you are sending texts, or on MySpace/Facebook and what you are saying on Myspace/Facebook?...The Golden Rule, treat others as you wish to be treated.

Cameron was emphatic about technology not going away and that schools should educate students in social skills. “[The] only thing I would like to add, we need to focus in on teaching kids how to use technology.”

Ashley reiterated that the Internet has certainly changed education and impacted society. In all of the interviews, it was mentioned that texting and threats were part of the disruption that comes into school. Six of the 10 principals mentioned that sexting and inappropriate pictures had also become increasingly more popular. Riley sums it up with:

[Cyberbullying] starts outside, leaks into school, and then it is a school issue. We don't treat things a whole lot differently unless we get a heads up from a parent that something has happened. At this point, we notify the students that we are aware of it, notify the parents that we are aware of it; parents can take care of it on their end, but if it becomes an issue in the building, even if it starts outside the building, then is an issue in the building, it is considered a school issue. We

follow procedures and 9 out of 10 times when it occurs outside the building, it will become a school issue.

### **Research Question 3: Teaching and Learning and Leadership**

What interventions and steps have been taken in the schools in this district to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been? Principals have several roles – one being an educator who is knowledgeable and has several opportunities to teach through building relationships with parents, teachers, and students as well as a leader who has to communicate expectations, make difficult decisions, and deal with discipline problems involving parents and students. The theme of teaching and learning as well as leadership emerged from the interviews and focus group analysis and was supported by the literature review. The themes of teaching and learning and leadership related to these two kinds of principal leadership and emerged from the third research question.

**Teaching and Learning.** From the interviews, many principals described the ways their school educates students, parents, and the community about cyberbullying. It was mentioned that students come to school to learn about academics as well as to develop social skills.

Hayden and Cameron expressed that an enormous amount of time was taken by each incident. Hayden described: “We deal a lot with the fallout from the MySpace... We end up doing therapy; typically taking up a lot of our time [consisting of] conversations with parents, their concerns about it, [and the] fallout becomes a school issue.” Hayden

added concerns about the time it takes “to talk to both sides, third parties, their witnesses, getting the stories, getting back with the parents, and getting back with both sides.”

From the interview with Hayden, it appeared that the goal of keeping students safe was the priority; however, it was mentioned that the response is reactive. Reactive responses do not stop the problem; responses should be proactive where prevention and safety are taught. Hayden was building relationships with all parties as the investigation and process was going on. Hayden described the way that solving cyberbullying problems was accomplished and elaborated that it is extremely time consuming. Cameron acknowledged and accepted responsibility for teaching social skills and felt a sense of obligation and commitment to do the right thing. Cameron explained:

We spend a lot of time trying to teach kids how to interact with each other, how to use technology appropriately, how to talk to each other, how to treat each other; from the teacher’s perspective, it gives us another opportunity for kids to learn.

Peyton noted that students are “less likely to participate in behaviors that will get them in trouble when they are aware of the ramifications of their actions.” Hunter agreed and explained that the “character campaign” in their building has been successful because “it is followed up with conversations and consequences” if problematic behaviors arise. Hayden, Cameron, Peyton, and Hunter seemed to share strong feelings on teaching and learning in their buildings that can positively impact students’ behaviors on school culture.

**Leadership.** The theme of leadership emerged from the third research question, what interventions and steps have been taken in schools to limit cyberbullying and how

effective do principals perceive them to have been? School disruptions call for strong school leadership. All 10 principals indicated that cyberbullying had caused a disruption in their building. The disruption ranged from four instances in a school year to 75 -100 incidents, and it was stated that 60-70% of bullying started on MySpace, then went to text messaging, then entered into the school building. Rory described incidents that have occurred within his building:

A lot of messages that students bring in, [I've] seen it a lot with our building with text messaging - ours are mostly with social networking. We are dealing with a lot of the secondary issues where forwarding [is the main culprit] [We are] trying to calm them down, parents coming in asking and showing us text messaging... We are doing so much more now, but we are reactive.

It was mentioned by several principals that talking just with the student is not effective. Students feel that they can get away with a lot if their parents are unaware of what they are doing. In conjunction with working with students and parents, evidence that their child was involved in the bullying proves to be the most effective method. The actual MySpace or Facebook printouts or text messages make it easier for the principal to share what is happening, because students tend to tell what another person did, not what they did. The 10 interview participants indicated that the police had been involved in each of their schools at some point over cyberbullying, the worst case described by Peyton:

It involved a student making a threat of gun violence at school to another student, via text message. The other student's parents called the police; police came to

school. That happened before we were aware of the situation, but we dealt with the situation.

Most principals reported they are struggling to keep students safe and working toward academic achievement. One principal mentioned that parents are becoming aware of their child's online activities; however, text messaging is becoming a larger issue because the child can erase the message before the parent can check it. Principals also cited that educating parents on their role and necessity to be involved is crucial. A problem that was mentioned regarding cyberbullying is the excuse that some students are using about not coming to school once they have been threatened online. It was indicated that students become truant using the cyberbullying excuse. The principals were not sure if it is a valid concern or a convenient excuse.

Many principals also mentioned that many times they are the mediator and have to work toward a short-term solution for a much larger problem. Parents want schools to get the kids to stop harassing each other, but most of the harassment is happening away from school. Hunter described a major concern for the future of leadership and cyberbullying.

Because two kids are mad at each other over the weekend and text each other nasty things, I don't think that means I should have to deal with it. Also, with everything we are asked to do...21<sup>st</sup> century skills, all we need to do, to take time to deal with bullying stuff, mandated exercise, and all that is talked about...takes away from our true focus. Parents could help out a lot, with cyberbullying, being

attentive with what is going on with their kids at home and access, checking their text messages and email and I don't think our parents do.

All of the principals expressed that taking proactive measures are a solution to cyberbullying. Rory mentioned that being visible with students helped to maintain a feel for the climate. Many of the principals expressed feeling helpless because schools are working to do what they can, but the responsibility falls under more than just the school.

### **Summary of Findings**

Interviews, a focus group, and documents were gathered to address the guiding research questions for this qualitative case study. The findings are summarized below in relation to five themes that related to the three research questions:

1. In the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school?
2. How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school?
3. What interventions and steps have been taken in the schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been?

### **Prevention and Intervention Impact Culture**

Several principals indicated that the culture of their buildings had gotten better after a major cyberbullying incident. All 10 of the participants expressed that the code of conduct, rules, procedures, and expectations of behavior are meaningful when members of the organization are aware of the consequences and empowerment of positive behavior is known and expected. The principals described that prompt response to students and

parents was important to lessen the impact of cyberbullying. These open lines of communication are also reflective of a culture concerned with student safety.

### **Indirect and Relational Aggression**

The online behaviors of threats, sexting, and bullying are prevalent in schools. Most of the cyberbullying is occurring outside the school but has been coming into the school after situations are left unresolved. The issues typically come into school with a parent bringing information to the office or a student telling someone. Parents and students report that students are using derogatory words online from profanity, racial slurs, insults, and threats to disrespect to family members. From the principals interviewed it seemed that personal relationships such as breaking up, changing friends, neighborhood issues, jealousy, and anger also contributed to the negative online behaviors.

### **Technology**

Cyberbullying, through MySpace, Facebook, and texting problems, has been occurring in the buildings of all 10 principals interviewed, Sexting had occurred and been disruptive in 6 of the 10 principals' buildings and disrupted school schedule. Three principals mentioned that girls use the pack mentality and exclude others through repeated cyberbullying.

### **Teaching and Learning**

The principals in the study indicated that teachers spend a lot of time teaching students about technology and bullying. The teaching, learning, and relationships among students and staff are critical to the culture of the building. All of the principals

mentioned that they instruct students regarding bullying and cyberbullying and these disciplinary actions that will be taken. Most of the principals acknowledged speaking only with the perpetrator was not effective; talking with the perpetrator, perpetrator's parents, mediation, and counseling were found by them to be the most effective methods of dealing with cyberbullying.

### **Leadership**

The cyberbullying disruptions per building ranged from 4 instances in a 5-6 buildings compared to 75-100 incidents a year in a 7-8 building; one principal reported that 60-70% of bullying started on MySpace and then went to text messaging, then came into the school building. One principal mentioned, in his estimate that once bullying occurs online, there is a 9 out of 10 chance that the incident will come into school and the principal or counselor will have to take care of the situation. School leadership was indirectly mentioned as a factor in addressing aggressive behavior. It was apparent from the principals that grades 7-8 had more disruption due to cyberbullying. Proof of the MySpace, Facebook, texts, or electronic messages has given the schools an opportunity to share information with parents in a non-accusatory manner. They have found it is hard for parents to dispute that their children are involved when it is in writing. The principals enjoy working with students in general, but one principal stated that with all of the mandated educational policy, things like responding to or preventing cyberbullying should not just fall on the school.

### **Quality Procedures**

I followed the university protocol for the notification of principals, for principals' verification of transcripts, and peer review of themes. Principals were given the opportunity to provide clarification after the interview and focus group. A sample transcript page is included in Appendix J. Themes and codes are located in Appendix K.

### **Summary and Transition**

In chapter 4, I discussed the emergent themes that evolved from 10 interviews and a focus group of five principals. In addition, documents were collected. The principals were from one school district in 7 schools, spanning grades 5-8. To develop the findings, I used Merriam's (2002) data analysis through open coding of interviews and the focus group, going line by line to identify code words and patterns. Upon completion of the patterns, five themes emerged: prevention and intervention impact culture, teaching and learning, technology, indirect and relational aggression, and leadership. Transcript excerpts were used to support the major points. Verification of transcripts and peer review were also incorporated to increase accuracy of the data analysis.

In chapter 5, I present a summary of the findings and an interpretation of the findings in relationship to the literature discussed in chapter 2. There is a discussion on how the findings of this research will contribute to positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Cyberbullying on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook has had numerous effects on children at school. The online activities that take place after school are creeping into the school day and present a challenge for school administrators. I sought the perceptions of middle school principals to understand the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to the culture of the school and onsite disruptions as well as to understand the effective and ineffective interventions used to limit cyberbullying.

A review of literature for this study revealed that most research on cyberbullying is limited to the student-to-student relationship in bullying and the causes, frequency, and costs of cyberbullying. Quantitative studies investigated cyberbullying interactions (Maher, 2008), gender victimization (Aricak et al., 2008; Li, 2006), reasons and categories of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a; Slonje & Smith, 2008), and reasons for cyberbullying and ways for victims to cope (Beran & Li, 2005; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). To date, there have been no studies capturing the experiences of principals with regard to cyberbullying and its disruption of the school.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. In the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school?
2. How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school?

3. What interventions and steps have been taken in the schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been?

### **Summary of Findings**

Interviews, a focus group, and documents were gathered to address the guiding research questions for this qualitative case study. The 11 participants for this study included two females and nine males. I conducted interviews with 10 principals and one focus group with 5 principals. In addition documents were collected. The principals were from one school district in 7 schools, spanning grades 5-8.

### **Prevention and Intervention Impact Culture**

Cyberbullying and cyberharassment have affected the culture of the principals' school buildings. Bullying policies are posted and the code of conduct is enforced. Sexting and texting have also caused disruption in many school buildings. Six of the 10 principals mentioned that sexting and inappropriate pictures had become increasingly popular. Parental involvement has been significant in reducing cyberbullying incidents. With technology advancements on the rise, schools must be consistent and enforce school policies as well as consequences when disruption occurs.

### **Indirect and Relational Aggression**

Indirect and relational aggression has been a response to cyberbullying situations. Principals described that aggressive words, threats, intimidation, and ostracism were common responses to cyberbullying. Four out of the 10 principals acknowledged that girls were more vocal in school about cyberbullying. 7-8 grade principals indicated higher cyberbullying incidents compared to the 5-6 grade principals.

**Technology**

Technology has advanced the bullying phenomenon. Technology has allowed cyberbullying to happen 24 hours a day through cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices. Cyberbullying has occurred in the buildings of all 10 principals interviewed. The way adolescents communicate has changed. There is a reduction in the amount of face-to-face time students have with each other (Coloroso, 2003). Student relationships and self-esteem can be damaged from comments, threats, and posts. Most issues occur when friends become involved when student couples broke up and one started posting and forwarding information on MySpace and Facebook.

**Teaching and Learning**

Each cyberbullying incident involves a lot of time for a principal. All of the principals indicated that they educate students on the rules, expectations, and consequences of bullying and other behaviors. Character campaigns, discussions, consequences, and parent involvement are some of the teaching tools principals are currently using to limit cyberbullying incidents in their buildings. Most of the principals acknowledged that speaking with only the perpetrators was not effective; talking with the perpetrator, perpetrator's parents, mediation, and counseling were found by them to be the most effective methods of dealing with cyberbullying.

**Leadership**

School leadership was mentioned as a factor in addressing aggressive behavior because a principal determines the consequences of an action. School principals mentioned that consistent, quick response with students and parents contributed to

positive communication. Proof of the MySpace, Facebook, texts, or electronic messages has given the schools an opportunity to share information with parents in a non-accusatory manner. They have found it is hard for parents to dispute that their children are involved when it is in writing. One principal mentioned, in his estimate that once bullying occurs online, there is a 9 out of 10 chance that the incident will come into school and the principal or counselor will have to take care of the situation.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings will be interpreted in relationship to the three research questions.

#### **Interpretations of Research Question 1's Findings**

The first theme of prevention and intervention impact culture emerged from the first research question which sought the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district regarding the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school.

**Prevention and Intervention Impact Culture.** Principals' concern about how prevention and intervention impact culture evolved as a theme because it encompasses the attributes of culture, norms, vulnerability to change, and the core values that are threatened by cyberbullying. The principals found communication was essential for positive school culture. Understanding expectations, establishing consequences, and reinforcing rules were found to improve school culture. Bandura (1977) supported the idea that if students believe control of behavior is possible, it contributes to an environment of support, learning, and safety, especially if staff are clear with their expectations.

Sergiovanni (2000) believed that character building as well as leadership would enhance the culture of a school. A principal needs to be cognizant of the culture and use the tools of leadership to support and mentor the school staff and students to make a difference and encourage positive behaviors and attitudes (Crippen, 2004). Positive school culture is also reflective of relationships between peers and adults can create an environment of respect in a school and represents a challenging curriculum and high expectations (Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2005). Positive school role models can assist in prevention and intervention of bullying. There is also the possibility that the culture of the school may shun a student who harassed other students. The culture could positively influence peer behaviors. Alexis mentioned that in his 5-6 grade building, cyberbullying is less prevalent and they have a very positive school climate, but regular bullying is more noticeable and prevalent.

With many students being bullied or harassed online and students not reporting it, the principals' recommended adult intervention and conversations within schools would open the door to a positive relationship where the students could feel comfortable revealing that they are being bullied. It was also mentioned by principals that consistent punishment, stricter punishment, and adhering to policies was the second most common comment and the most significant response was the support necessary by parents, community, students, police, and staff to help and provide resources to the school on a daily basis (Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2005). Cyberbullying can be a result of inconsistent consequences and limited supervision. School supervision is essential to ensure a safe school culture. Supervision may affect bullying behaviors if they go

without consequences. Threats and intimidation associated with bullying may create a negative school culture (Hoover & Hazler, 1991). Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) described that counselors should be cognizant of the environmental factors that are contributing to the bullying so a course of action can be decided. This also leads to building a stronger school culture.

Anderson and Sturm (2007) concluded that documentation should be saved and shared with school officials, or with police to reduce problems or prevent future problems. When principals are aware of cyberbullying situations, the principals recommended it should be automatic that parents of both parties are contacted and all parties meet with the administration. Communication between parents and the administration is necessary to improve the safety of schools (Beale & Hall, 2007).

Sergiovanni (2000) maintained that culture is representative of the community, parents, students, and staff of a building. In order for teachers and administrators to contribute to school culture, they need to be committed to the building and believe that accountability for teaching and learning is essential.

### **Interpretations of Research Question 2's Findings**

The themes of indirect and relational aggression as well as technology emerged from data collected to explore the second research question which sought how middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school.

**Indirect and Relational Aggression.** Principals felt that cyberbullying is a growing problem, and students are not aware of how to interact with each other with this

new technology. Principals were aware that cyberbullying was a problem in their buildings; 7-8 building principals indicated higher percentages of disruption. With the cyberbullying disruptions per building ranging from 4 instances in a 5-6 buildings compared to 75-100 incidents a year in a 7-8 building; one principal reported that 60-70% of bullying started on MySpace and then went to text messaging, then came into the school building, the students with the most incidents tend to come from schools with the most access to personal computers, cell phones, and technology. Cyberbullying could also be attributed to student boredom. Ashton described one of the reasons that students respond to cyberbullying “so much of their self-worth and self values is what others think about them...they lack the social skills about what to care about...computers are in their own bedrooms and parents don’t check what is going on...” Also, three principals reported that many students involved in aggressive acts have an audience and operate in a group or pack.

Cyberbullying is a manifestation of the bullying phenomenon (Bully Police, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Koloff, 2008). Students are at times unaware of the consequences or negative effects that they can have on others for their words or actions online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b). The principal participants believe that schools should contribute to positive, proactive teaching on cyber interactions, but believe that schools should not deal with all interactions since much of the cyber communication happens during after school hours. This is beneficial for administrators if incidents occur in school because without a safe environment, free of intimidation and threats, learning cannot occur (Sousa, 2003). Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) described in their study of

558 middle school students, that only 19.5% reported exhibiting no bullying behavior in the last 30 days.

While the previous research indicated that girls cyberbully more often, research has also shown that males were more involved in cyberbullying and bullying than females (Aricak et al., 2008; Li, 2006). Four principals in this study indicated that girls cyberbully more often than boys. Sasha described that “girls hold a grudge and will have the [same] issue from months ago.” Rory described that [girls] respond in a pack and talk and text a lot. While girls respond with indirect aggression, boys according to Ashton “don’t care; they aren’t going to take the time to type out a response.” Aricak et al. (2008) stated the same was true for victims (more boys than girls). While Aricak et al. (2008) reported that victimization was more likely for boys than girls, Li (2006) did not note a significant gender difference when it came to the number of times a student was victimized. However, females were more likely to report cyberbullying to adults than their male counterparts. Maher’s (2008) results concluded that the boys who were bullied online were able to cope (p. 53). Maher also mentioned that bullying was consistent with males being more dominant than females. The girls bullied online, but they tended to use indirect strategies (p. 55). Maher concluded that boys tended to bully boys and girls tended to bully girls; there was no cross-gender bullying in this study. Few, if any researchers discussed the cyberbullying disruptions in school by gender. Hinduja and Patchin (2008a) indicated that cyberbullying occurred regardless of gender and the victimization tended to happen to the same kids that are bullied at school.

**Technology.** While the Internet has many positive attributes, it is fairly unmonitored (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Cyberbullying has no limits; it is a global problem that impacts the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of children. Aggressive behaviors have been found in other studies to cause students to feel humiliated, helpless, and depressed (Beran & Li, 2005). It was described by Sasha that most cyberbullying incidents happened following a school holiday, break, or summer. Kirby and Kaillio (2007) addressed that conflicts stemming from cyberharassments are likely to arise at school on Mondays after the weekend; school becomes the territory where issues are settled.

While many principals indicated that identity and self-esteem were important, it was also mentioned by one principal that students lack the capacity to ignore things. Four out of 10 principals believed girls were most involved, one out of 10 principals believed that boys and girls have an equal part in cyberbullying two out of 10 believed that for cyberbullying neighborhood issues were the reasons, many principals indicated that parents are not aware of their child's activities online. One principal mentioned that in the aftermath of cyberbullying in the school, much of the principal's time is spent doing therapy. Many principals mentioned that it is difficult to handle cyberbullying since so much of it happens away from school. There was no literature available to support these findings.

### **Interpretations of Research Question 3's Findings**

The last two themes of teaching and learning and leadership emerged from analysis of the data to address the third research question which sought the interventions

and steps that have been taken in the schools to limit cyberbullying regarding how effective principals perceive them to have been. Principals take on the role of educator to ensure students receive a proper education and staff are aware of all policies and mandates. The principal is the “teacher-leader” which has been separated into two categories, teaching and learning and leadership; where communication, facilitation, motivation, and discipline are part of the decision making process for principal leadership. The themes of teaching and learning and leadership emerged from the third research question.

**Teaching and Learning.** It was suggested by principals that parents need to take a more proactive approach in knowing what their child is doing on the computer. This was reinforced by Espelage et al. (2000) who conducted a quantitative study with 558 students, Grades 6-8, of various genders and races from the Midwest. In the study, 189 students self identified that they spent more than an hour a day without the presence of an adult, which indicated that a third of this population was left unsupervised. Principals described how cyberbullying is a school problem when it enters the building or school grounds, however, most of the activities are occurring outside the school day. Parental support was described by principals as a necessary component to assist in curbing cyberbullying. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) reported that parents can keep track of children’s online behaviors by monitoring or limiting their Internet access. Parents may not understand how to establish limits and protect their teens from online behaviors and this lack of knowledge can create parent-child conflict (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Principals also discussed how parents want an immediate fix to the

problem and showing proof what their child has done is necessary in most cases. The findings of this study may be more important in light of Espelage et al. as children are left unsupervised; children are becoming increasingly independent and are often not receiving nurtured decision making at home (Laursen, 2008; Rapacki, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Nurtured decision making includes parents enforcing structured rules and offering guided discipline and familial disagreements being resolved by conversations (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007; McGuinness, 2007).

**School Leadership.** Collins (2001) suggested creating a culture of discipline that is supportive and encourages positive relationships on a daily basis. Effective leadership responds to the core changes in an organization that include bureaucratic, personal, market, professional, cultural, and democratic forces (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (2005) concluded that while expectations and curriculum are essential, relationships between adults and peers create the culture. Rory mentioned that being visible in the hallways and around students kept him aware of the problems within his school. None of the principals described a horrific event or tragedy from cyberbullying within their buildings. Maher (2008) indicated that even though cyberbullying occurs, it is not as devastating to most children as some may think. Barriers to stopping cyberbullying may have been “lack of or inadequate alternative placements, inadequate funds, and federal, state, or district policies on disciplining special education students” (Neiman et al., 2009, p. 4) however the suggestions from this study indicated that time, too many responsibilities, lack of parental support, off campus computer time, and other priorities were problems in stopping cyberbullying. Several principals indicated

that legal ramifications have been shared with staff and students about their part in cyberbullying; this seemed to make cyberbullying and bullying priorities within school buildings.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study will inform school staff, students, and parents about the disruption that cyberbullying can cause in schools so as to promote prevention activities. The findings from this study may help keep students safer because parents and school personnel may recognize that most of the cyberbullying occurs at home but comes into schools causing disruptions (Shariff, 2009). Principals may benefit from being more supported with techniques to curb cyberbullying and awareness of the harassment and torment of students (Kirby & Kaillio, 2007). Schools may want to mandate training for principals because cyberbullying has occurred in all of the school buildings considered in this study. A goal of the training would be awareness of the signs and interventions so that the consequences shared with students are consistent and more effective. The training for principals should be focused on procedures, investigations, consequences, and follow-up for bullies and victims as well as keeping staff aware of the signs, trends, and reporting expectations for cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has been linked to physical illness and mental health issues (Beran & Li, 2005). Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) concurred that there are psychosocial characteristics of bullies and their victims, and victims are at risk for mental health issues, the most common being depression. This study may assist in improving intervention when cyberbullying is a cause of disruption in school because “social ridicule,

psychological intimidation, and group rejection can be very devastating” (Mitchell et al., p. 16). With parental agreement, schools need to provide counseling or intervention to bullies and victims that focus on age appropriate behaviors and self-esteem. Staff may be cognizant of issues stemming from cyberbullying and share responsibility to help students and make parents aware. This study may also create awareness of online activities and the dangers when no one is watching to know that victimization is real and is not going away with out intervention from school, society, and family (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Schools should also provide community and parental involvement nights sharing information on cyberbullying, relationships, and technology. This study may illustrate that relationships between students and staff are necessary for safety and positive school culture.

### **Recommendations for Action**

This study’s findings can be of benefit to several groups, including school personnel, parents, students, and community members who should be concerned that Cyberbullying that affects the social, mental, and physical well-being of students (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). The following are suggestions for recommended actions for schools based upon the findings of this study that may reduce, curb, or stop cyberbullying, particularly in grades 7-8, which were found to experience more incidents of cyberbullying than grades 5-6, the other grades considered in this study. The recommendations focus on communication and on programs and ideas.

## **Communication**

The first five recommended actions regarding communication were used effectively by several principals; the last four recommended actions emerged after I read the interviews and focus group transcripts.

1. Educate and enforce rules consistently may reduce cyberbullying incidents.
2. Document cyberbullying incidents and notifying students and parents of the situation, consequences, and next action emerged from principal interviews and the focus group.
3. Establish weekly announcements that promote character campaigns of respect and responsibility.
4. Create cyberbullying videos with students from the school to demonstrate appropriate online behavior.
5. Communicate with all parents of the students involved and save all documentation.
6. Offer parent information meetings on cyberbullying and online computer usage.
7. Keep bullying and cyberbullying on the principal agenda at the monthly district meetings.
8. Establish time for collaboration between counselors and principals to determine the disruption of bullying or cyberbullying within the school.

9. Establish professional development including teacher training and principal programs focusing on workshops and parent meetings to educate on the use of technology.

### **Programs and Ideas**

The first program was effectively used by several principals; the remaining three programs emerged after I read over the interviews and the focus group transcripts.

1. Create behavior support for bullies and victims to build self esteem.
2. Create a program of peer mentors who work with students to resolve conflicts caused by cyberbullying, this emerged after the principal interviews and focus group as well as the research from Mitchell et al. (2008).
3. Create a link on the school website to report bullying and violence, this emerged from Neiman et al. (2009) that only 25.7% of all public schools in their study offered a hotline or tipline to report problems (p. 14).
4. Create lunch groups that are run by school counselors or principals that offer advice on stress, self esteem, identity, bullying, depression, and mentoring.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This qualitative exploratory case study of principals in grades 5-8 who were willing to share their perception of cyberbullying in their buildings adds to the literature on cyberbullying disruption in schools. However, there is still more to be learned about the experiences of principals in grades 5-8 and their perceptions of cyberbullying. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations for future studies are:

1. A case study can be conducted of a school district that implements conflict resolution and mediation in the middle grades, comparing the results of the cyberbullying with the current study and other similar studies.
2. Evaluate counseling programs in the middle grades to understand the tools and information being shared with parents and students in regard to cyberbullying awareness.
3. A case study on the administrators' perceptions of interventions that work in Grades 5-8.
4. Compare and contrast the administrators' perceptions of cyberbullying with those of middle school counselors to determine the disruption in schools.
5. Compare situations, gender, and reasons of cyberbullying to possibly identify potential victims and empower students before cyberbullying occurs.

### **Reflections**

I have been an assistant principal for 5 years; the first 2 years in a high school in an urban school district and the last 4 in a middle school in this suburban school district. The principals and I have worked together for up to 4 years. The principals and I have attended meetings and community events and have an established rapport and a good working relationship. I have been battling the cyberbullying war for the past 5 years because each year, there have been at least two major incidents that have disrupted the school buildings in which I have worked. In one incident, parents were involved in organizing a fight, videotaping it, and putting it on MySpace. The police became involved, and the parents were arrested and charged with contributing to the delinquency

of a minor. My personal objective was to determine the cyberbullying experiences of middle grade principals and make schools safer. My established credibility and rapport with the individuals in the study increased participation. I am not an evaluator for any of the individuals in the study, reducing the chance for coercion. The established relationships allowed for honesty and truthful answers, especially since the questions are related to student relationships, discipline, and safety (Braud & Anderson, 1998). The questions were not political in nature and it is unlikely that the participants' answers impacted their schools negatively. Awareness in schools can create safer environments for students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Mason, 2008). Administrator perspectives may contribute to understanding cyberbullying and limiting school disruption from cyberbullying.

The review of the literature demonstrated a gap in research on principal perspectives of cyberbullying. I wanted to find out what other middle grade principals experience and the relationship of bullying on social networking sites to disruption at school. I did not have any preconceived notions of what the findings would be. This study served multiple purposes. It provided an opportunity to speak with principals candidly about their experiences. It opened my eyes to the extent that cyberbullying has been causing disruptions in school. I was unaware that sexting was mentioned by 6 out of the 10 principals as a problem. I was amazed that grades 5-6 had more bullying than cyberbullying and surprised that racial terms were used to harass other students, but sexism and homophobic terms were not used. It became evident that the community, parents, school, and students need to work together to provide a conducive environment

in which all students can learn (Sergiovanni, 2000). I was surprised that just speaking with the bully did not stop the behavior; parental involvement and consequences changed behaviors. The case study method provided a look into principals' perceptions of cyberbullying in their school buildings. The interviews and focus group allowed for a personal connection and provided more of a response that I would have expected with a survey. I feel that this study could be best followed with research comparing counselor and principal perceptions because principals most often become involved when cyberbullying situations are disciplinary problems and counselors usually become involved when a victim or parent comes forward. Principals and counselors should work together to help students problem solve, make decisions, and protect students (Shariff, 2005). Ignoring cyber situations that occur outside of school is no longer acceptable. Schools have a responsibility to protect students (Shariff, 2005).

### **Summary**

This exploratory qualitative case study investigated principal perceptions to understand the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to the culture of the school as well as effective and ineffective interventions used to limit cyberbullying. In an effort to determine the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of a school and disruption in school, input from school principals was gathered. The findings suggest that the school may provide support to parents, community, and students by adding awareness and strategies for curbing and preventing cyberbullying. Future studies may provide additional support by empowering students and improving communication between students and educators. With a better understanding of what cyberbullying is, schools,

parents, and community can more effectively work to create safer environments for students.

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Appendix A  
Cooperation Letter

April 8, 2010

Dear Heidi Stevenson Welker

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled The Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying: Administrator Perspectives on Social Networking within the <<undisclosed>>. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview principals and conduct principal focus groups. Principals may also provide material from their personal files and notes. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances changes.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

<<undisclosed>>

Appendix B  
Recruitment Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

As a doctoral student at Walden University, I am asking you to participate in my research study entitled *The Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying: Administrator Perspectives on Social Networking*. It is hopeful that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of cyberbullying and provide solutions to reduce or curb these problems.

I am an assistant principal in the district who has experienced cyberbullying incidents from MySpace and Facebook that have impacted the school environment. I will be the only one involved in conducting the interview. An interview will be conducted at a time and a quiet place convenient for you and will last approximately an hour. You may also be chosen to participate in a focus group. The focus group will be conducted at a time and quiet place convenient for you and will last an hour. In the focus group, I will be conducting the session, but there may be a field notes transcriber.

With your permission, the interview and focus group will be audiotaped and some quotations from your interview and focus group session will be used in the dissertation. The interview and focus group will be confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. My doctoral committee will also have access to the transcripts. You may withdraw at any time and this study is completely voluntary.

For this study, I am seeking principals who:

- are licensed in the area of their current administration.
- are willing to share the experiences, disruption, and incidents of cyberbullying or social networking harassment

Would you be interested in participating in this study?

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by email [heidi.stevenson@waldenu.edu](mailto:heidi.stevenson@waldenu.edu), 614-801-3907, 937-605-9411.

Thank you for your consideration of my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Heidi Stevenson Welker

Appendix C  
Recruitment Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

As a doctoral student at Walden University, I am asking you to participate in my research study entitled *The Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying: Administrator Perspectives on Social Networking*. It is hopeful that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of cyberbullying and provide solutions to reduce or curb these problems.

I am an assistant principal in the district who has experienced cyberbullying incidents from MySpace and Facebook that have impacted the school environment. The focus group will be conducted at a time and quiet place convenient for you and will last an hour. In the focus group, I will be conducting the session, but there may be a field notes transcriber.

With your permission, the focus group will be audiotaped and some quotations from the session will be used in the dissertation. The focus group will be confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. My doctoral committee will also have access to the transcripts.

You may withdraw at any time and this study is completely voluntary.

For this study, I am seeking principals who:

- are licensed in the area of their current administration.
- are willing to share the experiences, disruption, and incidents of cyberbullying or social networking harassment

Would you be interested in participating in this study?

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by email [heidi.stevenson@waldenu.edu](mailto:heidi.stevenson@waldenu.edu), 614-801-3907, 937-605-9411.

Thank you for your consideration of my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Heidi Stevenson Welker

## Appendix D Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of *The Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying: Administrator Perspectives on Social Networking*. You were chosen for the study because (a) you are a licensed principal, and (b) are willing to share the experiences, disruption, and incidents of cyberbullying or social networking harassment in your building. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by an investigator named Heidi Stevenson Welker, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to collect narratives of administrators who have experienced disruption from cyberbullying in their buildings and to expand this knowledge into themes that will aim to reduce cyberbullying problems in the future.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions presented by the investigator honestly for approximately one hour. You will be asked to review the transcript and summary of findings at a later date. The interviews will be audiotaped. The consent form must be signed in order for the research to be conducted.

You may also be invited to participate in a focus group, if you agree to be in the focus group, you will be asked to answer questions presented by the investigator honestly for approximately one hour. You will be asked to review the transcript and summary of findings at a later date. The focus group will be audiotaped. This consent form must be signed in order the research to be conducted.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Participation is voluntary and at any time during the participation in study, you may terminate your participation at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions. The benefits of participation may be increased understanding for yourself and other principals who are, have, or will experience cyberbullying disruption at their school building

### **Compensation:**

None

### **Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The investigator will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the investigator will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. All information will be kept in a locked drawer and after 5 years will be destroyed.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the investigator via 937.605.9411 or Heidi.stevenson@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Walden Research Participant Advocate, Dr. Leilani Endicott, at 1800.925.3368 ext. 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-23-10-0307395** and it expires on **June 22, 2011**.

The investigator will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Written or Electronic\* Signature

Investigator's Written or Electronic\* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E  
Consent Form  
Focus Group

You are invited to take part in a research study of *The Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying: Administrator Perspectives on Social Networking*. You were chosen for the study because (a) you are a licensed principal, and (b) are willing to share the experiences, disruption, and incidents of cyberbullying or social networking harassment in your building. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by an investigator named Heidi Stevenson Welker, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to collect narratives of administrators who have experienced disruption from cyberbullying in their buildings and to expand this knowledge into themes that will aim to reduce cyberbullying problems in the future.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be invited to participate in a focus group, if you agree to be in the focus group, you will be asked to answer questions presented by the investigator honestly for approximately one hour. You will be asked to review the transcript and summary of findings at a later date. The focus group will be audiotaped. This consent form must be signed in order the research to be conducted.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Participation is voluntary and at any time during the participation in study, you may terminate your participation at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions. The benefits of participation may be increased understanding for yourself and other principals who are, have, or will experience cyberbullying disruption at their school building

**Compensation:**

None

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The investigator will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the investigator will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. All information will be kept in a locked drawer and after 5 years will be destroyed.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the investigator via 937.605.9411 or Heidi.stevenson@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Walden Research Participant Advocate, Dr. Leilani Endicott, at 1800.925.3368 ext. 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-23-10-0307395** and it expires on **June 22, 2011**.

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**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

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Participant's Written or Electronic\* Signature

Investigator's Written or Electronic\* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix F  
Guiding Research Questions and Interview Questions

In the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school? How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of bullying on social networking sites to disruption at school? What interventions and steps have been taken in schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been?

Interview Questions

1. **Can you tell me how your building meets state laws and locally-adopted policies pertaining to anti-discrimination, harassment, and bullying?**

How old are the rules?

When were they written? When were the rules and policies last revised?

Were they developed with/ reviewed with the advice of counsel?

Can you tell me how you educate staff about the requirements?

How often?

Is there a policy manual for staff on anti-discrimination, harassment, bullying, or hazing?

Can you tell me how you educate students and staff about the requirements of anti-discrimination, harassment, bullying, or hazing?

How often?

Is there a policy manual for students?

Would you share the methods that have been effective in curbing or preventing harassment, bullying, and nondiscrimination?

Do the policies include reporting these requirements?

To Whom must students/ staff make reports? How (Writing/ Oral)?

Do you see a demographic prevalence of those who report?

Do you see a demographic prevalence with those who are victims?

Can you tell me how many incidents that you have had with cyberbullying?

**2. Can you tell me how cyberbullying or cyberharassment has impacted your school? If yes, can you tell me:**

What interactions have you had with students about cyberbullying or cyberharassment?

If you have not had a cyberbullying situation, why do you think that is?

Tell me your perception of the impact of cyber problems in your building from teachers, students, and parents.

Can you share a cyberbullying scenario that has occurred this year with a student or a teacher?

If you have had cyberbullying problems with students, have you found any methods that have curbed or reduced incidents? Why do you think that works?

Do you think it is circumstantial? What is the motivation for their behavior? Would aggression be a reason?

If you have had cyberbullying problems, what methods did not work with the students?

Is there a situation that has occurred that you would handle differently based on the policies and procedures?

Is there a situation that has occurred with staff that you would handle differently based on the policies and procedures?

If you have had cyberbullying problems, what types of cyberbullying problems have you had? (texting, sexting, pictures, threats)?

Many districts offer their own district-sponsored intra-district email system for students, this enables students to write to their peers and their teachers during the school day, does your building participate in this email system?

Some cyber problems occur on school property and to-and-from-school with students using their own devices. This has occurred at bus stops, while waiting for school buses, on the school bus, in the cafeteria, restrooms, and in locker rooms. How do you deal with threats when it occurs on school property with their own private device?

Since the recent deaths in Mentor, Ohio, Sycamore, Ohio, and South Hadley, Massachusetts- what do you do when there is inappropriate cyber communications brought to your attention that occurred at night and during the weekend?

Appendix G  
Interview and Research Question Alignment

Interview Question

Research Question

1. Can you tell me how your building meets state laws and locally-adopted policies pertaining to anti-discrimination, harassment, and bullying?	2, 3
2. Can you tell me whether cyberbullying or cyberharassment has impacted your school? If so, tell me more about...	1, 3

Appendix H:  
Focus Group Questions

1. How do you feel cyberbullying has impacted your job?  
Can you describe any memorable experiences?  
What role do you feel you play?  
Tell me more about ....
  
2. Why do boys and girls respond differently?  
Can you explain?  
What are your thoughts?  
How do they resolve conflict?  
Do you believe it is happening to both boys and girls?
  
3. Can you share your feelings on the social skills that students in grades 5-8 have or lack in regards to schools building skills to cyberbullying and cyberinteractions?  
Can you describe the students' behaviors?  
Can you describe what has been effective?  
What education can we provide to assist them?
  
4. In a lot of the interviews, it was mentioned that parents brought in the issues to the school, how do you create awareness of cyberbullying to parents and the community?  
Can you explain?  
How often has this occurred?  
Do you think text messages are becoming a greater issue because parents are more aware of the myspace/facebook because they can't check the cell phone?
  
5. What do you think administrators need in order to curb, prevent, or get ahead of cyberbullying disruption that is impacting our schools?  
Can you explain?  
What additional resources are needed?
  
6. Based on your own individual buildings, have you noticed a relationship phenomena with students involved in cyberbullying as well as other school drama?  
Can you explain?  
Why do you think that is?

Appendix I  
Confidentiality Agreement  
Colleague-Peer Review

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: “The Disruptive Effects of Cyberbullying: Administrator Perspectives on Social Networking” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification, or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.

7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix J  
Sample Transcript Page

I. Can you tell me how your building meets state laws and locally-adopted policies pertaining to anti-discrimination, harassment, and bullying?

P: Okay, First of all in the student handbook, there is a district code of conduct which prohibits discrimination, and bullying. As far as our building, we have chosen to be a little more aggressive, we actually do a powerpoint presentation, we do binding meetings, which are class meetings. Powerpoint presentations are conducted when a school starts, during the year, we go through the powerpoint presentation that delineates and exactly what bullying is, and identifies what bullying is. We give examples of what it [means] to help clarify in the student minds and then progress through the fact that it [anti-discrimination, harassment, and bullying] is not acceptable behavior. [We] move down through that there will be serious consequences for continued acts of harassment or bullying.

I. Is there an actual policy manual for staff or students?

P: There is an actual policy manual. We have of course, there is the code of conduct, information on the website, and there is a part as I have said in the student handbook; also we put together a staff handbook for our building. We also go through with the staff at the staff meeting at the beginning of the year talking about problems and in fact, it is to be brought to the attention to the office. Not to be taken lightly.

I: Okay.

I: Would you share the methods that have been effective in curbing or preventing the harassment, you kind of gone into that a little bit when you described the powerpoint, is there anything that you have noticed that has been effective in curbing or preventing harassment, bullying, or antidiscrimination?

P: One of the things, that... of course I go through with students and we do it in a non-threatening manner with information ...put together matter of fact information to solve problems. If problems persist, we put together also a video for the students and I start off with the video explaining was explaining what harassment and bullying was and then we have students act out/ the students are our actors in the video and portray different scenerios / that proved to be effective with the students and caught students' attention because their peers were on the video. Role playing everything; cyberbullying, text messages, emails, facebook all those types of things that then at the end if you feel have been subjected to a subject like this, you need bring it our attention we need to run with that and that proved very effective we thought.

Appendix K  
Research Questions, Themes, Codes

RQ 1: In the perception of middle grade principals in a single school district, what is the relationship of cyberbullying to the culture of the school?

**Prevention and Intervention Impact Culture**

Policy  
Attention  
Relationships  
Following policy  
Protecting self  
Getting help  
Class meetings  
Presentations  
Tell/ Report  
Record  
Difficult to gather proof  
Refusal to come to the office  
Awareness  
Truth  
Letters to parents  
Records

RQ 2: How do the middle grade principals perceive the relationship of cyberbullying on social networking sites to disruption at school?

**Indirect and Relational Aggression**

Oppression  
Mean girls  
Grudge  
Allies  
Boys  
Don't like  
Mean muggin'  
Instigating  
Friends  
Comments  
Boyfriend/girlfriend

**Technology**

Text messages  
Facebook  
MySpace  
Forwarding  
pictures  
naked pictures  
comments on district software  
cyberbullying  
social media  
phones

Relationships  
 Socially acceptable  
 Own version  
 Insecurity  
 Self confidence  
 Exclusion  
 Talking  
 Names  
 Jealousy  
 Anger  
 Lies  
 Bumping into  
 Girls  
 Threats  
 Not comfortable  
 Identity  
 Needs help  
 Involved  
 Ugly  
 Snitch  
 Mean  
 Back and forth  
 Rumors  
 Hurting others  
 Spin on it  
 Picked on  
 Spreads fast  
 Racial terms

RQ 3: What interventions and steps have been taken in the schools to limit cyberbullying and how effective do principals perceive them to have been?

**Technology (see above)**

**Teaching and Learning**

Modeling  
 Professional development  
 Videos  
 Powerpoint  
 Parents

**Leadership**

incidents  
 reports  
 records  
 fights  
 parents

Informing  
Communication  
Discussions with parents, students  
Messages to kids by kids  
Teach kids  
Treat others  
Learning tools  
Meaningful  
Never delete  
Offer solutions

bus suspension  
communication  
police  
consequences  
small-big- spiral  
neighborhood  
ties up day  
large conflict  
outside school  
suspensions  
Face to face  
Gun violence

## Curriculum Vitae

**Heidi Stevenson Welker**

imathguru@yahoo.com

**ACADEMIC BACKGROUND**

2005-Present	Ph.D. Doctoral Student, Walden University. Specialization K-12 Educational Leadership, (expected graduation, Fall 2010)	
2009	School Superintendent License	University of Dayton Dayton, OH
2004	School Principal Licensure	University of Dayton Dayton, OH
2002	Master of Education Educational Leadership	University of Dayton Dayton, OH
2001	Math and Social Studies Certification 4-9	Central State University Wilberforce, OH
2000	Bachelor of Arts Marketing Management	Cedarville University Cedarville, OH
1999	Associate of Science Marketing Management	Clark State Comm. College Springfield, OH
1998	Summer Studies British History, European Economics	University of Bath Bath, UK
1998	High School Diploma	Shawnee High School Springfield, OH

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

&lt;&lt;undisclosed&gt;&gt;

2007-Present

&lt;&lt;undisclosed&gt;&gt;

Assistant Principal

**Responsibilities include:**

- Responsible for Master Scheduling for entire building, 860 students, 90 staff members

- Provide educational leadership and resources to staff
- Interacted and provided data to improve test scores in math, reading, and science.
- Perform inservice with staff on procedures, curriculum
- Write and edit staff handbook and procedures for PVMS.
- Attend conferences on safety, intervention, prevention of academic and behavioral needs, improving accountability, and testing.
- Provide necessary materials and information on testing and curriculum.
- Interact with parent, staff, and community providing open lines of communication.
- Provided crisis leadership when a device exploded at school; in charge of 860 students and staff working with police and fire department as well as the media and parents.
- Discipline, conferences, mediation, goal setting, intervention and prevention of middle school students.
- Encourage the theme of achievement and relationships.
- Implementation of silent mentor, guided study, and intervention programs.
- Perform teacher evaluations while motivating and guiding teachers to strive for excellence.

### **Dayton Public Schools**

2004-2006

Belmont High School

Assistant Principal

### **Responsibilities included:**

- Responsible for OGT testing, materials, and administration.
- Responsible for data driven instructional changes and modifications to curriculum within the building.
- Responsible for Intervention Assistance Team, Special Education Accommodations, and training for Alternate Assessments.
- Attended conferences on middle/ high school scheduling, educational research, intervention assistance teams, at-risk students, school to prison pipeline, and safety.
- Provide educational leadership and resources to staff.
- Responsible for planning, developing, and finding science, math, social studies, and language arts curriculum
- Perform teacher evaluations while motivating teachers to strive for excellence.
- Work with staff to increase engaging activities, lesson plans
- Perform inservice on school procedures, curriculum, and testing.
- Write and edit staff handbook and crisis plan for BHS.
- Interact positively with faculty members and administrators.
- Provide educational leadership through serving on committees and executing special projects to further high educational standards
- Assess continuous improvement goals and encourage staff to meet our goals and mission
- Provide mediation with staff, students, and parents to open lines of communication to better serve our stakeholders
- Provide information necessary to improve instruction and increase standard based instruction
- Interact with parent groups about the Ohio Graduation Test answering questions and holding sessions for parents and students to learn more about the ever-changing assessments
- Charting, mapping, and compiling data in the areas of attendance, expulsions, detentions, suspensions, and progress of the Ohio Proficiency Test, Ohio Graduation Test
- Serving the Belmont staff, students, and community in any way possible.
- Discipline, mediation, and conferences to assist and modify student behavior.

- Compose and administer exams and evaluate student performance.
- Advise and counsel students and work on behavior modifications.
- Responsible for all testing and assessment within the building
- Using Baldrige and Pathwise to generate staff buy-in
- Encourage the theme of computer based learning and the use of technology
- Responsible for IAT, IEP, and special education discipline for Belmont High School
- Liaison with Central State University, Cedarville University, University of Dayton, Wright State University, and Antioch University.
- Liaison with Early Childhood Longitudinal Research Study coordinator
- Clinical Faculty at Wright State University
- Nominated Top 40 Business Professionals Under 40 in Dayton, Ohio
- 2007 Chinese Bridge Delegate

### **Dayton Public Schools**

2005

Dayton Digital High School

Summer School Principal

#### **Responsibilities included:**

- Responsible for Pilot Dayton Public Schools Digital Summer High School operations.
- Provide educational leadership through serving teachers in obtaining materials, support, and training.
- Provide curriculum assistance on the online activities as well as offline activities to support teachers.
- Responsible for discipline, attendance, data, success, and leadership.
- Monitor special education students to ensure accommodations are being met.
- Provide curriculum materials when needed to improve instruction.
- Mediation and intervention assistance to all students.
- Encouragement and interaction with parents, community, and students to increase public relations and higher student performance
- Performance in DSS morphed into the Dayton Technology Design High School for Dayton Public Schools.

### **Springfield City Schools**

2001-2003

9<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher

2004

7/8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher

#### **Responsibilities included:**

- Responsible for planning, developing, preparing and implementing an effective mathematics curriculum, management and student assessment.
- Devise and prepare daily lesson plans, materials, teaching aids and demonstrations to effectively convey critical concepts and factual knowledge in Algebra, Geometry, Probability, Statistics, and Measurement.
- Develop engaging daily classroom presentations; assign work projects; review and discuss lesson objectives and class performance.
- Stimulate and motivate students by generating excitement and enthusiasm; encourage exploration of new concepts, joy in learning and pride in performance.
- Provide clear explanations, creative approaches and extra tutoring as required.

- Compose and administer exams and grade student performance. Advise and counsel individual students in academic areas and on aspects of student life.
- Collaborate with district math team to write quarterly math assessments that met the state standards.
- Communicate with parents on their child's progress, fostering excellent professional relations.
- Interact positively with faculty members and administrators. Provide educational leadership through serving on committees and executing special projects to further high educational standards.
- Attend conferences on IAT, special education, evaluations, Pathwise, Praxis, and IB.
- Secretary of faculty action committee. Take notes, collaborate with staff, sent out changes and new policies.
- Member of continuous improvement, behavior, IEP, IAT teams.
- SEA representative for the middle school.

## **SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

- Nine years in education: teaching and administration primarily in middle and high school.
- Selected as Chinese Bridge Delegate (2007)
- Nominated Top 40 Business Professionals Under 40 in Dayton, Ohio
- Five years in administration.
- Particular strength in crisis management, multicultural environments, and in raising test scores on state-mandated standardized tests.
- Responsible for data driven instructional changes and modifications to curriculum.
- Responsible for master schedule and building usage.
- Particular interest and research in intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation, societal change, and violence in schools.
- Participant in several conferences on leadership, IB, Scheduling, At-Risk students, current research, accountability, and state testing.

## **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- <<undisclosed>>