

Analyzing, Creating, Then Sharing Messages about Cyberbullying in the Middle- and High-School Classroom

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Abstract

As children today spend a vast amount of time online, it is important for them to understand and engage in responsible behaviors. Unfortunately, cyberbullying is highly prominent in many digital spaces amongst youth and can lead to devastating consequences. This qualitative case study examines the artifacts, experiences, and perceptions of students in a rural school in the Midwestern U.S. who engaged in an educational unit in which they analyzed, created, and shared digital messages on the topic of cyberbullying. The students in this study demonstrated their understanding of what cyberbullying is, its consequences, and advocated for actions to address the issue. These findings connect with and build upon existing scholarship in media literacy, digital literacy, digital citizenship, and cyberbullying and demonstrate how children can examine problematic social issues and seek to improve their communities through creating and sharing digital messages.

Keywords: media literacy, digital literacy, digital citizenship, cyberbullying

Introduction

As children today spend vast amounts of time online, including engaging with social media, it is important for students to develop strong media literacy and digital citizenship skills to help them navigate online environments in safe and productive ways (International Society for Technology in Education, 2016). Teachers are crucial purveyors of media literacy and digital citizenship skills and need to help children understand ways they can effectively and responsibly use digital technologies, including to improve their communities. While research has explored in-service and pre-service teachers' perspectives on media literacy and digital citizenship (Ata & Yıldırım, 2019; Snyder, 2016; von Gillern et al., 2024a), further research is needed to understand specific classroom activities teachers can use to support their students' development of these crucial skills. This study aims to illustrate how teachers can use the Analyze, Create, Then Share (ACTS) Framework (von Gillern et al., 2022) to help their students learn about and address cyberbullying. The ACTS Framework is a useful structure for helping students study socially relevant topics because it integrates three areas of importance: media literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship.

Literature Review

Media Literacy

Media literacy refers to “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication” (National Association of Media Literacy Educators, n.d.). In other words, students use media literacy skills when they critically evaluate the relevance and validity of information accessed through any form of media, including print media, websites, social media, images, art, and more. Likewise, students employ media literacy skills to create media that follows norms for each type of media and communicate in ways that are effective for each genre (Hobbs, 2007). As digital technologies emerge and evolve, media literacy skills need to adapt and develop accordingly. Online communication, including via social media, has influenced the media literacy opportunities and challenges faced by individuals and societies (Cho et al., 2022; Manca et al., 2021).

Media literacy scholars have used the perspectives of protectionism and empowerment to understand the ways media literacy skills are used and taught (Potter, 2022). Protectionism focuses on supporting individuals and students to safely navigate media environments and use critical evaluation skills to determine the credibility of media messages (Friesem, 2018). Empowerment, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of helping people productively participate in and enact change in their communities (RobbGrieco, 2014). Both perspectives are valuable for media literacy, and its underpinning processes of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating with all forms of media, skills that are influenced and accompanied by digital literacy skills.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the skills needed to “navigate and participate in a variety of digital environments” (von Gillern et al., 2022, p. 146). Scholars in digital literacy recognize that the emergence of new technologies necessitates new types of literacy skills that are often multimodal, interactive, and non-linear in nature (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Digital literacy differs from media literacy in the current context in that it refers to the technical and navigational skills for effectively using digital tools, understanding the norms of digital environments, and understanding aspects of online reading such as formulating appropriate search terms and questions, toggling between different tabs and tools, and choosing the best type of digital tool for the task. Further, as O’Brien and Scharber (2008) note, digital literacy involves determining and utilizing effective strategies and tools for goal-driven behaviors in digital spaces as well as being able to effectively bridge and navigate both digital and non-digital media messages and spaces. While overlap exists between digital literacy and media literacy skills (Wuyckens et al., 2022), they are distinct concepts that can play complementary roles in classroom learning and community participation, including as relates to digital citizenship.

Digital Citizenship

Scholarly perspectives on digital citizenship often align with conceptualizations of media literacy and digital literacy but often add an emphasis on civic engagement (Mossberger et al., 2008). The work of Choi et al. (2017) identified common themes in the digital citizenship literature including digital ethics, information and media literacy, and participation/engagement. von Gillern et al., (2024b) drew upon these ideas and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of survey data from 860 secondary literacy and social studies teachers that established a four-factor model of digital citizenship with the following constructs: informed citizen, civic know-how, digital ethics, and participation and engagement. The construct of informed citizen focuses on the value of using digital technologies to learn about social and political issues and critically evaluating their credibility (Martens & Hobbs, 2015). Civic know-how focuses on the importance of understanding mechanisms and processes for participating in civil society (Mossberger et al., 2008). The work of Ribble and colleagues (2004; 2015) illustrates the value of digital ethics, including the importance of responsible, legal, and safe behavior in online environments. Participation and engagement focus on how people can use digital tools and platforms to build civic connections and effect change in their community (Mossberger et al., 2008). While digital citizenship is relevant to a myriad of issues related to learning and civic engagement, there is one topic connected to digital citizenship that is highly important yet has received limited attention: cyberbullying (Vlaanderen et al., 2020).

Cyberbullying

Unfortunately, cyberbullying is extremely common among children in the United States and around the world and can lead to “...low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration, and a variety of other emotional and psychological problems” (Cyberbullying Research Center, n.d.). Scholarship has explored cyberbullying from the perspective of media literacy and found the proliferation and omnipresence of digital technologies including the Internet, social media, and smartphones has led to high rates of online bullying (Arslan & Topal, 2023; Bhat et al., 2010). Notably, given the vast amount of time children spend with digital and online technologies,

cyberbullying can easily transcend school grounds and follow children home and wherever they go.

Existing scholarship illustrates strategies for helping students understand and mitigate cyberbullying in their lives and communities. Meyers and Cowie (2019), for example, demonstrates that it is crucial for students to understand what cyberbullying is and its impacts. Such educational efforts can help students focus on cyberbullying in a broad sense as well as relates to their specific schools and communities (Cross et al., 2015). Additionally, research illustrates that it is valuable for students to reflect on their own digital experiences and ways that they may have engaged in and/or been a victim of cyberbullying, as this helps them become more aware of their actions and opportunities to address cyberbullying within their lives and among their peer groups (Lan et al., 2022). Finally, students benefit from learning about concrete actions they can take to address cyberbullying, including blocking cyberbullies, reporting harmful content on digital platforms, and informing trusted adults (StopBullying.gov, n.d.).

Given the high prevalence and severe consequences of cyberbullying and informed by existing scholarship on cyberbullying education, we wanted to have students explore these issues in an authentic way to promote awareness and mitigate its effects in their community. To do so, we recognized that students must have the necessary digital and media literacy skills and would likely benefit from a structured approach. Thus, we utilized an approach designed to promote digital citizenship, media literacy, and civic engagement for school children the Analyze, Create, Then Share (ACTS) Framework (von Gillern et al., 2022).

The ACTS Framework

Media literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship are different yet complementary concepts, as outlined above, which are often viewed and treated as separate concepts (Wuyckens et al., 2022). As noted by von Gillern et al. (2022), the ACTS Framework was developed as an approach to integrate these three concepts in a meaningful and productive way. As the name suggests, the ACTS Framework involves students analyzing, creating, and then sharing media messages to develop an understanding of civic issues and take action to raise awareness and advocate for change. Media literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship are all addressed in this set of processes, including accessing and evaluating media messages, developing and utilizing skills to produce thoughtful and compelling multimodal messages, and then sharing their work with their peers and community to promote change.

Study Purpose

Inspired by the aforementioned perspectives, we facilitated the following study and ACTS unit focused on the topic of cyberbullying, including its effects and ways to mitigate its impact. In the current study, we bring together media literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship with a socially relevant topic to understand how students can develop and utilize these skills to learn about and take action related to cyberbullying. Our research was guided by the following research question (RQs):

- In what ways does use of the ACTS Framework help students learn about cyberbullying?

Methodology

Study Context and Participants

Upon meeting at a professional development conference, Sam and Mr. Daniels (all participant names are pseudonyms) discussed the importance of children participating in community change. We passionately agreed that students deserve opportunities to investigate civic issues that affect their community and advocate for positive change. As the conference concluded, we went back to our respective roles as a literacy teacher educator and a middle- and high-school media teacher, but our mutual interest in identifying an opportunity for students to engage with meaningful real-life issues led to continued discussions.

Given that Open Plains School District (pseudonym) is located in a rural location in a Midwestern state, we considered issues that directly affect that community, such as pollution and water-quality. While these are worthy topics, Mr. Daniels suggested an issue that acutely affects his students and the community in a prominent way on an unfortunately regular basis: cyberbullying. Open Plains community members have recognized and discussed cyberbullying as an issue that affects their community, and occasionally, the topic is briefly addressed in classrooms. Yet, Mr. Daniels and his colleagues felt that something more could be done to address this insidious issue. After conferring with administration and colleagues, Mr. Daniels and Sam decided to facilitate activities on the topic of cyberbullying to promote awareness and advocate for change in the Open Plains community.

Sam and Mr. Daniels co-developed the unit by discussing the ACTS Framework (von Gillern et al., 2022), developing questions to guide student analysis, identifying valuable online materials, and considering available classroom resources. We facilitated the activity in four different classrooms (one middle-school and three high-school) by two teachers. The unit by introducing the ACTS Framework and discussing with students how it can be utilized to engage with digital platforms and promote digital citizenship and civic engagement.

Overview of ACTS Unit

Analyze

After we introduced each class to the unit and the ACTS Framework, we began the analysis stage of the activity. We developed a list of guiding questions that we presented in a handout to scaffold student thinking and learning. These questions included:

- What is cyberbullying?
- How does cyberbullying occur?
- Why is cyberbullying problematic?

- What are ways students, schools, and communities can prevent and address cyberbullying?
- What are valuable resources for students, teachers, and schools on cyberbullying

We presented students with a list of websites (including stopbullying.gov and cyberbullying.org) to help students learn more about the topic and analyze key features and facts about cyberbullying. Students were also encouraged to find additional resources online that would help them answer the guiding questions. As students browsed additional websites, we encouraged them to think about the credibility of the authors and organizations, including by examining their reputation, history, and expertise on the topic.

Students primarily worked individually while answering the guiding questions, but they occasionally shared interesting information, websites, and perspectives with their peers as they analyzed resources on cyberbullying. As students worked, we circulated to chat with students and learn about their findings and provide guidance when needed. The children were largely focused during this process, as they analyzed resources and developed their understanding of cyberbullying.

Create

On the second day of the ACTS unit, each class reviewed their analysis documents and as a group discussed key facets of cyberbullying to prime student thinking for creating an artifact focused on educating their school community on cyberbullying. Each class also discussed the purpose of and audience for their messages to help them tailor their artifacts. The central purpose, as the classes discussed, was to raise awareness of cyberbullying, including its prevalence, impacts, and methods for mitigation. The audience, they understood, was their school community. This not only included students in their classrooms, but the school community more broadly, including students, teachers, and administrators.

Mrs. Jones and Mr. Daniels took slightly different approaches for facilitating artifact creation. Mrs. Jones had recently worked with her students on Canva (canva.com). Her students had developed a strong foundation for creating compelling digital posters on Canva, and she wanted to provide her students an opportunity to refine and develop their skills further. Mrs. Jones expected each student to create their own artifact, and she also provided more structure for students, such as encouraging them to provide a clear overview of cyberbullying and ways to address it.

Mr. Daniels, on the other hand, allowed students to choose whatever creation platform students wanted. Mr. Daniels' students utilized a variety of platforms, including PowerPoint, Canva, Instagram, and even an animated .gif file generator. He gave students wide latitude on what they wanted to convey and how they wanted to convey it. Some of his students created more direct "stop bullying" artifacts, while others created artifacts that provided more information about what constitutes cyberbullying and how it harms victims. Mr. Jones also gave his students a choice to create artifacts individually, with a partner, or in a small group.

After students created a solid first draft of their artifacts, they had an opportunity to share their creations and receive feedback from peers and their teacher. This feedback typically addressed both content and style that then allowed students to revise their artifact before sharing with a larger audience. Both Mrs. Jones' and Mr. Daniels' approaches led to students developing creative and compelling artifacts that provided the audience with important information on cyberbullying and advocate for the audience to take action against it.

Share

After finalizing their creations, students shared their artifacts in various ways. All students shared with their classmates. Many students shared their artifacts with pride. They believed they created compelling artifacts on an important and authentic issue in their community. Students had the option, though, to share their messages more broadly. Mr. Daniels had discussed the project with the principal and received permission for his students to share their artifacts on the school announcement system that was broadcast to televisions stationed throughout the school. As the lead supervisor of the school newspaper, Mr. Daniels also arranged for interested students to share their artifacts on the newspaper website and its associated social media profiles. At least one student also shared her digital poster via her Instagram feed.

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative case study examines the artifacts, experiences, and perceptions of students in a rural school in the Midwestern U.S. Student data included 63 student analysis worksheets focused on cyberbullying and 29 digital artifacts, primarily in the form of digital posters. As illustrated in the description of the analyze portion of the activity above, the worksheets supported students in their analysis of media by providing guiding questions about what cyberbullying is and its consequences.

Data was analyzed qualitatively using MAXQDA qualitative coding application in a two-phase process. In the first phase of coding, a research team member applied descriptive and process codes to the data (Saldaña, 2022). Descriptive codes were utilized for analyzing the student data, a process that involves identifying segments of data that are potentially valuable for addressing the research questions and applying nouns that capture a key idea of the data segment. Sample codes include *definition*, *consequences*, *actions*, and *resources*. In the second phase, two researchers independently examined all of the codes to identify potential themes for the research question. The two researchers then met to share and discuss their preliminary themes in a dialogic reliability check to ensure they identified similar patterns (Åkerlind, 2005) and then deliberated to finalize themes for each research question. After agreeing on these themes, a researcher contacted both participating teachers to engage in a member check (Creswell & Poth, 2016) to verify that the identified themes seemed accurate and authentic to the teachers. Collectively, these processes promoted reliability and trustworthiness of the data analysis and themes identified (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Results

Collectively, students shared their messages on cyberbullying in a variety of ways with authentic audiences on an issue that students openly recognized negatively impacts their community. Through examining students' analysis documents and artifacts, we identified three themes related to students' knowledge about cyberbullying: 1) its definition and how it occurs, 2) consequences of cyberbullying, 3) actions to address cyberbullying.

Definition and How it Occurs

Student artifacts included definitions of cyberbullying and how and where it occurs (see Figure 1). Students examined and drew inspiration for their ideas via websites including stopbullying.gov and unicef.org. Students gave definitions that reveal varying levels of complexity and their understanding of cyberbullying. Some students had relatively basic definitions, such as "Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online." Many students, however, had more robust definitions. A middle-school girl, Becka, wrote: "Cyberbullying is where you online bully someone using threats, harmful words, and making fun of someone." David, a high-school boy, provided a more detailed definition:

It is when people target another person for something they can or cannot control such as how they look, live, or what they're interested in. Such as someone who dresses outside social norms, has a physical disformation or mental struggle, and judging someone for the condition of their home and belonging.

Many students also reflected on how and where cyberbullying occurs. They noted there are a variety of methods and platforms that people use to cyberbully. Stephanie, a high-schooler, wrote, "Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place through cellular devices such as cellphones, laptops, ipads, etc. It can take place on social media apps like TikTok, SnapChat, Facebook, Twitter, etc." Kara, a middle-schooler, wrote: "Cyberbullying is online bullying where you harass people, comment rude things and say rude things to someone over text, email, online games, social media, etc." Another student, Brian, specifically examined cyberbullying in video gaming (See Figure 2.)

Students largely gave definitions for cyberbullying that demonstrated their understanding of cyberbullying. While they may have relied on websites to give statistics and credibility to the artifacts that they created, defining cyberbullying and how it occurs for them was through their own words and perceptions. This activity created a platform for meaningful engagement for students as they were able to search for, locate, and analyze online sources and discover new insights about cyberbullying that they then conveyed in their own messages.

Consequences

Through this activity, students not only learned about what cyberbullying is and how it occurs, but they also learned about and reflected upon its consequences, which, as they noted, are vast and can be devastating (see Figure 3). Katie wrote that cyberbullying "can cause depression, sadness, angry, and frustration," and Layla wrote that "Cyberbullying is problematic because it could affect someone's mental health, making them suicidal or wanting to harm someone or

themselves.” Billy, a high-schooler, noted “When teens get bullied they start getting insecure, and dont want to be social and in todays age where social acceptance is such an important part of the adolescent experience.” While most students, understandably, focused on the consequences of the victim, a few also described consequences for the cyberbullies themselves. Nicki wrote that “The person who is cyberbullying can also lose future jobs since they choose to bully people online.” Ultimately, students recognized the terrible consequences that can stem from cyberbullying.

Figure 1

Student artifact providing overview of cyberbullying



The activity gave students a space to think deeply about a phenomenon that is commonplace in their community and society more broadly. The fact that cyberbullying was a prominent issue in

Open Plains High School, as noted by Mr. Daniels and confirmed by many of the participating students throughout the unit, allowed students to analyze information from online sources alongside their own personal encounters, which produced valuable insights and meaningful learning. This activity helped them reflect on the emotional consequences of cyberbullying. Going beyond the immediate emotional distress that victims would experience, students highlighted that cyberbullying can lead to mental health issues, depression, and suicidality. Students further demonstrated consequences of cyberbullying go beyond the suffering of victims themselves, as it could also trigger victims to cause harm to others around them.

Students' perspectives on the consequences of cyberbullying additionally shed light on social exclusion that could happen from being a victim or a perpetrator of cyberbullying. Students highlight the importance of social acceptance for them and how being a victim of cyberbullying can cause teenagers to become insecure. This social anxiety can go well beyond the online world into how victims perceive themselves offline, leading to isolation and disrupting potential for supportive social connections. Additionally, their self-perceptions are influenced by cyberbullying, which can negatively impact their attendance in school and interfere with their academic experiences and achievements. Moving beyond the consequences for victims, cyberbullies themselves risk facing the repercussions of their behavior in the future when it comes to job opportunities, especially in situations where digital footprints of their online misconduct are still present and obtainable.

Figure 2

Student artifact on cyberbullying in video games

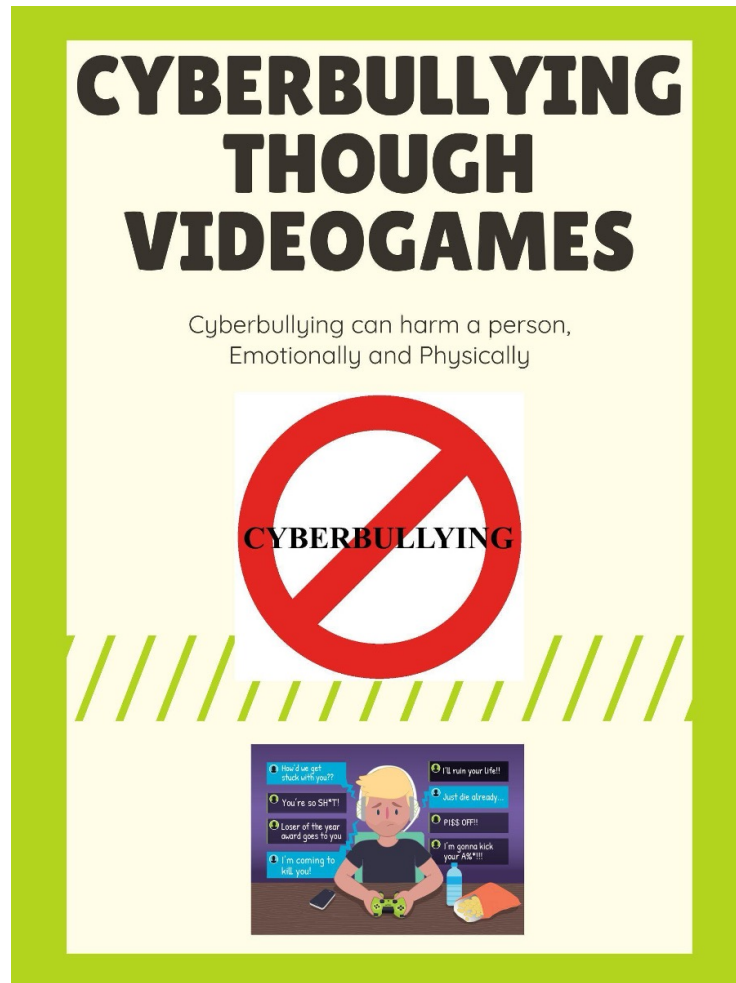
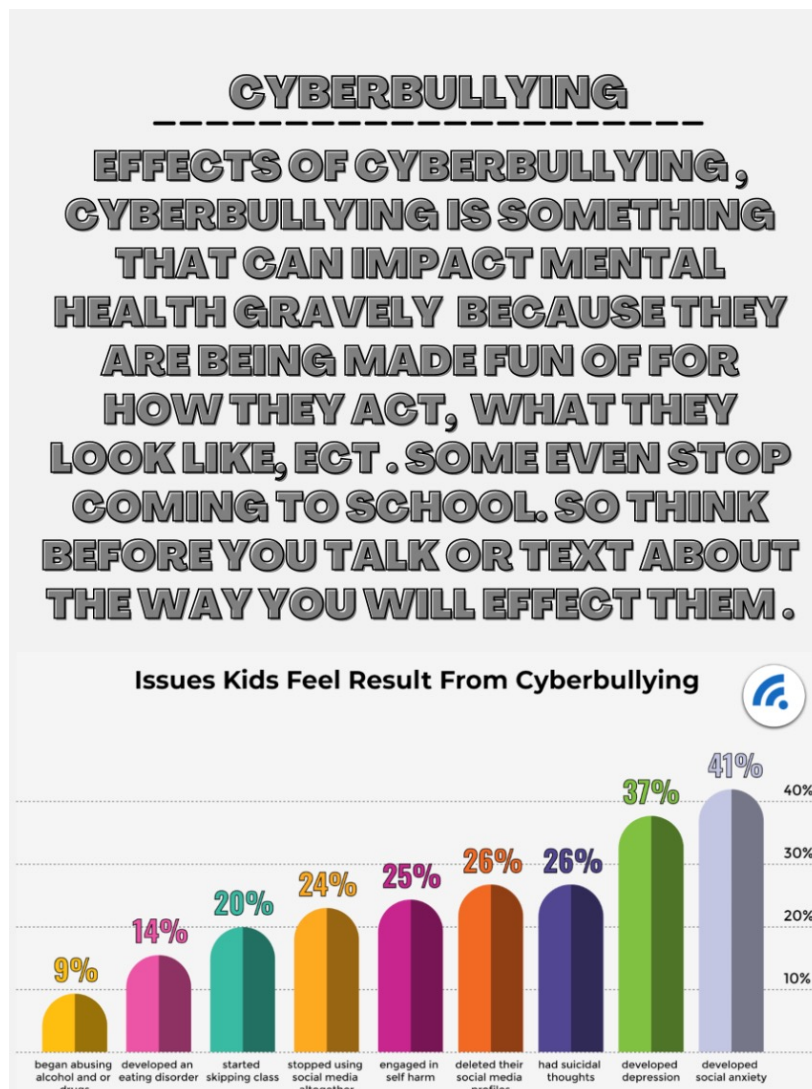


Figure 3
Student artifact on consequences of cyberbullying



Actions

Given the severe consequences of cyberbullying, students reflected on relevant actions that people can utilize to mitigate cyberbullying. In their writing and digital posters, students shared specific actions that people, including victims and bystanders, can take to address cyberbullying. Tara wrote that students “should report [cyberbullying] to a teacher or the counselor and make sure an adult or authority is aware of what is going on, if they don’t the problem will become an even bigger problem and will cause lots of issues.” Kayla echoed this perspective and noted the value of “building a safe school environment, and creating a community-wide bullying prevention strategy.”

Students also highlighted actions beyond the school environment. For example, Brayden noted “you can block [their account] or ignore it but if it gets out of hand report it.” Similarly, Clayton wrote: “Block or delete accounts of that cyber bully.” While blocking, deleting, and reporting

accounts may not be a comprehensive strategy, expert sources note these can be valuable and effective ways of reducing the frequency and impact of cyberbullying.

Student artifacts revealed the need for schools and communities to take cyberbullying more seriously. Students noted the responsibility falls on the school authority to create awareness within the school and the community, an awareness that creates safe spaces, counseling, and resources for victims of cyberbullying. Additionally, students also noted that schools should train teachers on how to respond when a case of cyberbullying is reported. This could involve school authorities identifying frequent platforms where cyberbullying occurs and monitoring and taking action as needed. Further, students illustrated that victims or potential victims can help prevent cyberbullying before it takes root by blocking, deleting, and reporting accounts that engage in harassment.

Collectively, these three themes not only helped students learn about cyberbullying themselves, but also create and share messages with the school community about cyberbullying, its impact, and methods for mitigation.

Discussion

The students in this study demonstrated their understanding of what cyberbullying is, its consequences, and actions to address the issue by analyzing online resources and creating and sharing their own digital messages. These findings connect with and build upon existing scholarship in media literacy, digital literacy, digital citizenship, and cyberbullying. The students' engagement with the social topic of cyberbullying connects with literature in media literacy, particularly as relates to the perspectives of protectionism and empowerment (Potter, 2022). As cyberbullying leads to direct harm to victims, examining and addressing cyberbullying aligns with the concept of protectionism and its efforts to reduce negative media experiences for students (Friesem, 2018). Helping students safely and responsibly navigate digital environments is central to protectionist perspectives, and the students in this study directly investigated cyberbullying to learn from expert sources on the topic on what it is, its consequences, and methods for mitigation. Relatedly, students' artifact creation and sharing processes reflect empowerment (RobbGrieco, 2014), as their efforts promoted agency to advocate for positive change in their community.

The study activity also complements perspectives on digital literacy. Multimodality is a central issue in digital literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008), and the students' created multimodal artifacts as part of the unit. In their creation processes, students reflected on and made decisions to utilize different communicative modes to convey their messages. Different students made different choices about which communicative modes to include in their artifacts that occurred in various combinations. This is a valuable process and supported by the work of Klein et al., (2016) who found that students learned more content when blending the visual and the textual ideas, thus images with shorter written segments supported student learning. Students' processes involved both creating and sharing digital multimodal content, which are activities related to digital literacy (Spire et al., 2018). From the literature and from the findings in this study, we see the importance of teachers embedding multimodal composition into classroom instruction.

The results from this study connect with digital citizenship literature in a few important ways. Digital ethics, participation, and engagement are key concepts in the digital citizenship literature (Choi et al., 2017). Digital ethics permeated this ACTS Framework activity on cyberbullying. Online harassment and bullying issues are ethical issues, and students in this study examined what cyberbullying is and its consequences, which led to deeper understandings of this problematic issue and its effects. Additionally, by creating and sharing messages (i.e., participating in and engaging with their community), students advocated for more ethical online environments in ways that address and aimed to mitigate cyberbullying. This active participation and advocacy aligns with cyberbullying scholarship that recognizes effective programs provide students agency to address cyberbullying in their communities (Cross et al., 2015; Lan et al., 2022). The present study also contributes to the limited scholarship examining the relationship between digital citizenship and cyberbullying (Vlaanderen et al., 2020). The students in this study demonstrated that they could develop and utilize digital citizenship skills by examining and creating messages on the topic of cyberbullying to advocate for better and more respectful digital environments.

This study has additional connections to and implications for classroom practice, including as relates to students' engagement with authentic issues, reading with a purpose, and developing academic writing and communication skills. An additional implication is the use of authentic issues to build student engagement (Magnifico, 2010). Students in Open Plains recognized cyberbullying as a real issue affecting their community, which promoted their buy-in and engagement. Teachers and administrators also shared in this concern, so it became a good topic for collaborating around an authentic issue that reaches the context of place and time for their school and community. The project-based learning framework presented by Boardman et al., 2021 highlights the need for authenticity and recommends "connecting tasks that are authentic to students' lives and stories with tasks that are authentic to audiences and the tools of the professionals, in order to support students in understanding disciplinary skills as relevant to their own experiences" (p. 16). Their framework, which shares some features with the ACTS Framework, shows how authenticity reaches topics, genre, students' backgrounds, and relevant disciplinary connections.

Authentic activities and topics also facilitate purposeful reading. When curiosity is piqued and there is a need to know, then the reading, comprehension, and analysis of sources become more meaningful, and reading and annotating have a purpose. Another benefit is that purposeful reading can promote stamina, goal-directed comprehension, and successful engagement with complex texts (Schoenbach et al., 2012). Students' engagement with the texts and the teachers' instruction in the ACTS lesson provided the scaffolding for students to find, preview, read, annotate, and share. Students also noticed that the texts they examined could provide models for what they might produce, naturally integrating their reading and creation processes.

A final implication is the development of effective academic writing when students work towards a goal with their writing, are aware of their audience and context, and are clearly communicating their intended purpose (Graham et al., 2016). As we see in these students' experiences, the analysis of the texts didn't mean the end of the project. The real impetus for developing student understanding is in developing as communicators when students step into the

role of teaching others the important information and positions. Thus, students became civically engaged advocates, as demonstrated in their artifacts. Effective academic communication hinges on students making rhetorical decisions that are based on audience, purpose, and context. The students' processes and products of creating their artifacts were aligned with these aspects of effective communication. Because these were relevant topics to their school, the students had the added benefit and outcome of publishing their work, which synthesized the need for all of these implications. As students step into roles of being civically engaged, they realize their work has meaning and can lead to real-world impacts and improvements.

Lastly, while we believe the unit was successful and led to student engagement and learning, we occasionally had to navigate student comments that trivialized the topic of cyberbullying. There was a high-school boy who sometimes blamed cyberbullying victims. He said that if the victims cannot handle the hurtful comments they should just not go online. He also said that he sometimes cyberbullies novice players in online video games because their lack of skill causes his team to lose games. This was particularly challenging as other students' comments reflected their difficult experiences as victims of cyberbullying. We handled this boy's comments by facilitating a classroom discussion and allowing other students to respond. Sometimes other students pushed back by respectfully problematizing this boy's statements. For example, a few students responded by pointing out that simply not spending time online is not really a viable option in our modern and digitally-mediated society.

We, as facilitators, addressed these situations cautiously, as we did not want this boy's comments to set the tone for the activity. Nor did we want the boy to feel attacked by us problematizing his statements. Sam, for example, after providing an opportunity for students to respond to such comments, gently encouraged the boy and the class to consider the perspectives of victims to promote empathy and understanding. Ultimately, many people, including students, have differing perspectives on and experiences with various civic topics. When facilitating the discussions on such topics, it is valuable for educators to plan ahead and anticipate where disagreements may occur and develop a plan for addressing these issues.

While this study illustrates how the ACTS Framework activity on cyberbully facilitated meaningful learning for the students, it is not without its limitations. First, this study was conducted in a single rural school district in the Midwestern United States, and the results may have been different in a different location with different participants. Second, this study did not measure or examine the effects of cyberbullying in the period that followed the ACTS activity, which may have revealed if/how cyberbullying activities and impacts may have changed after the activity, and future research should examine not only the classroom experiences but also strive to measure and understand the community impacts of similar activities.

Conclusion

Although this unit focused on cyberbullying, teachers can focus on any authentic issues that are important in their communities, such as climate change, poverty, and LGBTQ+ rights. Through applying the ACTS Framework and analyzing, creating, and sharing civic media messages, teachers can help students learn about social issues and "grow as digitally savvy and civic-

minded citizens” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2019, n.p.). Collectively, English language arts educators are well-positioned to help their students develop their literacy skills and become well-informed citizens capable of promoting change in their community (Mirra, 2022).

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