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Qualitative evaluation of teachers with respect to the implementation of the project of cyber bullying prevention (TABBY) in their classes

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Abstract

The project 'Tabby Trip in EU - Threat Assessment of Bullying Behaviour in Youngsters Transferring Internet Preventive procedures in Europe' (DAPHNE program JUST/2011-2012/DAP/AG/3259) coordinated by the Department of Psychology of Second University of Naples focuses on the prevention of cyberbullying and other related problems. The project aims to train school teachers in the use of social networking and cyberbullying prevention. Tabby Team has developed four videos that serve as a guide to address the various issues of cyberbullying. The videos use four key issues to address cyberbullying: internet identity, permanence of online content, the consequences of actions taken on the internet, and committing of crimes through social networks. The project seeks that school teachers train their students in these issues through the material designed for this purpose. In this paper we present the results of focus groups conducted between February and March 2014, with teachers who had implemented the program in their classes.

Keywords: *cyberbullying, social networks, teachers' training, focus group*

Introduction

The use of technology by children and adolescents is a reality, especially in the case of social networks. Our children and students are digital natives. Digital natives are people born after the appearance of all the communication technology and information we know today (Gardner & Davis, 2013). This means that generations are more skilled in the use of technology, and especially of social networks, than any adult from previous generations.

This leads us to wonder about the risks of using technology, especially when it is made a prime medium for the socialisation of children and young people. Social networks have extended old problems in peer relationships through technology, as it is the case of bullying. The use of social networks has created the problem of cyberbullying (Belsey, 2005), which Smith et al (2006) define as deliberate aggression by an individual or a group, using electronic forms of repeated contact against a victim who cannot easily defend herself or himself. Willard for his part (2004, 2006) places special emphasis on the social dimension of the problem, considering that cyber bullying is being cruel to another person by sending or posting harmful material or participating in other forms of social aggression using the internet or other digital technologies.

Cyberbullying includes the following socially inappropriate behaviour online: harassment, humiliation, intimidation, insults or threats in messages, taunting and using inappropriate language (Chisholm, 2006).

Cyberbullying shares many features with the bullying, without implying that they are equal. It maintains the same characteristics but with the nuances of ICTs. The power imbalance may be set by the fact that the victim cannot remove unpleasant or anonymous aggressor content and repetition can be through harassment action of seeing or reading the aggression.

Cyberbullying has the same characteristics of bullying such as intentionality, repetition and imbalance of power, but we must add anonymity. In this case, the repetition has a different hue. A single action can be repeated many times, when each user of social network share or comments these actions. Anonymity is one of the characteristics to be considered exclusive of cyberbullying (Dehue et al, 2008; Huang & Chou, 2010; Ortega et al, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

In this sense the main objectives of the project TABBY (Threat Assessment of Bullying Behavior in Youngsters Transferring Internet Preventive procedures in Europe. DAPHNE program JUST/2011-2012/DAP/AG/3259) are that the project aims to train school teachers in the use of social networking and cyberbullying prevention. It seeks to:

- Increase knowledge and skills to protect young people when using internet, mobile and social networks.
- Identification of risk factors and assessment of cyberbullying, cyber-threats and sexting.
- Take adequate preventive actions to protect themselves and the victims from such obnoxious behaviours.

The project is developed through four videos that focus on four central themes for preventing cyberbullying:

- The first one is called “Everyone can be everyone”: The aim of this video is that students understand the need to protect their privacy on Internet and especially on social networks sites, and that it is especially important not to accept friendship requests of someone they do not know, or whose real identity they are not sure, because the anonymity made possible by the new technology allows anyone to be anyone.
- The second one is called “Internet, all forever”: The second video shows the potential damage that images and video sharing (even as a joke) can cause to the victim.
- The third video is called “Virtual actions but real consequences”: This video focuses on the possible negative consequences of the improper use of smart phones or tablets. In particular, this video stresses that it’s very important for owners not to leave them unattended, that the information contained on this electronic devices may be used by someone else, as it happens in this video, to create fake profiles on social networks sites, and at best, creating troubles for people.

- The last video is called “Joke or crime? The last video deals with the consequences (for both the author and the victim) arising from sharing images or videos that seriously damage other people reputation. Taking revenge on partner or former partner by using and spreading materials that denigrate or harm their reputation, is an increasingly widespread practice, which highlights control attitudes and a lack of dialogue and reflection.

Participants

We conducted the cyberbullying prevention program TABBY in nine Madrid schools: two private schools and seven public schools. Two public schools were of primary education and five were of secondary education.

We performed focus groups with seven of the nine schools in which we applied the cyberbullying prevention program.

Methodology

We met with the teachers who conducted the cyberbullying prevention program. We made an evaluation of TABBY project. Focus group session lasted two hours with each group. The sessions were recorded and transcribed.

The points of discussion on the focus group session were:

1. Program strengths
2. Program weaknesses
3. Handling weaknesses
4. Training given to teachers
5. Usefulness of the teaching units
6. Usefulness of the prevention program
7. Suggestions for improvement

The focus group were led by one of the researchers who conducted the program TABBY preliminary training with teachers from each school.

Results

1. Program strengths

All teachers consider that the issues developed in the videos were clear and left a clear message on students. The first two videos or topics (Anyone can be anyone and Internet, all forever) were more motivating for students in the discussion and the exhibition cases were also interesting for them.

In schools where the survey form on line was passed, the teachers reported a positive effect on students with respect to the evaluation of their behaviour through different colours that was included at the end of the survey. At the end of each questionnaire, students receive feedback on their own behaviour as a traffic light. At one end of spectrum was the red colour, indicating important problems in cyberbullying or bullying. And at the other end of spectrum was the colour green, indicating no problems in these areas. These colours allow students to start discussions and allow them questioning about the meaning of every colour and its own performance in social networks and Internet. This positive effect occurred especially in younger students.

Primary teachers considered that the content of the videos shown to students were very appropriate for helping them to handle these complex issues. Secondary teachers considered useful the videos for younger students.

The activities proposed in the teaching units are relevant and are useful to start the reflection of the issues raised in the videos.

Two most important issues for teachers were using secure keys in social networks and the emphasis on asking an adult for help when students are in trouble.

2. Program weaknesses

Most secondary teachers in public schools (85%) agree that the videos were not the most appropriate for working with adolescents. They considered that these videos were more appropriate for younger children, and that were very childlike for older ages and that the sound was a distraction for the sessions.

For primary teachers, both from public and private schools, some important issues related with the content of the videos were unclear for students. Further explanation was needed about these issues by the teachers.

Secondary teachers agreed that the video format (based on drawings and not in real persons) made that the protagonists of the video were seen remote from student's reality. For them, videos are treated in a very childish way and this is what makes them unattractive for teens.

Most teachers believed that students' training should be conducted by experts in cyberbullying. They feel that they are not the most appropriate for addressing these issues. Especially in social networks handling.

3. Handling weaknesses

In most schools the videos without sound was presented. Thus the distraction problem was removed because of the video noises.

To avoid problems with the childlike videos, some teachers began the session by explaining to students that the videos could be a little childish for their age. They invited students to watch the videos in order to think about what things they could change in order to make these videos to be closer to them.

In order to approach some issues contained in the videos to the older students, the teachers of public schools used real cases videos like Amanda Todd. This video tells the story of a girl who after suffering multiple situations of harassment, bullying and cyberbullying decides to commit suicide. She tells her story in the video.

A teacher of one public school did not use the video program. She considered unsuitable for the group. She looked for videos of real cases and worked the same subjects. She felt that these cases will allow approaching better to the reality of their students. With elementary school children teachers watched the videos several times. And teachers read them news. The topics of videos were complemented by teaching units. Some teachers searched real news on these topics, and discussed them in the sessions.

4. Training given to teachers

The teachers were given training of four to six hours about the use of social networks, social network security, bullying and cyberbullying. All teachers agreed that the training given to teachers was adequate to handle these issues. But they believe it would be better if they could receive a little more training. Teachers feel a little away from these issues, and especially with respect of the use of social networks. They express that they would like to come to understand better about the different uses of the social networks and of the importance that teenagers given to them.

5. Usefulness of the teaching units

Only private schools used all the lesson plans and exercises posed here. They considered very useful and timely to work with students. Teachers in the public schools considered timely, but too long to develop in an hour class. They used some of the exercises but the program was not fully applied.

Some teachers of public schools consider all activities are not valid for different student's ages. They believe that activities should be designed according to age.

6. Usefulness of prevention program

Generally all the teachers believe that cyberbullying prevention program worked effectively, giving especially useful information to students and particularly regarding the management of security keys. Activities and discussion led to the identification of some cases with students. Prevention was higher in elementary students since they still are not as involved in the use of social networks like teenagers. The subject that

interested all students was the use of secure passwords on social networks, as well as security measures thereof.

For high school students, teachers consider that really does not get to sensitize students about the issue because teens believe they are away from the dangers and they do not believe it can happen to them.

7. Suggestions for improvement

Teachers consider the program TABBYA would be better if some of the issues had been raised in a more realistic way and had been closer to students' perspective. For example, using videos of actual cases and with characters of the same age as students.

Teachers believe that the program would have a greater impact if prevention is made by persons skilled in the subject, and not by them. They believe the professor does not transmit the information appropriately to generate awareness in students.

All teachers consider essential to involve parents in the use of social networking and cyberbullying prevention.

Conclusions

Our students are digital natives (Gardner et al, 2013). They are much more skilled than us in the use of communication and information technologies. We are digital immigrants. But we have the obligation to engage in use of technology and especially in social networks if we want to help young people to protect and prevent from cyberbullying activities. The life of younger generation takes place mainly through the internet use. For this reason, for us it is very important to promote that education must work to develop and improve their digital citizenship. Besides, schools must be prepared for teaching about the new rights and responsibilities that arise in relation to the use of internet and social networks in this digital world, and particularly when they are used by children and young people.

We must come to understand the importance of social networks for teenagers in their lives in order to help and guide them on his or her development in this area in the safest way possible. For this reason, it is very important working especially on the use of secure passwords and privacy offered by social networks. Besides, we must be very careful with all the information that we publish in these sites.

The results of this study show us that if we want to give more effective prevention messages on these topics with adolescents, it is important to use real materials, real data and direct information. In this way we can be better act as preventive agents.

In the process of prevention, we must try to engage the entire educational community. In this program should be involved parents, teachers, students and all social agents. It is therefore very important that we should become better digital immigrants. Only if we

understand the importance of social networks and its use by young people, we can make a more effective prevention on these issues.

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