

CYBERBULLYING AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES AN EDUCATIONAL PROJECT FOR EMOTIONAL ORIENTATION AND CYBERBULLYING PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying as a new form of bullying demands new coping strategies. As a result of new technology there has been a constant growth in the spread of harmful online behavior. The instant project “Cyberbullying and new technology”, which started from cooperation between school and university, was planned for pupils in the third year at “Leonardo Da Vinci” secondary school in Palermo. The project was started and carried out within the school setting with a focus on students, parents and teachers.

Objectives: the main aim was to identify useful actions and precautions to help face cyberbullying (on smartphone and mobile applications) using technology to create a campaign of peer to peer sensitization.

Methods: the methods applied in the classroom have been drawn from community pedagogy and psychology, as well as through direct teaching that allowed students to be participant and protagonist in this process of providing information and training in prevention. In the first phase the use of role-play, groupe parole and focus groups facilitated a rethinking of new technology, which was then used in the second phase when the pupils independently produced multimedia material aimed at dealing cyberbullying.

Results: the brief project permitted the creation of significant educational products for the school (a pictorial/graphic exhibition by the pupils, sensitizing advertisements and videos shared among students and teachers) and the publication of an information brochure developed from cooperation between the school, the Sicilian Regional Government, the Centro Siciliano Sturzo and the department of Community Psychology at the University of Palermo.

Conclusion: “Cyberbullying and new technology” is aimed at the caring professions. It is justified, in theory and practice by elements of community pedagogy and psychology for didactic experimentation with new strategies and methods, to counter the risks associated with the complicated problem of cyberbullying. The description of this field experience is aimed at prevention and comparison of this phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Around the seventies we witness the birth of a new community desire, new ways of being together and communicating, almost as if this were the antidote to rampant individualism. This new need for belonging emerges from modernity and brings with it a profound symbolic burden made up of needs, possibilities, research for new stimuli, links, opportunities to feel that they belong to a community ideal.

In recent years the term community sets aside its own geographical meaning to focus on its relational value. In these terms it allows us to experience belonging, sharing values and interests, in a plot in which individual and collective become two sides of the same coin.

The new social dynamics emerging in the 1960s, charged with the need for sharing and participation, and the development of new means of communication contribute to the creation of what scholars define as virtual communities. This term refers to that very particular form of community that overcomes any kind of border to favor the development of a non-physical place where users share common interests and needs.

In recent decades, virtual communities, in addition to representing themselves as a resource, have gradually become a limit to relationships, a place full of dangers that nullifies the authenticity of the person.

The authors William Strauss and Neil Howe, as a result of the studies concerning the digital generations, have coined the term Generation Z.

Given the profound changes in the communication and fruition of young people to the new technological means, the authors indicate the subjects Generation Z born after one thousand nine hundred and ninety-five, characterized by a mind that is not oriented to symbolism and lacking emotional-relational skills that interfere with the development of the dimension of autonomy, intimacy and privacy. Today the risks of the new technological tools seem to multiply, due to the lack of awareness in the use of these means by numerous young people. The speed of

the technological evolution and the greater fruition by the different users, makes the possibility of identifying clear boundaries, functional to discern acceptable behaviors on the net from the problematic ones.

One of the most widespread phenomena among digitized young people is cyberbullying, a variant of bullying traditionally understood, a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in articulated ways. The most obvious difficulties are: the possibility for the aggressor to remain anonymous; the number of spectators; absence of supervision by adults; the separation between gesture and attributed meaning. This phenomenon implies the need to promote digital and affective-relational education through educational activities capable of preventing the numerous and complex dangers of the network, so as to foster a healthy psychosocial development of the person inserted - or trapped - in a network of relationships to be connected to a protected line of thought.

The speed of technological evolution and the increasing use by subjects with different characteristics makes the possibility of identifying clear boundaries, functional to discern acceptable behaviors on the net from problematic ones, highly complex.

One of the most widespread phenomena among digital natives is Cyberbullying, a variant of bullying traditionally understood. By this term we mean "an aggressive and intentional act, conducted by an individual or groups of individuals, using various forms of electronic contact, repeated over time against a victim who has difficulty defending himself" (Smith et al., 2008).

Cyberbullying represents a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in articulated ways. The most obvious difficulties are: the possibility for the aggressor to remain anonymous; the number of spectators; absence of supervision by adults; the separation between gesture and attributed meaning.

From the Istat results of 2014, it emerges that in Italy more than 22.2% of adolescents have been victims of some arrogance, through the use of new technologies. Among these the highest percentage is characterized by 11-13 year-old girls.

This phenomenon implies the need to promote digital and affective-relational education, through educational activities capable of preventing the dangers of the network.

It is fundamental to educate to respect reciprocity, social norms, intentionality of us, cooperation.

The project "Cyberbullying and new technologies", born from a collaboration between the University of Palermo and the Leonardo Da Vinci school, was created and activated in order to prevent this phenomenon.

The project was implemented in 11 classes in the last year of lower secondary school, involving parents and teachers across the board.

TARGETS

- address the participants to a conscious and critical use of social media, learning to think and take advantage of the media language in an autonomous and responsible way;

- raise awareness among young people on the issue of cyber bullying and the risks it includes, promoting the use of tools to combat it;

- encourage the promotion of dialogue and understanding on the issue of cyber bullying, directing emotions, promoting social skills, manifesting and socializing the emotions of cyber bullying actors.

METHODS

The "Cyberbullying and new technologies" intervention was designed for pupils and pupils of third grades of "Leonardo Da Vinci" secondary school in Palermo. Designed, activated and implemented within the school setting with a trifocal look aimed at students, parents and teachers. In addressing the problem of cyberbullying at school, a key element was to convey the importance of partnership between teachers, pupils and universities.

One of the main objectives was to identify the actions useful to deal with the aggressive acts coming from cyberspace in real life, using the weapons of cyberbullying (smartphones and mobile applications) as new technologies useful for producing peer to peer awareness campaigns.

The methods applied in the classroom were derived from pedagogy and community psychology through active teaching which allowed the students to be participants and active protagonists of this process of training, information and prevention. The two introductory activities chosen to conduct the beginning of the classroom meetings with the students were the ice-breaking: "game of the ball", functional to present, without benches and in a circle, the metaphor of the virtual network that can trap, and a "brainstorming of emotions" related to cyberbullying actors. In this first phase the use of reflexive methods, role-playing games, word groups and focus groups facilitated the previous re-signification of the new technologies used in the second phase of the intervention, when the participants involved produced autonomously multimedia materials aimed at contrasting the cyberbullying realizing audio, video and graphic-pictorial products with their smartphones. Starting from the way in which digital social interactions develop today, schools should propose a conscious and responsible educational action in synergy, which aims to provide students (and their parents) with information and tools useful for recognizing their potential and limits of the Web, with particular attention to social networks, in order to promote the assumption of behaviors based on the respect of the "rules" and of the juridical norms recently implemented concerning the cyberbullying phenomenon. Knowledge of the policy will enable young people to recognize the

seriousness of acts and facts relating to cyberbullying by promoting the development of pro-social behavior that can help them live and develop healthy relationships inside and outside the school walls. It is therefore important to promote a psychological climate in which all students feel understood and in which complaints of cyberbullying are addressed through educational and communicative tools, not repressive ones.

INSTRUMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- ice-breaking: through the "game of the ball" we gave students the chance to metaphorically reproduce a virtual network introduced with the help of stimulating questions on the cyber bullying phenomenon. Through this activity we have stimulated the creation of a positive and relaxed environment;
- brainstorming of emotions: a tool used to bring out knowledge and ideas aimed at creating a dialogue on cyber bullying and associated actors. This tool allowed the students to become authors and protagonists of their training;
- creation of audio, video and graph-pictorial products through the use of pedagogically inspired methodologies;
- use of smartphones as connectors between the project and the intervention, to produce multimedia content to be broadcasted chat to chat.

RESULTS

Following the realization of the workshop activities, significant cultural products have emerged for the Institute: drawings, audio and video spots created by the beneficiaries of the intervention.

In the perspective of adolescent prevention and training, learning is not reduced to a purely cognitive activity of transmission and reception of information, but involves the recovery of individual and collective experience.

The laboratories are, therefore, stimulating spaces capable of developing the capacity to question oneself, to tolerate doubt, frustration and failure, to contain anxieties and defensive dynamics and, therefore, to be able to face the new and the change.

To promote the dissemination of actions to prevent and combat cyberbullying in the territory, the preparation of a graphic-pictorial exhibition within the school produced by the students involved in the project "Cyberbullying and new technologies".

It is essential to inform, raise awareness and educate public opinion, starting from the young generations so that they are an instrument for promoting a new educational age.

The collaboration between the school, the Sicilian Region, the Sicilian Sturzo Center and the University of Palermo - Chair of Community Psychology, therefore, supported the final realization of an awareness video, taken from previous multimedia products, and the publication of an information and budget brochure on the phenomenon distributed in some schools in the Palermo area.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2002 the Canadian professor Bill Belsey, adding the cyber prefix to bullying, creates for the first time the term coins the term cyberbullying. In 2006 the Canadian educator Peter Smith scientifically develops it in one of the first definitions: "a form of voluntary and repeated prevarication, implemented through an electronic text, acts against an individual or a group with the aim of hurting and making the victim of such behavior that fails to defend itself". Twelve years later this term has evolved parallel to the technology that allows its existence. Cyberbullying is one of the many undesirable effects of scientific and technological progress in computer engineering. Staying connected has become the prerogative to stay connected to the world, to feel part of one or more virtual communities. Such communities dispersed on the World Wide Web have emerged thanks to the poetic vision of the hippie counterculture of the sixties. It could be argued that the Internet is born of peace and love, of an exciting sense of idealism present in the municipalities (self-sufficient communities), passing from the monopolistic Silicon Valley and today disruptive in the lives of all those who have a Wi-Fi modem or a mobile network. Since the 2000s, the Internet seems to connect an incredibly large part of the global population thanks to the help of a computer or a smartphone that gives the feeling of avoiding the risk of a possible and unacceptable isolation.

According to the 2018 Report of the Global Annual Digital Growth, the big tech companies have five billion registered users worldwide, of which more than three billion users appear to be exclusively social mobile. The panorama in Italy does not differ and follows the interactionist line subject to an exponential increase in the use of the Internet and related social media. We Are Social and Hootsuite polls record that 57% of the Italian population is active in the various social networks existing in the network. The annual Atlas of childhood at risk published by the two thousand and sixteen by Treccani, born from the work of Save The Children Italy, analyzes the youth social fabric reporting numbers relating to the Italian juvenile population: in two thousand fifteen more than one child out of three surfs every day on the Internet (38.6%). In a sample of a thousand young people between the ages of twelve and seventeen it appears that almost all, 95%, have a profile on at least one social network. The average age of ownership of the first smartphone has fallen since 2001 year after year, until reaching the eleven years in 2017. A preadolescent has at least one technological device connected to an internet network.

The "digital natives" seem to use the network mainly to keep in touch with peers, through instant messaging programs, such as Whatsapp or Messenger. Many of them are used to update their Facebook profile, add photos

or "stories" on Instagram or Whatsapp, browse in search of new friends in the hope of feeling understood, considered, appreciated, with an extra like or message. The parents and the school of Generation Z have the task of transferring a media and digital competence that faces the new challenges that this generation is experiencing and undergoing, inserting the subjects at risk in projects and programs aimed at this "broadband" problem difficult to resolve. The law was instead entrusted with the task of intervening on cyberbullying episodes criminally punishable by the introduction of a judiciary (L. 71/2017 - "Provisions for the protection of minors for the prevention and contrast of the phenomenon of cyberbullying"), which guarantees the protection of victims involved in cyber-violence. Because staying online continuously from the age of eleven to seventeen is not just "spending time" or feeling "in company", but it is putting the vulnerability of those who still have to work on their weaknesses and self-worth. Therefore the definition of cyberbullying, conceived by Peter Smith, should be updated to the latest possible versions concerning the new lifestyles of adolescents immersed in the technological evolution of an unstoppable and potentially risky progress for the health of the next adults.

The collective underestimation of the transformation of bullying into cyberbullying is extremely topical and is a consequence of the role of the de-responsibility of the parental figures and of the educational institutions that have become increasingly marginal compared to the smartphones, probably because they are not able to read and withstand the gravity of the wide sea of the web, its depth and the risk conditions that digital kids can drown. Those who drive navigation and the growth of millennials are not parents, but youtubers with their tutorials on how not to learn life. Although parents and teachers have also become homo-smartphonicus, they navigate on different channels where risks can be glimpsed but not identified. The Internet universe can be even more exterminated and undermined by the living space concretely experienced by generation X. Cyberbullying is one of the dangers and is a new model in continuous change. As serious facts and acts are spreading and are attracting the attention of journalists and educational agencies, the phenomenon is becoming increasingly chameleon-like and invisible in the eyes of the law and the adults of reference. Unlike bullying which is easier to identify because it is more linear and physical.

The cyberbully is a structured coward, in him we find basic elements of bullying, strategically studied mental processes and de-responsibility. The degeneration of violent social behavior produced by non-existent rules, not only on the Internet, but also at school, at home; and therefore in the life of a teenager. Thus cyberbullying becomes the key to reading today's society that has had to become aware of the phenomenon in order to start fighting it and preventing it. The planning and the relative realization of this intervention is a portrait inserted inside the bill n.1261 in the article 1 comma 2 where the juridical definition of the cyberbullying phenomenon resides. In this portrait we see the pupils in the foreground, in the background the teachers supported by the pedagogists and the school as a frame: the representation of a positive educational pact. A picture, more than a photograph, It has the fragility of being able to be easily ruined if it is not placed accurately on a safe, rigid, not unsafe wall. In this portrait we have the manifestation of a small educating community; the promise of improvement in the school environment, and, consequently, social. A healthy image of the work done in class, where the classroom becomes a metaphor for a field as endless as life can be. A field without borders, without walls where paintings can be hung. The challenge is to build functional and protective walls in this case. Because the absence of these could be the absence of rules, the absence of boundaries where we feel protected because not with the freedom alone we learn the responsibility. Freedom is not expressed by induction. The school wall is not a limit, a wall can have windows, doors, paintings to be able to admire and learn with progression and observation ability the external and endless three-dimensionality of real life, which becomes for a teenager a world without limits no longer Two-dimensional.

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