Cyberbullying—Lesson Plan

Student Outcomes

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define *cyberbullying*.
- Explain how technology has changed the nature of bullying.
- List at least three reasons to support and three reasons to oppose the government's authorization of schools to limit off-campus student speech.
- Give at least one example from their school that demonstrates the tension between the right to free speech (expression) and the right to personal security.
- Explore the influence of technology on the specific balance of values and legal protections in different democratic societies.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement with other students.
- Reach a decision, individually and collectively, on the deliberation issue using evidence and sound reasoning.
- Explain the importance of deliberation in a democratic society.

Question for Deliberation

Should our democracy allow schools to punish students for off-campus cyberbullying?

Topic Materials

- Reading
- Glossary—Supplemental Handout
- Quotations—Supplemental Handout
- Graphs—Supplemental Handout
- Selected Resources

Deliberation Materials

- Deliberation Procedures
- Handout 1—Deliberation Guide
- Handout 2—Deliberation Notes
- Handout 3—Deliberation Reflection

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Cyberbullying—Reading

Should our democracy allow schools to punish students for off-campus cyberbullying?

In 2010, Phoebe Prince, a 15-year-old living in the U.S. state of Massachusetts, committed suicide after being bullied by other students. She suffered both face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying, including abusive comments made off-campus on Internet social networks. After her suicide, nine students involved in the cyberbullying faced criminal charges. Phoebe's story was widely covered in the media, but there are many stories like her in the United States of America.

Source: John Cole, *The Scranton Times-Tribune*, October 26, 2010. Reprinted with permission.

Schools and children have long faced the problem of bullies. Bullying comes in many forms: physical aggression, social isolation, and emotional torment. In the past, most bullies could only hurt their victims when they were in the same place. Today's bullies can use digital technologies to harass and intimidate their victims at all hours of the day and without even confronting their prey. This is known as "cyberbullying."

Schools have a duty to protect the safety and well-being of their students. When a ***bully*** harms someone on a school campus, the school may punish the bully. Much cyberbullying,

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however, takes place ***off-campus***, away from school and after school hours. Therefore, schools must decide whether to punish bullies for these actions taken outside of school.

What Is Cyberbullying?

The Cyberbullying Research Center in the United States of America has defined cyberbullying as occasions "when someone repeatedly harasses, mistreats, or makes fun of another person online or while using cell phones or other electronic devices." Victims of bullying are usually vulnerable in some way, which means they are easy targets. Unlike traditional victims of bullying, however, victims of cyberbullying have no escape.

Cyberbullying can be more than ***harassment*** or teasing. It may involve threats and ***hate speech*** and can lead to physical attacks. Other examples of cyberbullying include:[1]

- *Flaming*: Deliberate posting or sending of hostile or vulgar messages.
- *Outing*: Posting private information about someone that leads to embarrassment or humiliation.
- *Cyberstalking*: Repeatedly threatening harm or intimidation online.
- *Impersonation*: Assuming the identity of a victim in order to publish embarrassing information.
- *Exclusion*: Excluding someone from a social group online in a mean-spirited way.
- *Harassment*: Forwarding private material without permission, spreading rumors, or posting embarrassing pictures without permission in order to embarrass or humiliate someone.
- *Sexting:* Sharing sexually embarrassing content.[2] Young people in the United States of America are sometimes unaware that it is a crime to send sexually explicit images of persons under the age of 18, even if the person in the photo agrees.[3]

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The Internet can allow a bully to remain ***anonymous***. Cyberbullies, therefore, do not feel inhibited to say hurtful things as they might if they were in the presence of their victims. Psychologists call this the ***disinhibition effect***.[4]

The Extent and Consequences of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying appears to be common around the world. In the countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, an estimated 12.1 percent of all teenagers have experienced some form of cyberbullying.[5] A recent survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 32 percent of all U.S. teenagers who use the Internet have experienced harassment online. Thirteen percent of U.S. teenagers have received threatening messages online. Twenty-six percent of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 have been bullied or harassed through their cell phones.[6]

In Mexico, a study by the Federal District Secretary of Education has shown that as many as 480 students in 29 public primary and secondary schools are victims of bullying.[7] In all of Mexico, an estimated 10 percent of students in primary and secondary schools are victims of bullying at school. Cyberbullying is one of the ways that bullies send threats of violence and insults to their victims.[8]

Abuse often leads to victims feeling fear, anxiety, and depression. In some cases, cyberbullying has even more tragic outcomes. In Mexico City, a majority of 190 cases of teen suicide in 2010 occurred after those teens were victims of bullying, including cyberbullying. Mexico's Movement Foundation studied these suicide cases and found that cyberbullying made it hard for victims to avoid abuse when not in school. When they got home, the victims were often confronted with abusive comments on Internet ***social networks***.[9]

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School Responses to Cyberbullying

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, "Congress shall make no law…abridging the ***freedom of speech***." However, in 1969 the U.S. Supreme Court decided that schools could prohibit student speech that "substantially interfered" with discipline at the school.[10] In later cases, U.S. courts have had to decide if student speech about other students, teachers, or the school interfered with the school community.

Recent U.S. court decisions have addressed harassment on the Internet, such as a student web site that made insulting and threatening comments about a teacher.[11] In most decisions, the courts ruled against school districts that punished students for off-campus Internet postings.

For example, in 2002 a student posted on another student's website. He included a list of people at school called "people I wish would die." He also recommended that "Satan's mission" of the week was to "stab someone for no reason." A parent reported it to police and school officials. A federal court ruled that the school violated the student's freedom of speech after the principal temporarily suspended him from school. According to the court, the school could not prove that the off-campus threats on the web page were a substantial interference at the school.[12]

U.S. school officials, parents, and legislators have addressed cyberbullying in other ways. The California education code, for example, states that school officials may recommend that a student be suspended or expelled for "bullying committed by means of an electronic act…directed specifically toward a pupil or school personnel." The cyberbullying, however, must be "related to school activity" to be punishable.[13] Schools in Fairfax, Virginia, are required to have students discuss the dangers of cyberbullying at the beginning of each school year, and again in the middle of the year. Schools also must provide ***character education*** and, in elementary schools, use a bullying prevention curriculum.[14] According to Maryland law, school

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administrators can suspend a student who commits cyberbullying off campus if the incident leads to the "substantial disruption of the school."[15]

Punishing Off-Campus Cyberbullying: Supporters and Opponents

People who think schools should ***intervene*** in off-campus cyberbullying argue that it causes significant school disruptions and poisons the learning environment. Whenever a student suffers off-campus harm, it affects their on-campus behavior. Victims suffer from sadness, depression, and low self-esteem. They also experience failure in school and even avoid school. In the worst cases, bullies (as well as victims of bullying) commit violence at school. Many victims think about suicide. Others, like Phoebe Prince, commit suicide.

Supporters also argue that schools would not have to use too many resources in investigating cyberbullying. Digital technologies like text-messaging often leave evidence behind. A text-message is recorded on cell phones of both the sender and receiver of the message. Messages on the Internet are not private. The results of a cyberbullying incident are also noticeable at school almost immediately.

School districts that are required by law to stop cyberbullying are more likely to work with schools, parents, and students to implement anti-bullying programs. In turn, these programs can prevent cyberbullying by punishing harmful off-campus student actions. If students see that cyberbullying has consequences, they will be less likely to become cyberbullies. Parents, too, often demand that schools take action to protect their children from embarrassment and harm.

People who think schools should not intervene in cyberbullying often have serious concerns about punishing free speech. For example, they argue that cyberbullying is an ambiguous term. Many young people view "cyberbullying" as a modern form of teasing, a normal part of growing up. What makes one student depressed might not affect another student. It is too hard for schools

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to make broad rules about what words are "bullying" and what words are just "teasing." This also means schools are in danger of violating students' freedom of speech if the schools punish off-campus communications.

Opponents of school punishments for off-campus cyberbullying also argue that educating students is more effective than punishing students. They suggest that a more useful way to address cyberbullying is a ***grassroots approach***. Individual schools can create comprehensive strategies for fighting bullying and violence based on the administrators, staff members, and students' understanding of the problem. Bullying itself is an "age-old" problem. Opponents argue that programs such as character education, supported by parents, school officials, and students working together can be effective to control the harm of bullying.

Many people who oppose school actions against off-campus cyberbullying do not believe punishment by school authorities can effectively stop cyberbullying. As a practical matter, they note that school administrators have a harder time keeping track of off-campus incidents.[16] "Suggestions" or "recommendations" for confronting cyberbullying often do not result in concrete actions. Even when there are stronger anti-bullying policies, some people argue that these policies are often not enforced. This is particularly true if no funding is available to develop successful programs. Students who send offensive or abusive messages online or with cell phones might violate civil or criminal laws. Therefore, police and courts of law should discipline them, not schools.

Will schools that punish off-campus cyberbullying improve school safety and protect the dignity of individual students? Or will they exceed their authority and violate students' right to freedom of speech? Citizens must consider which policies best balance individual rights and public safety.

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[1] Nancy E. Willard, "Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats" (Eugene, OR: Center for Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet, April 2007), http://www.cyberbully.org/cyberbully/docs/cbcteducator.pdf (accessed June 24, 2011); and Jorge del Rio Perez, et al., "Cyberbullying: un analisis comparative en estudiantes de Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, y Venezuela" (Pamplona, Espana: Departamento de Communicacion Audiovisual y Publicidad y Literatura Foro Generaciones Interactivas, Universidad de Navarra, 2009), http://www.generacionesinteractivas.org/?p=1377 (accessed June 24, 2011).

[2] "What They're Saying About Sexting," *The New York Times* (March 26, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/us/27sextingqanda.html?_r=1 (accessed June 24, 2011).

[3] "What They're Saying About Sexting."

[4] John Suler, "The Online Disinhibition Effect," *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2004), http://lacomunidad.elpais.com/blogfiles/apuntes-cientificos-desde-el-mit/71994_Suler.pdf (accessed June 24, 2011).

[5] Rio Perez, et al.

[6] Amanda Lenhart, "Cyberbullying 2010: What the Research Tells Us" (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Youth Online Safety Working Group, May 6, 2010), http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2010/May/Cyberbullying-2010.aspx (accessed June 24, 2011).

[7] Vanessa Maya Alvarado and Daniel Tapia Quintana, "Cyberbullying in Mexico: The Importance of Implementing Earlier Public Policies to Limit Its Growth," *Revista AZ*, (2010), http://works.bepress.com/daniel_tapia/2 (accessed June 24, 2011).

[8] "El acoso escolar se puso de moda," *Periódico La Jornada* (May 10, 2010), http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/05/10/index.php?section=politica&article=002n1pol (accessed June 24, 2011).

[9] "In 2010, 190 Mexico City Youth Took Their Lives After Being Bullied," *Hispanically Speaking News* (February 23, 2011), http://www.hispanicallyspeakingnews.com/notitas-de-noticias/details/in-2010-190-mexico-city-youth-took-their-lives-after-being-bullied/5526/ (accessed June 24, 2011).

[10] *Tinker v. Des Moines*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).

[11] *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District*, 757 A.2d 412 (Pa.Cmwlth. 2000).

[12] *Mahaffey v. Aldrish*, 236 F.Supp. 2d 779 (2002).

[13] California Education Code sec. 48900.

[14] "Bullying Prevention and Help for Depression" (Falls Church, VA: Fairfax County Public Schools, 2011), http://www.fcps.edu/news/bullyprevention/index.htm (accessed June 24, 2011).

[15] Josie F. Brown, Josie F. "Maryland Cyber-Bullying Legislation Awaits Signature by Governor," *First Amendment Law Prof Blog* (April 10, 2008), http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/firstamendment/2008/04/maryland-cyber.html (accessed June 24, 2011).

[16] Dakarai I. Aarons, "Anti-Bullying Efforts Gain Fresh momentum," *Education Week* (May 6, 2010), http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/05/05/31bully_ep.h29.html (accessed June 24, 2011).

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Cyberbullying—Glossary

Anonymous: Not named; lacking a real name or identity.

Bully: A person who harms or shows cruelty to another person who seems vulnerable or less powerful.

Character education: Program that teaches students about ethics and responsibilities.

Disinhibition effect: A sense of boldness or carelessness that comes from being anonymous.

Freedom of speech: The right to express an opinion, create a written work, or share news and information with other people without government intervention; also known as freedom of expression.

Grassroots approach: A proposed solution to a problem that begins with citizens and citizen groups rather than the government or legislature.

Harassment: Persistent bothering, disturbing, or severely teasing another person.

Hate speech: Speech that shows hostility toward a person or group on the basis of race, color, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

Intervene: Get involved in a problem directly in order to solve it; stop or prevent communication from a cyberbully in order to protect victims. An intervention is the act of stopping or preventing a problem from causing harm.

Off-campus: Occurring away from a school; not on a school's property.

Social network: A web site that provide users with the ability to post information about themselves, form online groups based on shared interests, and send messages to each other.

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Cyberbullying—Quotations

"Cyberbullying based on sexual orientation appears to be quite frequent and has been implicated/suggested in most of the cases that have resulted in suicide."

~Nancy Willard, *Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (2006)*

Nancy Willard, "Cyberbullying, Cyberthreats, and Dangerous Online Communities," Technology in Education Colorado, Inc. Conference (2006), http://www.tiecolorado.org/2006/cbctpresentation.pdf (accessed June 24, 2011).

"If you bully somebody face to face, and they get upset, you see them cry and be hurt. When it's over the Internet, you can't see the emotional reaction and go along thinking it's no big deal."

~Robin Kowalski, *Psychology Professor, Clemson University (2008)*

Robin Kowalski, *Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2008).

"It's one thing when you get made fun of at school, but to be bullied in your own home via your computer is a disgusting thing for someone to do and I think anyone who gets kicks out of it is disgusting. It makes me feel badly about myself. It makes me wonder how people can be so rude and disrespectful of others and makes me lose faith in the human race. It decreases my self esteem and I often wonder what I did to make someone treat me that way."

~Anonymous, *16-year-old girl from the United Kingdom*

Quoted on "Share Your Story" (Jupiter, FL: Cyberbullying Research Center, n.d.), http://www.cyberbullying.us/shareyourstory.php (accessed June 24, 2011).

"I had recently picked on a old friend of mine, for what I will not reveal because it was unusually cruel, however she had done something to me that was equally as wrong or if not worse. I was disappointed in her, and for that I decided not to be a friend any longer and spread her deepest secrets to everyone, which made her look like a complete fool. I felt somewhat guilty because I had known her for years, at the same time it was a pay back and I think she learned from it some when it comes to attempting to mess around with me."

~Anonymous, *15-year-old girl from New York, USA*

Quoted on "Share Your Story" (Jupiter, FL: Cyberbullying Research Center, n.d.), http://www.cyberbullying.us/shareyourstory.php (accessed June 24, 2011).

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"We . . . asked the students what they think teachers and parents should do about cyber bullying. The common response was that you don't report playground bullying so you don't report cyber bullying because it's humiliating and you can't be sure of the adult's reaction. They also said that they wouldn't report cyber bullying in particular because most adults don't know that they have a cyber life - and if they report then the technology will be taken away from them."

~ Marilyn Campbell, *psychologist, Queensland University of Technology*

Quoted on "Bullying, No Way!"
http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/talkout/profiles/researchers/marilynCampbell.shtml (accessed June 24, 2011).

"We teach people a lot of the consequences of things like unsafe driving but not that what we do online could have serious consequences."

~Daniel J. Solove, *Author (2007)*

Daniel J. Solove, *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), http://docs.law.gwu.edu/facweb/dsolove/Future-of-Reputation/ (accessed June 24, 2011).

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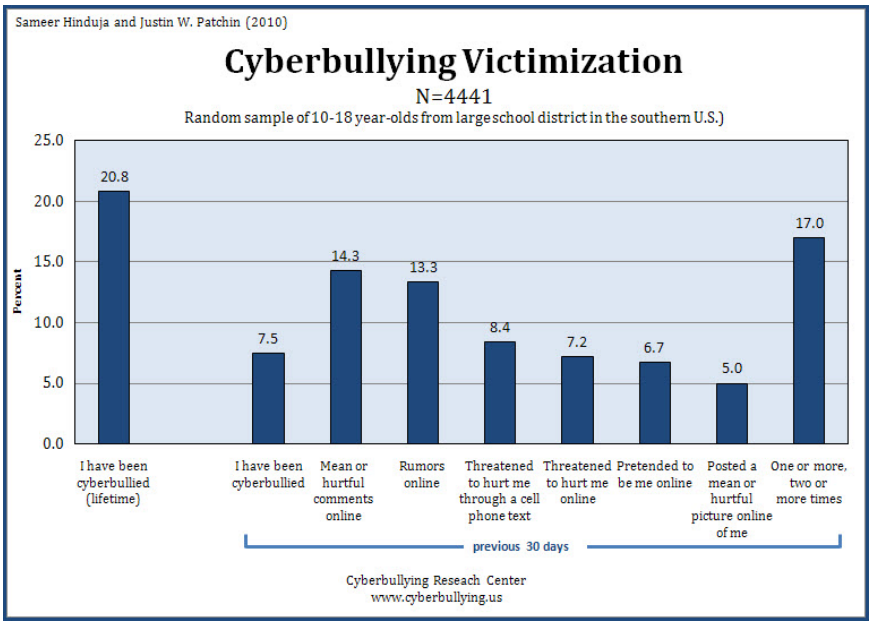
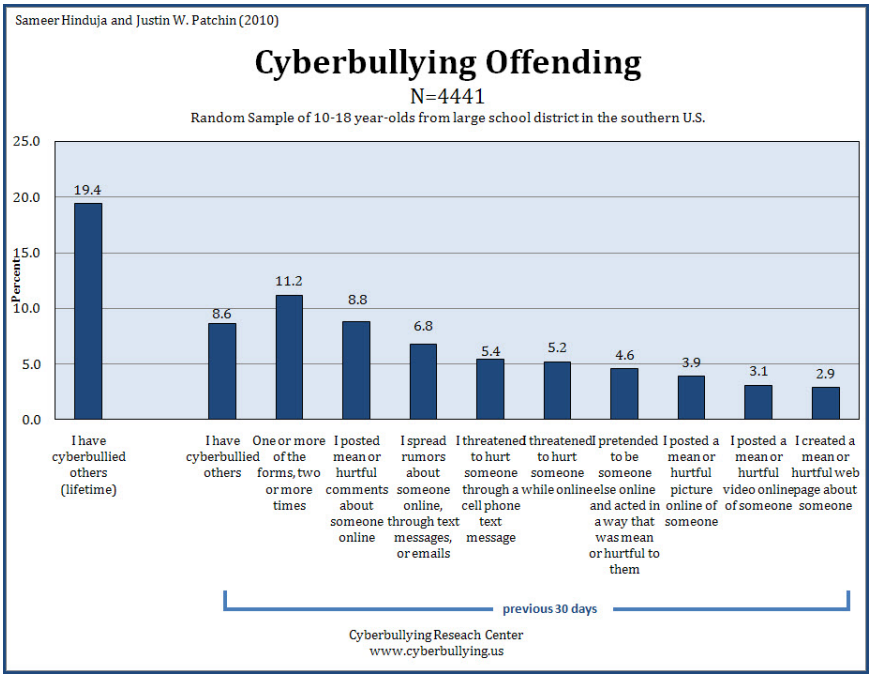
Cyberbullying—Graphs





Source: Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin, "Research" (Jupiter, FL: Cyberbullying Research Center, 2010), http://cyberbullying.us/research.php. Used by permission.

In a recent MSN study in Europe (Adam Hartley, "Safer Internet Day 2009," http://www.techradar.com/news/internet/cyber-bullying-is-rife-across-europe-527334), 29 percent of young people (ages 14 to 19) with unrestricted access to the Internet reported having been cyberbullied.

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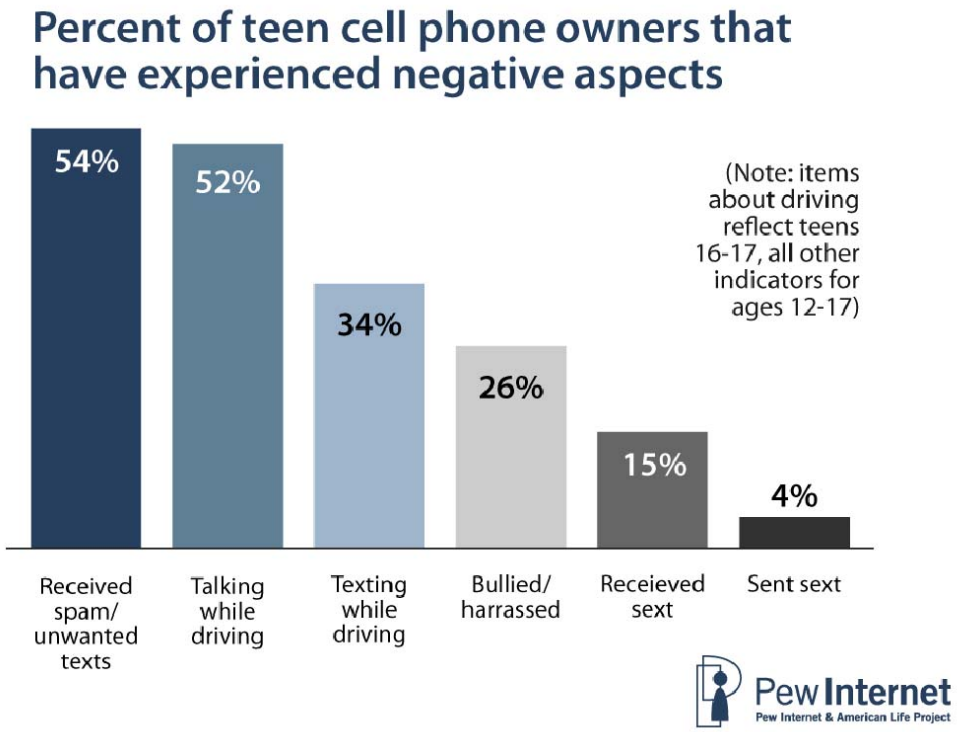

Source: Amanda Lenhart, "Cyberbullying 2010: What the Research Tells Us" (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010), http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2010/May/Cyberbullying-2010.aspx (accessed May 20, 2011). Used by permission.

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Cyberbullying—Selected Resources

Alvarado, Vanessa Maya, and Daniel Tapia Quintana, "Cyberbullying in Mexico: The Importance of Implementing Earlier Public Policies to Limit Its Growth," *Revista AZ* (January 2010), http://works.bepress.com/daniel_tapia/2 (accessed June 24, 2011).

Del Rio Perez, Jorge, et al., "Cyberbullying: un analisis comparative en estudiantes de Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, y Venezuela," (Pamplona, Espana: Departamento de Communicacion Audiovisual y Publicidad y Literatura Foro Generaciones Interactivas, Universidad de Navarra, 2009), http://www.generacionesinteractivas.org/?p=1377 (accessed June 24, 2011).

Hinduja, Sameer, and Justin W. Patchin, "Cyberbullying and Suicide Fact Sheet" (Jupiter, FL: The Cyberbullying Research Center, 2010), http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying_and_suicide_research_fact_sheet.pdf (accessed June 24, 2011).

Willard, Nancy E.,"Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats" (Eugene, OR: Center for Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet, April 2007), http://www.cyberbully.org/cyberbully/docs/cbcteducator.pdf (accessed June 24, 2011).

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Deliberation Procedures

PART I (In class the day before)

1. **Introduction.** Teachers review the meaning of deliberation, the reasons for deliberating, and the rules for deliberation. (Handout #1)

PART II (approximately 30 minutes)

2. **Careful Reading of the Text.** Students read the text individually, in small groups of 4 or as a whole class in order to reach a common understanding of the reading. If students do not understand the reading, the deliberation will not be successful. As a whole class or in their small groups, students agree on at least three interesting facts and/or ideas. (Handout #2).

Note on Supplemental Resources. Each deliberation includes both a basic reading and one or more supplemental resources. Supplemental resources may be a graph, a political cartoon or image, a glossary, a page of expert quotes, or a primary source or independent news story. These supplemental resources are optional materials that can be used to provoke discussion and critical thinking. These materials may be used by teachers as part of the lesson—as part of the *Introduction (Step 1), Careful Reading of the Text (Step 2), Presentation of Positions (Step 4), Reversal of Positions (Step 5),* or *Reflection (Step 8).* Teachers can use these materials to differentiate instruction with some or all the students in class. Supplemental resources also can add depth or enrich the deliberation.

3. **Clarification.** After checking for understanding of the terms and content, the teacher makes sure students understand the deliberation question. (Handout #2)
4. **Presentation of Positions**. Students work in small groups of 4 divided into pairs (A & B). Each pair is assigned a position. The position of the A's is to find at least two compelling reasons to say YES to the deliberation question. The position of the B's is to find at least two compelling reasons to say NO to the deliberation question. A's teach B's at least two reasons to say YES to the deliberation question. B's teach A's at least two reasons to say NO to the deliberation question. (Handout #2)
5. **Reversal of Positions.** The pairs reverse positions. The B pair now adopts the position to say YES to the deliberation question; the A pair adopts the position to say NO to the deliberation question. The A's & B's should select the best reason they heard from the other pair and add at least one additional compelling reason from the reading to support their new position. (Handout #2)

PART III (approximately 15-20 minutes)

6. **Free Discussion.** Students drop their assigned roles and deliberate the question in their small groups. Each student reaches a personal decision based on evidence and logic.

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PART IV (approximately 10-15 minutes)

7. **Whole Class Debrief.** The teacher leads the whole class in a discussion to gain a deeper understanding of the question, democracy, and deliberation.
    - What were the most compelling reasons for each side? What were the areas of agreement? What questions do you still have? Where can you get more information?
    - What is your position? (Poll the class on the deliberation question.) In what ways, if any, did your position change?
    - Is there an alternative policy that might address the problem more effectively? What, if anything, might you or your class do to address this problem?
    - What principles of democracy were inherent in this discussion? Why might deliberating this issue be important in a democracy?
    - Add other questions relevant to your curriculum.

PART V (15-30 minutes either in class or for homework)

8. **Student Reflection.** Students complete the reflection form either at the end of class or for homework. (Handout #3)

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Handout 1—Deliberation Guide

What Is Deliberation?

Deliberation is the focused exchange of ideas and the analysis of multiple views with the aim of making a personal decision and finding areas of agreement within a group.

Why Are We Deliberating?

People must be able and willing to express and exchange ideas among themselves, with community leaders, and with their representatives in government. People and public officials in a democracy need skills and opportunities to engage in civil public discussion of controversial issues in order to make informed policy decisions. Deliberation requires keeping an open mind, as this skill enables people to reconsider a decision based on new information or changing circumstances.

What Are the Rules for Deliberation?

- Read the material carefully.
- Focus on the deliberation question.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying.
- Understand and analyze what others are saying.
- Speak and encourage others to speak.
- Refer to the reading to support your ideas.
- Use relevant background knowledge, including life experiences, in a logical way.
- Remain engaged and respectful when controversy arises.

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Handout 2—Deliberation Notes

The Deliberation Question:

Review the reading and in your group determine at least three of the most important facts and/or interesting ideas. Ask about any terms that are unclear.

Reasons to Support the Question - YES	Reasons to Oppose the Question - NO

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Handout 3—Deliberation Reflection

What I think:

1. What did I decide and why? Did I support or oppose or have a new idea?

2. What did someone else say or do that was particularly helpful?

3. What, if anything, could I do to address the problem?

What we think:

1. What did we agree on?

2. What, if anything, could we do to address the problem?

Rate yourself and the group on how well the rules for deliberation were followed:
(1 = not well, 2 = well, 3 = very well)

	Me	Group
Read the material carefully.		
Focused on the deliberation question.		
Listened carefully to what others said.		
Understood and analyzed what others said.		
Spoke and encouraged others to speak.		
Referred to the reading to support ideas.		
Used relevant background knowledge and life experiences in a logical way.		
Remained engaged and respectful when controversy arose.		

1. What can I do to improve my deliberation skills?

2. What can the group do to improve the deliberation?

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