



# CYBER-BULLYING



## Battle? . . . Or Opportunity to Educate?

**Dawn Zinga, Ph.D.**  
Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario Canada

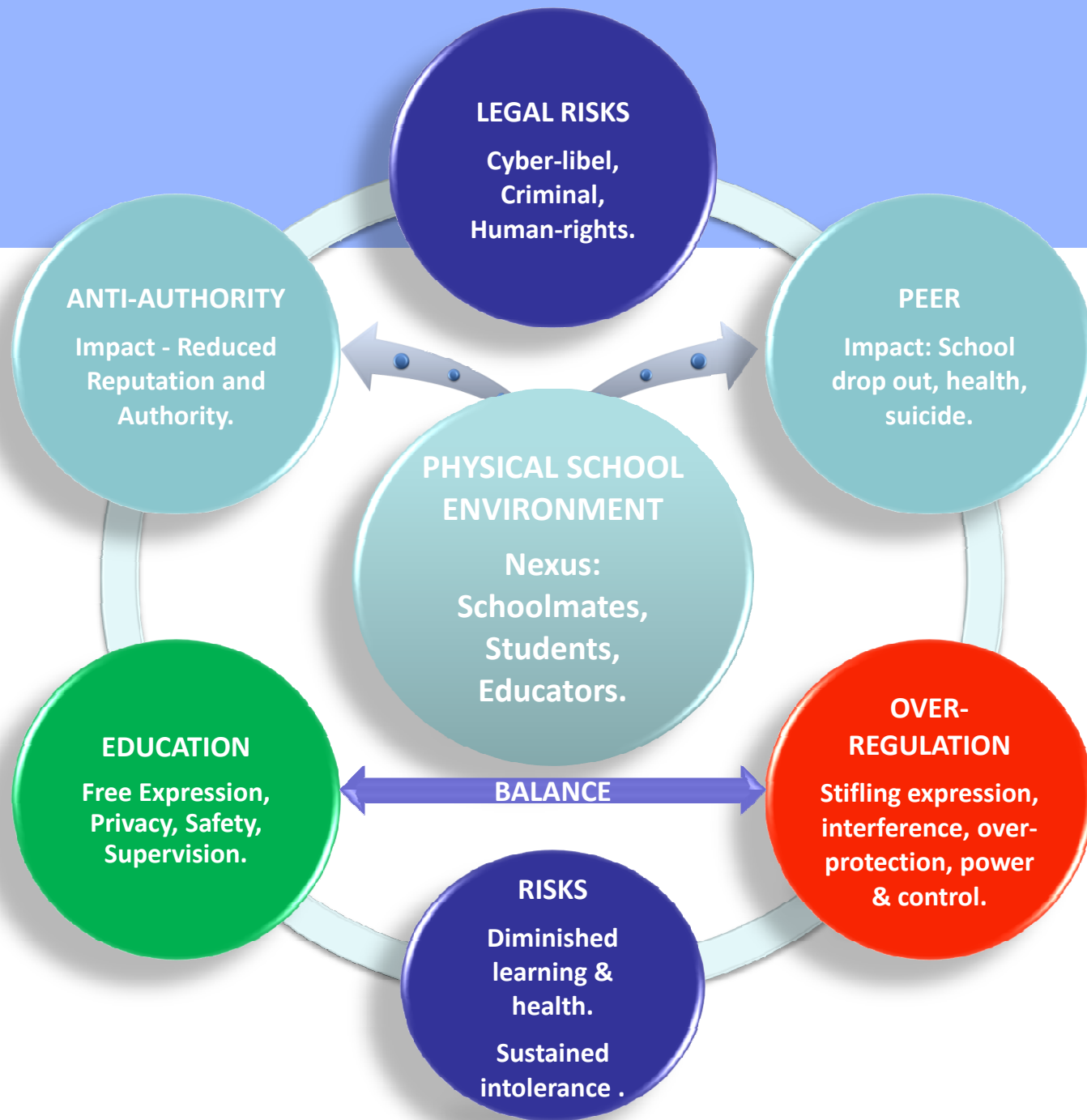
November 5, 2009  
Toronto



# Today's Presentation

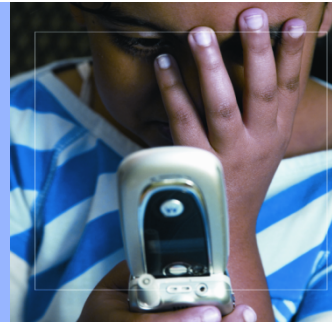


- Contextualize cyber-bullying.
- Explain influences on cyber-bullying.
- Highlight 2 forms of cyber-bullying.
- Highlight court and school responses (briefly).
- What needs to be done?





## Media Framing



A gift fr  
about o  
Regina bylaw to target cyber-  
bullies

chors uevra

# Cyber-bullying blighting our lives

CTV Cyber-Bullying Special Report

© Shaheen Shariff, Ph.D.



# Fear-based Responses



## Fear of a loss of control:

- Fears about too much power in the hands of kids.
- Fuels perceptions that kids are out of control.
- Prevalent adult mindset is grounded in zero-tolerance (military models).
- Less attention is paid to root societal attitudes and discrimination expressed on and off-line.
- Teachers tacitly condone verbal bullying. (Lagerspetz et al, 2001; Glover et al, 1998)



## Public opinion shifts responses



Blogging has made a significant difference:

Media outlets invite bloggers to comment on their reports  
(Zinga, 2009)

Shift by some media from sensational to educational

Increased awareness by school authorities and task force  
initiatives (e.g. QUESBA, QUPAT)

Quebec Ministry initiative - interested in research on  
cyber-violence



# Corporate Ads



What is the impact of corporate ads by technology corporations . . . ?

Consider the following ads. Where is the line for responsible advertising?

- North American Ads
- Rogers & AT&T Ads not bad
- T MOBILE peer pressure via phone
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdHdIR8OS50>
- SPRINT normalizing phones in locker rooms?
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N9gSS\\_HRcE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N9gSS_HRcE)
- T-Mobile little brother puts same fav 5 in his phone as sister did (“your friends are hot”). Parental response.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUHT-p8svkc&feature=Playlist&p=08164B0202B6C820&index=11>
- really bad one! Takes friends pic, posts to facebook, all laugh.
- [http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1126828/rogers\\_wireless\\_facebook\\_ad/](http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1126828/rogers_wireless_facebook_ad/)



# Corporate Ads



What messages are being received by students?

How are behaviour and responsibility being presented?

- Ads outside North America
- Practical jokes
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QkJGqr4lr4&feature=related>
- POST BANK (not a mobile company) False Identity
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT7NgewVV2Q&feature=related>
- Mobile Video Company (Spanish) deception
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boVA7A8Ugpc&NR=1>
- SFR (FRANCE?) “hottie on airplane” CREEPY.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzBiGo4FKSE>
- VIRGIN guy impersonating a woman to prank an unsuspecting guy
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hi7r54TBf-A&feature=related>
- T mobile - “life is for sharing”
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUZrrbgCdYc>



## Two Profiles of Cyber-bullying



- Peer and Anti-authority on-line expression.
- Mediums: Social networking sites, bulletin boards, blogs, chat rooms, Xangas, e-mail, cellular phones, photographic gadgets, text messaging.
- Peer cyber-bullying attracted less calls for banning the technologies.
- Anti-authority on-line expression has resulted in calls for bans and more filters.



# Characteristics of Cyber-bullying



- There is always a power imbalance.
- Exclusion, isolation and dehumanization of victims to justify the harm. It is repeated and relentless.
- These are the differences on-line:
  - The bullying is largely anonymous;
  - It is available to an infinite audience;
  - There is a permanent record of the bullying;
  - Perpetrators can hide behind screen names.



# Peer Cyber-bullying



- [Video: Digizen -   
http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullfilm.aspx?video=s](http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullfilm.aspx?video=s)
- Canadian Examples
- National Kick a Ginger Day (Facebook - Bullying Awareness Week 2008)
- Ajax, Ontario teen committed suicide (Rau, 2007)
- David Knight (Burlington, Ontario)
- Star Wars Kid (Quebec)
- Many unreported cases



# Anti-Authority Expression



## How is anti-authority cyber-bullying different?

### Social Networking Sites (Facebook, MySpace)

- Teachers have been described as masturbating in class;
- Principals have been described as pedophiles;
- Sexual orientation, hygiene, teaching styles are discussed;
- Unflattering photographs are posted with insults and defamatory statements.

### Video-sites (YouTube)

- Teachers are provoked and filmed on cellular phones when frustrated - videos are subsequently posted on YouTube.



# Anti-Authority Expression



- Canadian Examples
- Thornhill Elementary school - suspended five grade eight students for online comments about teachers and staff
- Birchmount Park Collegiate - derogatory comments on facebook
- Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary school - derogatory comments on facebook
- Many international cases as well



# Balancing Rights



## Comments from a new article on Anti-authority cyber-bullying

- "Most are sexually explicit, they're derogatory, they're mean, demeaning -- they're an attack on character," he said.
- "It was intimidating, because you had the entire school administration, staff and a police officer present," Sultana said.
- "The only mistake that I made was that I added a bad word into (the comment), and I guess I personally hurt him," said student Christina Giosa.
- "Where does the school's jurisdiction end? Why is it right for them to come into my home for something I do in my house and suspend me from an education?" he asked.
- "This is a really challenging thing," she said. "Most of these activities are happening off school property, but they are impacting a great deal in the classroom."



# Balancing Rights



## Student perspectives:

- A right to free expression in cyber-space.
- On-line social conversation are private conversations.
- Maintain they are not directly targeting teachers/administrators.

## Parent perspectives:

- This is no different from traditional bullying or graffiti on washroom walls.
- The school had no right to intervene on home computers, private cell-phones.
- Punishment too harsh

## School perspectives:

- Undermines authority
- Interferes with educational environment
- School personnel needs to be free from attack; students need to be held responsible



# Balancing Rights



How do we balance rights in these cases?

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom from attack
- Positive learning environments

Where does responsibility fit in?

- How do we teach students to take responsibility for their actions?
- What responsibility do school boards and school personnel have?
- What responsibility do parents have?

Do students understand cyber-bullying and other on-line interactions?

- Are students able to understand the impact of their actions?
- Habbo, MSN examples



# Key Issues: Extent of Legal Responsibilities?



## Increasingly blurred boundaries:

- Free expression
- Privacy
- Safety
- Supervision

## When expression occurs:

- Outside school hours
  - Off-campus (on personal computers and cell phones)
- It involves school-mates, teachers or authority figures



# Impact on Learning



- Bullying in a “virtual school environment” impacts learning in the physical school setting  
= **HOSTILE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**
- It is psychologically devastating for victims (health, drop-out, suicide, career);
- Socially detrimental for *ALL* students and educators.



## Canadian Supreme Court: Expression vs. Reputation (Libel)



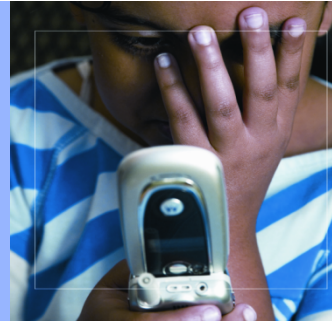
TEST: If an ordinary person is likely to believe the on-line comments this constitutes unfair comment, ruining reputation:

A good reputation is closely related to the innate worthiness and dignity of the individual. *It is an attribute that must, just as much as freedom of expression, be protected by society's law . . .* Democracy has always recognized and cherished the fundamental importance of an individual . . . *The reputation tarnished by libel can seldom regain its former lustre.* A democratic society therefore, has an interest in ensuring that its members can enjoy and protect their good reputation so long as it is merited. [Emphasis added]

*SCC: Hill v. Church of Scientology of Toronto (1995)*



# Student Expression & School Obligations



- *Tinker* standard: “material or substantive disruption of learning.”
- *Fraser* standard: “if it interferes with the educational mission.”
- *Hazelwood and Garrity*. If school property is used.
- *Morse vs. Frederick* BONG CASE: If there is a nexus to school.
  
- *Davis vs. Munroe* US - Title IX): School should not create a “deliberately dangerous learning environment.”
- Canada - *Robichaud, Ross, Jubran*: Institutions should not create a poisoned school or work environment.



## PALFREY REPORT - US CONGRESS

On September, 2009 - Harvard University Law Professor, John Palfrey testified before Congress:

- Urged lawmakers to consider problem of bullying more broadly and not to put sole blame on new technologies for increased on-line bullying

“First, overwhelmingly, most of the ways in which young people use digital technologies are positive . . . Most young people, at least in the United States, do not distinguish between their ‘online’ and ‘offline’ lives. As a result, many of the good things that have gone on offline also happen, in one form or another, online: so, too, do many of the bad things that happen in everyday life play out also online. We should fundamentally be talking about ‘bullying’ not ‘cyber-bullying.’”



## PALFREY REPORT - US CONGRESS

The law should encourage technology firms to be responsible and use their innovation to protect kids.

Congress ought to consider how to ensure that online intermediaries have an obligation not to ignore harm that is occurring to their users online.

Online gossip sites like AutoAdmit and Jucy Campus have become symbols of bad behavior because site operators often refuse to co-operate with victims to help those harmed by defamation or bullying. The sites operators hid behind bad law.

Facebook, MySpace & Youtube have added reporting mechanisms for inappropriate behaviour and safety centres online

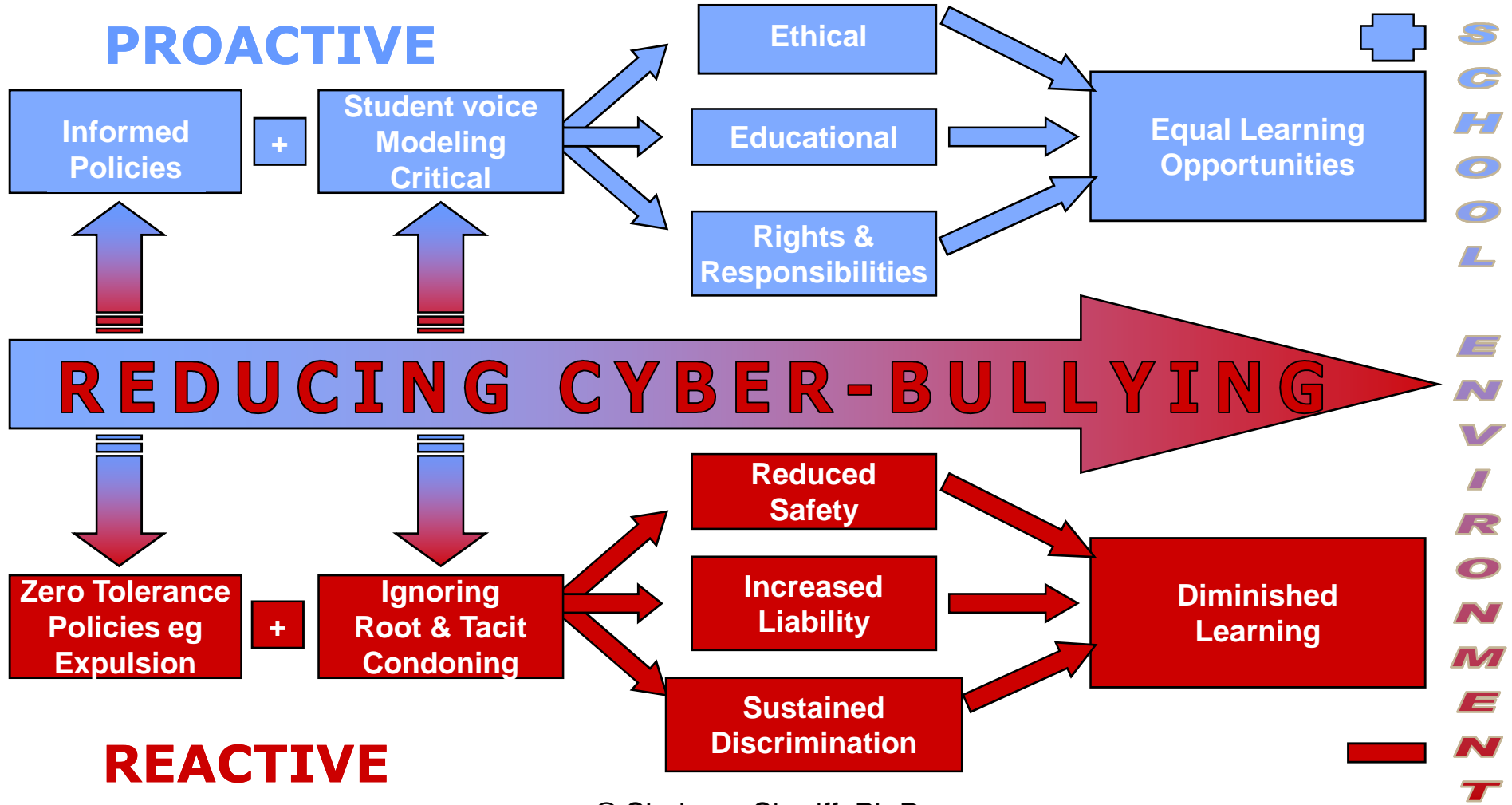


## Why won't kids report it?



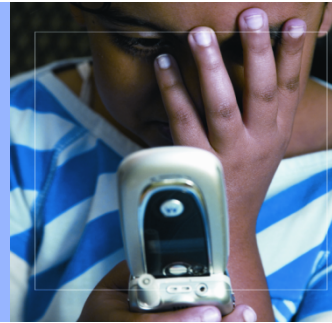
- It is my problem not the school's (52%).
- The school staff could not stop it anyway (50%).
- The cyber-bully would bully me even more (41%).
- My parents would restrict my access to the internet (40%).
- Other students would call me a 'rat' (41%).
- My friends could get in trouble (33%).
- I need to learn to deal with the problem myself(33%).

# Policy approaches





## Proactive Objectives?



- Develop capacity (among adult stakeholders and kids) to understand the impact of their expressions.
- Bring kids and corporations and media together to dialogue
- Involve students, teachers, librarians and parents directly in developing and delivering (as well as receiving) information, skills and approaches on rules of technology use, conduct and respect for privacy (QUESBA Task Force Report)
- Empower young people to become active agents in raising awareness among peers and stand up to bullying e.g. empowering girls program, pink shirt, Virginia.



# Engage and Empower Youth



- Recognize hegemony and value pluralism (recognize discriminatory roots - sexism, homophobia, special needs, etc.).
- Make curriculum relevant to young people's lived and historical experiences
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>
- Dialogue with kids and raise awareness of impact of their words.
- Address adult mindsets on use of technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).



# Risk Management



- Have proactive policies in place
- Engage students in drawing up on-line communication codes of conduct
- Respond to incidents of cyber-bullying with a focus on education and responsibility not punishment
- Keep records
- Conduct workshops on cyber-bullying for staff and students
- Create awareness and foster responsible use of the internet



## Selected Publications



- Shariff, S. (2009). *Confronting Cyber-bullying: Issues and solutions for the school, the classroom, and the home*. Abington, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge (Taylor & Frances Group)
- Shariff, S. (2008). *Cyber-bullying: What schools need to know to control Cyber-bullying and avoid legal consequences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shariff, S. and Johnny, L. (2007). Cyber-Libel and Cyber-Bullying: Can Schools Protect Student Reputations and Free-Expression in Virtual Environments? *Education & Law Journal*. 16 (3) 307-342.
- Shariff, S. and Gouin, R. (2006). Cyber-Hierarchies: A New Arsenal of Weapons for Gendered Violence in Schools. In (Leach, F. and Mitchell, C. Eds., 2006). *Combating gender violence in and around schools*. Stoke on Trent. Trentham. 33-41.
- Shariff, S. (2005) Cyber-Dilemmas in the New Millennium: Balancing Free Expression and Student Safety in Cyber-Space. Special Issue: Schools and Courts: Competing Rights in the New Millennium. *McGill Journal of Education*. 40(3) 467-487.
- QESBA Task Force on the Internet and Related Technologies (June 28, 2008). Towards Empowerment, Respect and Accountability.

***Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this important research on international and national cyber-bullying.***