Because I am not currently employed as a teacher or school librarian, I have imagined the following scenario. The ninth grade Health teacher at a public high school contacted me (the school librarian) to collaborate on a lesson on cyberbullying as part of a larger unit on Internet safety. We decided to first introduce the topic by showing a video and having the students read a newspaper article related to the issue in class. In this Health class, which is required for all ninth graders, students had already discussed the basics of Internet safety and use of social media. The Language Arts teacher mentioned that she wanted the students to work on reading informational texts such as newspaper articles more effectively, so the Health teacher and I decided to design a scaffolded reading experience for the students.

For this first lesson, we decided to bring the class to the media center in order to access the article through the school’s subscription databases. I chose a newspaper article citing recent research by the Cyberbullying Research Center (Janssen, 2011). The article also describes two instances of cyberbullying. After conducting a Fry Readability study (Vacca, 2011, p. 115) on the article, I determined that this article was at an 11th grade reading level. Though the reading level is high for this class of ninth graders, I determined that the score was possibly due to high syllable words such as, “technology” and “cyberbullying” as well as other possibly difficult vocabulary, such as “confrontation” and “harass.” By effectively introducing the topic and the article and guiding reading comprehension, I think that this article will be appropriate for ninth graders.

The students are relatively diverse, with African Americans comprising 20%, Hispanics 18%, Caucasian students 48%, and 16% of other ethnicities. There are 4 English Language Learners and 2 students on the high functioning end of the Autism spectrum. There have been no major incidences of cyberbullying reported to the school from this particular grade, but the ninth grade the year before had a problem with one or two students being repeatedly bullied using text messages and Facebook.

As a teacher-librarian, my goals are to support content-area teachers as well as to give students the tools and skills they need to read a variety of forms and formats. Furthermore, I want to guide students to use technology (and the multiplicity of tools available to them) well and safely. This involves knowing how to use the Internet appropriately to interact with peers. By having the students access the newspaper article through the school’s database, the students are introduced to the variety of resources they can use for their upcoming inquiry research project. A further advantage is that the database provides options to listen to the article or have the article translated to provide modifications for EL learners and students with learning differences.

I believe that scaffolded reading experiences should challenge students. Because the teacher is there to guide students through reading and comprehension and to ensure student success, this is a perfect opportunity to set high expectations for students. This can be accomplished by providing a slightly more challenging text or by requiring thoughtful and critical responses. Silent reading and individual handouts allow students to read at their own pace and re-read sections of the text as needed. Discussion in pairs allows students to share ideas in a less intimidating form than large group discussion. A discussion web helps develop visual literacy and organization skills.

Literacy is also about more than understanding a text – students should be able to use what they read and apply it to new situations and problems. I also believe that emotions and creativity are an important part of learning. In light of that, the homework for this lesson is for students to respond to what they have learned creatively.
Objectives:
After instruction, students should be able to demonstrate understanding of the text and the issues surrounding cyberbullying. Students should be able to glean information from a newspaper article, summarize it in their own words, and articulate their opinion on the issue. Furthermore, students should create something new using their new knowledge (a short story, poem, song, etc.).

Materials/Equipment (chart):
1. Projector – media center
2. Computers – media center
3. Handouts – Health teacher and librarian

Before Reading:
The first activity will be a brief discussion of cyberbullying to see what students already know (5 minutes). The discussion will follow with a brief video on cyberbullying (3 minutes).

During Reading:
Students will read the article on their own on the computer. If they are unsure about the definition of a word, they should look it up or ask their neighbor before asking the teacher. If they want, they can listen to the article being read to them using headphones.
While reading, students will fill out a handout with “Right There” and “Think and Search” questions (Vacca, 2011, p. 202). The questions are:
1. What is cyberbullying? (“Right There”)
2. In your own words, describe what happened to Makena. (“Think and Search”)
3. In your own words, describe what happened to Jaimie Hunter’s daughter. (“Think and Search”)
4. How did the schools respond to the cyberbullying? (“Think and Search”)
5. How is cyberbullying different from bullying without technology? Give at least 3 ways. (“Think and Search”)
Reading and filling out the handout should take about 20 minutes.

After Reading:
After reading the article, the teacher will lead a brief discussion of the answers to the comprehension questions. Then, students will work for about 10 minutes with the student sitting next to them to answer the following “On Your Own” (Vacca, 2011, p. 202) questions using a discussion web (Vacca, 2011, p. 213).
1. Should the schools have punished the cyberbullies? Why or why not? (In the web, give arguments for or against, and come up with a conclusion as a group.)
2. How would you respond to cyberbullying? Why?
Once the questions have been answered, the teacher will ask a few pairs to share their thoughts.
The Health teacher and I will both assess the students’ completed handouts as well as student participation in the lesson (staying on task, contributing to discussion, etc.). The Discussion Web will be evaluated for multiple arguments for each side as well as a conclusion with reasons. The homework following this lesson will be a creative response by each student to what they have learned. The response can be in a variety of formats, including a short story, a
poem, a journal entry, a speech, or a song. The homework will be evaluated based on connection to the issues surrounding cyberbullying.

Implementation and Evaluation:

I implemented this lesson with three other grad students, all getting their Masters in Library Science. Unfortunately, not being able to trial the lesson plan with ninth graders made it difficult to evaluate. It also felt odd to take on the role of teacher with my peers. That aside, I think the lesson went well. Some of the issues surrounding cyberbullying are not black and white, and my lesson sparked a lively discussion. One surprise was that each “student” had a different response to the question, “How did the schools respond to the cyberbullying?” I expected an answer that described their lack of punishment, but only one “student” included that. The other two described the good citizenship programming and discouragement from creating social networking profiles at elementary schools. As I hoped, the “students” responded well to the Discussion Web question. Though they all agreed pretty quickly that schools should be responsible for punishing cyberbullies, they saw the validity of the opposing argument.

While my “students” read the article and answered the questions, I was pretty hands-off. In a class of ninth-graders, I would have been much more attentive to ensure I helped any students who were struggling or distracted. Honestly, it is difficult to say what I would change until I actually used this lesson in the classroom.

References
