

Activity 4.3.1 - Anonymity and social behavior. Is anonymity still possible?

Estimated duration	25 minutes
Requirements	None
Hardware and Software tools used	In class: • Pen and paper • Mentimeter (optional) • Computer for the teacher (optional) Online: • Online meeting platform • Shared document (e.g. Google Docs) • Mentimeter (optional) • Digital device for all
Type of assessment	• Oral presentation in front of class • Open-ended questions by the teacher about the potential link between reputational harm and anonymity. • Could we be totally anonymous?

Procedure

Anticipatory Set:

The teacher introduces the concept of harm by asking students which type of harm they are able to list – physical, emotional, psychological, financial, reputational, etc. –. Students will be asked to reflect on the resulting list to decide which type of harm is more linked to communication issues, especially in the case of online communication, and explain why. The introduction sets students' discussion about the relationship between emotional/reputational harm and unhealthy online communication modes.

The teacher should stimulate students to think about whether anonymity is or not an incentive for bad on-line behavior of any potential user. The suggested questions could be:

- a) Does anonymity spur bad social behavior or does it help people nurturing empathy and positive attitudes toward others?
- b) Is anonymity still possible either online and offline?
- c) How difficult is it to detect someone online?

Guided Practice:

The activity shows how it is possible to identify someone just by combining a few bits of information, as it happens with the information that people share on the internet (Guess Who? Game).

In this activity, students will use personal characteristics to identify a target student known only to the teacher.

The teacher will ask students to stand up and tell them to name the typical personal characteristics that people consciously share on social media or that can be easily seen, guessed or inferred by looking at their posts on social-media (i.e. people wearing glasses, people's height, etc.).

On the basis of the mentioned characteristic, the teacher will ask students who don't have the same characteristic as the target student to sit until the target student will be identified.

Check for Understanding:

Once the class has identified the target student, the teacher should trace back the few steps it took to pick that person out, underlying the importance of even a minimal amount of information. The discussion should then bring students to reflect on the information they themselves post online and to show them that the availability to everyone could make an identification even easier.

Closing:

The activity ends with a discussion about the real life implications of such a scenario. The teacher should also prompt students to outline means and actions that could improve their privacy and anonymity online.

Troubleshooting

Possible issue	Possible solution
Students do not provide many questions in the guided practice phase	The teacher can create a list of questions for facilitating the activity
Students might find difficulties in relating this activity to the on-line context	The teacher should stress the parallelism between online and "real-world" actions