

# Digital citizenship: developing an ethical and responsible online culture

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## Abstract

Responsible and ethical use of the Internet is not something that teenagers, in particular, consider to be important, and serious consequences are beginning to emerge as a result of careless and offensive online behaviour. Teachers and teacher librarians have a duty of care to make students aware of the potentially devastating effects of thoughtless, inappropriate or malicious online behaviour, and to guide them into making wise choices when interacting in a digital world.

The Australian Government recognises the valuable contribution educators make in this regard, and the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, released in June 2011, outlines 12 out of 32 recommendations directly related to schools, teachers and education, commenting that, '... schools are the key places to encourage young people to improve their own safety and online ethics'. The Australian Government has set up a national cybersafety education program and Cybersmart website for children, parents and educators, and is providing free online tutorials for teachers wishing to help students deal with the challenges of an online world.

## Introduction

We live in an incredibly exciting time of global connectedness and online collaboration. However, while the rapidly evolving world of the Internet has profoundly revolutionised our lives, it has also opened the door to a whole new set of social problems,

the speed of which has caught law enforcement agencies and the public, as a whole, by surprise. As a result, parents, schools and the police seem to be forever playing catch-up, with 20th century solutions often applied to 21st century problems. In the past, people were limited in their sphere of influence to those with whom they could physically come in contact. Now, with the emergence of interactive, collaborative Web 2.0 communication technologies, we each have the world at our fingertips — literally — and we each must internalise how to behave in this rapidly evolving world: in essence, how to become digital citizens.

Almost every day the media publicise examples of the misuse of social networking sites, Internet scams or cyberbullying. Along with illegal downloads, credit card fraud, gaming addictions, Facebook addiction, viruses, hate sites, pornography and predator grooming, these highlight the dark underbelly of the Internet. Our students inhabit this online world, some for many hours each day. While many of them already have skills and strategies in place for dealing with these problems and protecting themselves and their friends, teachers and schools have a responsibility to educate them about the dangers related to inappropriate and unethical use of the Internet. The Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, released in June this year, acknowledges that teachers play a critical role in helping children internalise positive online behaviours: 'Schools are the key places to encourage young people to improve their own safety and online ethics' (2010, p.27).

Parents, teachers, governments, industry and organisations must all work together to make the Internet a safer place, especially for our children.

Vicki Davis and Julie Lindsay are two very active players in the digital citizenship arena and they state:

*It is not enough to open the gate and let the sheep out to wander aimlessly ... Unsafe drivers cause accidents, whereas educated drivers make the roads safer. Likewise, educating students makes the Internet a safer place (Lindsay & David 2010).*

It is not enough to have a set of rules for children to follow at home or at school, because there are so many other opportunities for them to access the Internet — especially now that laptop programs are being implemented in schools, and many children have Internet access via their mobile phones. Instead, they need to understand the reasons for the rules and be able to make thoughtful and critical decisions when confronted by opportunities to engage in inappropriate and irresponsible online behaviour.

## What is digital citizenship?

According to Mike Ribble, a pioneer and passionate advocate who has written extensively about the subject, digital citizenship can be defined as 'the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use' ([http://www.digitalcitizenship.net/Nine\\_Elements.html](http://www.digitalcitizenship.net/Nine_Elements.html)). He has analysed the types of behaviour that comprise digital citizenship and categorised these into nine elements:

1. Digital Etiquette: *electronic standards of conduct or procedure.*
2. Digital Communication: *electronic exchange of information.*
3. Digital Literacy: *process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology.*
4. Digital Access: *full electronic participation in society.*

5. Digital Commerce: *electronic buying and selling of goods.*
6. Digital Law: *electronic responsibility for actions and deeds.*
7. Digital Rights and Responsibilities: *those freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world.*
8. Digital Health and Wellness: *physical and psychological wellbeing in a digital technology world.*
9. Digital Security (self-protection): *electronic precautions to guarantee safety.*

Vicki Davis defines digital citizenship as 'literacy, safety, etiquette and learning strategies' (Digital Citizenship wiki), while Andrew Churches has condensed it into:

*Respect yourself, protect yourself.  
Respect others, protect others.  
Respect intellectual property,  
protect intellectual property.*  
(Educational Origami wiki:  
<http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/The+Digital+Citizen>).

See the Brisbane Grammar School Libguide at: <http://libguides.brisbanegrammar.com/watchfulwaryandwise> which contains resources on most of these areas.

## Why is a digital citizenship program so critical?

Three of the biggest problems facing young people today are:

- their perceived anonymity
- their accumulated digital portfolio or footprint
- the legal implications of thoughtless or malicious actions.

## Perceived anonymity

What students often forget, or don't

care about, is that their comments and images can be viewed by hundreds or thousands of others. Even adults can get caught out this way. Carolyn Bourne, a 60-year-old in England, discovered this the hard way in June this year when a scathing e-mail she sent to her future daughter-in-law went viral and was read by millions of people around the world.

As soon as anything is posted online, it can be retrieved forever. An example of preserving content on the Internet is the Wayback Machine (<http://www.archive.org/>), an archive database where it is possible to check websites the way they were at a certain time in Internet history. The Library of Congress has now acquired the archive of all Tweets since the introduction of Twitter in 2006, to be kept as a snapshot of our society for future reference (Digital Trends). This means that any comment that anyone has ever posted on Twitter since its inception is now permanently recorded forever.

Similarly, Facebook would have an archive of everything posted on its site and for legal purposes these would also be searchable. It would not be uncommon for many teenagers to have 600 'friends' on their Facebook account, and the implications for them regarding who can see their posted information is enormous. Students need to learn to tighten their privacy settings to reduce the incidence of misuse of their online information. There are numerous websites and blog posts on the Internet showing how to do this. Two examples by Mahendra Palsule are: *10 solid tips to safeguard your Facebook privacy*, and *8 steps to regain control of your Facebook privacy*.

The National Teen Internet Survey was funded by Cox Communications in partnership with NCMEC and John Walsh and was conducted

in March 2007 among 1,070 teens age 13 to 17. Findings included:

- A majority of teens (58%) don't think posting photos or other personal information on social networking sites is unsafe.
- About half (49%) are unconcerned that posting personal information online might negatively affect their future.
- Teens readily post personal information online. Sixty-four per cent post photos or videos of themselves, while more than half (58%) post information about where they live. Females are far more likely than male teens to post personal photos or videos of themselves (70% versus 58%).
- Nearly one in 10 teens (8%) has posted his or her mobile phone number online.
- Forty-nine per cent of high school students have posted personal information on their Web pages — such as name, age, or address — that could assist a stranger (from: <http://www.safesurfer.org/websafe.html>).

For teenagers, the two YouTube video clips *Think before you post* and *Once you post it you lose it* are graphic reminders about the potentially devastating consequences of students casually posting information about themselves online.

Younger children often innocently post personal information online that can lead to cyber grooming, then don't recognise it and often don't know how to deal with it. A street name and number can easily be found using Google Maps street view and Google Earth. Watch the YouTube video *Exposing private information online* to see how easy it is to track children down.

## Accumulated digital portfolio or footprint

The YouTube video *Digital Dossier* gives an overview of how much information is accumulated about each of us over a lifetime, whether we created it or not and whether we like it or not. A potential problem young people need to consider more seriously is the fact that most employers now check potential candidates on Google or Facebook before they offer interviews. According to a 2007 survey conducted by Online Recruitment, 20% of employers surveyed said they used 'social networking' sites to run searches on job applicants and 68% of employers used search engines to check on candidates: [http://www.onrec.com/news/employers\\_use\\_facebook\\_for\\_further\\_background](http://www.onrec.com/news/employers_use_facebook_for_further_background)

Daniel Schwabel's 2011 blog post, *5 Reasons Why Your Online Presence Will Replace Your Resume in 10 Years*, shows how personal online information is becoming increasingly important to potential employers and the blog post *Can Facebook Impact on Your Current Job or Interview?* (republished on Bloggers Base) outlines why we need to teach students to be thoughtful and vigilant about which photos and details they share online.

However, potential employees are not the only ones checking information online. Fraudsters, scammers and identity thieves can all find a wealth of information about people if they know where to look. According to JessicaM (<http://www.squidoo.com/personalInformation>):

*... it is quite easy to search private information on the Internet on almost everyone ... there are hundreds of people search or background check websites on the Internet. You can make a background check on a lost friend, a missing relative, a potential*

*date, a new neighbour, a prank caller, a ruthless car driver, an unknown mobile number, an unlisted phone number, your boss, your co-worker, or strangers you never meet. On the flip side, not only can you find anything about others, **people can also find anything about you** — which includes your personal records and private information. Creditors, banks, political parties use your personal data for legitimate purpose. However, unscrupulous individuals and criminals can use the same information to harm you and your family. With the full availability of your personal information, your identity can be stolen or exploited in illegal activities such as identity theft, predatory marketing, credit fraud and Internet stalking.*

The website *25 free search engines to find anyone* shows how easy it is to track down people you are interested in finding. While JessicaM gives a very comprehensive overview of how to remove personal information from Google and the Internet, the reality is, while many older people do not want their information made public, it seems that most of the younger generations just don't care. In future, it is quite likely that removing or hiding content on the Internet will become a thriving business once current generations realise how much their careless postings will influence their lives in later years.

## Legal implications

We need to reinforce the fact that once students post something it's out of their control and it's out there forever. Freedom of speech does not equate to freedom from consequences and there are now many examples of young adults being sued or prosecuted because of careless or deliberate Internet postings.

- One of the most famous

examples of cyberbullying and a video going viral is *The Star Wars Kid*. In 2002, Ghyslain Raza filmed himself, at his school in Quebec, mimicking Darth Maul from *Star Wars*. Unfortunately his friends found the video and uploaded it to the Internet, where it went viral. It is estimated that it has been watched more than a billion times and has been reworked into other videos hundreds of times. Ghyslain endured terrible bullying and severe depression after the video was posted and his parents sued the boys who had posted it for \$250,000. Today he has managed to move on and is now a lawyer.

- In the US, Megan Meier was a depressed 13-year-old who hanged herself after a MySpace relationship with a boy turned sour. The problem was, the 'boy' was the mother of one of Megan's friends in her neighbourhood, and she deliberately set out to make Megan 'pay' for upsetting her daughter. At the time, no legislation existed to charge Lori Drew for committing a crime; however, the prosecutors had hoped for a 20-year jail term.
- In the UK, a teenager who posted death threats on Facebook has become the first person in Britain to be jailed for bullying on a social networking site. Keeley Houghton, 18, of Malvern, Worcestershire, has been sentenced to three months in a young offenders' institution after she posted a message saying that she would kill Emily Moore.
- Eighteen-year-old Philip Alpert from Orlando had just had an argument with his 16-year-old ex-girlfriend when he sent a naked photo of her to dozens of



her family and friends. He was arrested on child pornography charges, given a five-year probation and registered as a sex offender until he turns 43. He's been kicked out of college, he cannot travel out of the county without making prior arrangements with his probation officer, he has lost many friends and is having trouble finding a job because of his status as a convicted felon. At the same time, Alpert says, 'I'm being punished for the rest of my life for something that took two minutes or less to do' (<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/04/07/sexting.busts/>).

## Using the Internet to create a positive digital footprint

While the majority of media reports that we hear highlight the negative use of the Internet and social networking sites, it is very refreshing to know that there are also many young people who are using the Internet to change the world for good.

- **Ryan Hreljac** was just seven years old when he raised money for clean drinking water for African children. His first well was built in 1999 at a school in a Ugandan village and continues to serve thousands of people. *The Ryan's Well Foundation* now involves over 650 schools from 30 countries in fundraising activities. They have completed over 560 water and sanitation projects, providing access to clean water, improved sanitation and hygiene education for over 670,000 people. *The Ryan's Well Foundation* website can be found at: <http://www.ryanswell.ca/about-us.aspx>
- At the age of 17, with a passion

for social issues, **Yassmin Abdel-Magied** founded *Youth Without Borders*, an advocacy group that strives to empower young people to work together to implement positive change within their communities in Australia and overseas. Yassmin's web page is at: <http://www.youthwithoutborders.com.au/node/6>

- *25 Days to Make a Difference* was a blog set up by **Laura Stockman** in honour of her grandfather, a very caring and generous person. To honour her grandfather's memory, she tried to make a difference every day for 25 days. Laura blogged about it at: <http://twentyfivedays.wordpress.com>
- *Working Together to Make a Difference* (<http://workingtogether2makeadifference.ning.com>) is a website set up by **Jenny Luca** in response to Laura's blog.
- When 21-year-old **Chris Raine** decided to spend a year without alcohol and blog about it, he didn't realise how many young people he would influence. His blog, *Hello Sunday Morning*, now reaches over 9000 people and has over 75 bloggers around the world (<http://hellosundaymorning.com.au/category/chris/>). To read about why he created this blog, go to: <http://hellosundaymorning.wordpress.com/chris-raine-hello-sunday-morning/>

## How do we teach digital citizenship?

There are hundreds of sites now set up to deal with this ever-growing problem. Here are just a few where you can participate or download free activities to use with your students:

- *ACMA Cybersmart website and Connect.ed tutorials*

The Australian Government, in conjunction with the Australian Communications and Media Authority, has put together an excellent site to help children, teachers, library staff and parents become better informed about cybersafety issues. The site's objectives are to inform, educate and empower and there is a wealth of resources included for different age levels.

There is also a free online tutorial program that teachers can access, as well as workshop sessions around the country that provide teachers (including casual relief teachers) with:

*... a comprehensive understanding of a modern student's technology profile, digital literacy, positive online behaviour, personal and peer safety and the school's and teachers' legal obligations to minimise and address risks* (<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/outreach.aspx#CON>).

- *Alannah and Madeline Foundation*

The National Pilot to Increase Cyber-Safety in Schools was conducted by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation (AMF). It involved 164 government and non-government schools in urban, rural and remote regions and helped confront safety issues in e-communications, including cyberbullying and examine the effectiveness of existing cybersafety programs in schools.

The Queensland Government announced on 14 March 2011 that eSmart will be rolled out to all Queensland state schools by the AMF in partnership with the Queensland state government (<https://www.esmartschools.org.au/Pages/eSmartPortal.aspx>).

On 12 April 2011, the Victorian government also announced \$10.5 million of funding to promote the eSmart program across Victorian schools (<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/DigitalEducationRevolution/Pages/AMFoundation.aspx>).

- *Digital Compass Activity*

Mike Ribble and Gerald Bailey (2005) have developed a series of scenarios to discuss with students along with a 'digital compass':

*Students often argue that there are shades of gray when interpreting each scenario. The purpose of the compass metaphor activity is to help students analyse the concept of technology use and misuse ... The best way to help others to understand the right direction is through discussion, self-reflection and role modelling.*

- *Adina's Deck*

This is a DVD series of digital citizenship scenarios, designed to make middle school-aged students think more carefully about online issues. You can purchase them from: <http://adinadeck.com/shop/>

Episode 1: Solving cyberbullying mysteries.

Episode 2: The case of the online crush (online predator).

Episode 3: The case of the plagiarised paper.

- *Hector's World*

Hector's World is a free online space for 2- to 9-year-olds and their parents and teachers, where animated characters learn how to become confident and responsible digital citizens.

- *MyWorld*

MyWorld is a digital literacy

tutorial for secondary students which aims to teach students:

*... essential digital literacy skills through simulating their favourite online experiences. The tutorial is divided into four chapters, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of digital literacy: researching and authenticating online information, managing privacy and reputation, dealing with online relationships and using digital media in an ethical manner. (<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/catalogue/products/descriptions/myworld.cfm>)*

## Conclusion

As well as physical danger from inappropriate use of the Internet, children also face emotional and psychological trauma and legal ramifications. Teachers have a duty of care to ensure that students are empowered to deal with these challenges, while at the same time recognising that many already have safety mechanisms in place and many are already using the Internet to create a positive online presence. The key to the future may well lie in one of the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee: involve students more in peer mentoring and use them to teach others how to become responsible and ethical digital citizens.

### Three key learnings:

- Irresponsible and potentially harmful use of the Internet is escalating alarmingly.
- Most children and teenagers need to be taught ethical and responsible ways to behave when using the Internet, particularly as information online is out there forever.
- Young people should be

encouraged to create a positive digital profile and to use the Internet for good and worthwhile projects.

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*For all websites, YouTube videos, practical activities and news articles referred to in this commentary, please visit: [http://www.asla.org.au/pubs/access/a\\_commentary\\_index.htm](http://www.asla.org.au/pubs/access/a_commentary_index.htm)*