

Teaching Online Safety Issues from a Media Education Perspective

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Young people and the use of Internet

- The promotion of online safety in school should be part of a larger pedagogical project where the urgency on regulation and prohibition is associated with pedagogical interventions aimed at developing young people's creative, cultural, critical media skills and competences.
- The school is a vital factor for getting young people to critically understand and creatively appreciate the Internet as a way to cultural and social growth, to the world and to the diversity of people and cultures, in a word as a way to the construction of active citizenship in the digital age

Young people and the use of Internet

- As research shows, usually young people use Internet more at home than at school (with obvious differences from country to country).
- Preferred activities are: communicating with friends; visiting websites; listening to music; playing games downloading (at times uploading) material
- The home is where many young people learn about the Internet either through self learning or from siblings and peers (at times from parents)
- School Internet use is instead limited and constrained. Although physical access to it is widespread, practical, systematic and creative use of it occurs much less often than at home.
- Students mostly say they use Internet for their homework (retrieving information) and during ICT lessons

Some recommendations for a Media Education perspective

- Clearly, there is a marked gap between home and school use of Internet in terms of frequency of use, access, regulation, learning and skill development, and type of activity
- It is equally clear, however, that **young people cannot adequately gain the necessary skills on their own**
- Despite the highly creative potential offered by the new media, the evidence suggests that creative work (both inside and outside school) is limited. **Again, there is an obvious role for school in developing these less easily-acquired skills**
- I'd like to make one example: the use of blogs in school

Teaching and learning with blogs

- Teachers can use blogs to document their own professional activity; to share data, teaching material and information with colleagues
- They can also use blogs for uploading their teaching material, assignments and grading, and in general for creating spaces of interaction and feedback with their students
- They can also use blogs to make contact with parents and with the educating community as a whole (families, local authorities, NGOs, adults) to share with them those issues studied in the school which might have a particular socio-cultural impact on the local community.

Teaching and learning with blogs

- Students as a class, can use blogs as a kind of online newspaper where they publish and share their opinions on a variety of issues;
- Blogs can be used to interact with teachers and participate to specific online forums, debates and teaching activities;
- On a more individual level, blogs can be used as a student's portfolio (open to teachers and parents) where s/he deposits and documents all the schoolwork being done for the school (papers, projects, presentations, research, etc.).
- Similar activities may be carried out with other kind of Web 2.0 applications (such as Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, iTunes/Podcast, Skype, etc.)

Some recommendations for a Media Education perspective

- As for safety issues, it seems to me important to help students to understand “risk” in the wider terms of cyber exclusion/digital divide and uncritical/uninformed access
- It is not simply a question of teaching the students how to protect themselves but also (more importantly) to be able to fully understand, experiment and evaluate how technologies can be a gift in terms of cause-oriented social networking, critical information retrieval, creative self-expression, collaborative learning, political participation, etc.
- It is equally important they understand that such a gift is not available to everybody in the same way. Technology may create new forms of social exclusion and digital divides which often add to older ones. Students, as growing-up citizens, must be aware of this and take responsibility – together with their teachers – for it.

Some recommendations for a Media Education perspective

- It is also important they understand that their daily internet uses are often thoughtless and uninformed
- The kind of approach I'm suggesting here is a *dialogic* one: it involves a dialogue between students' existing knowledge and experience of Internet and the new knowledge that is made available to them by teachers
- It is not a question of “validating” – let alone celebrating – students' experiences but to provide them with the means to reflect upon those experiences, to realize how they might be different and to move beyond them
- Media education involves participation and understanding: it must enable students to become active and responsible **users** and **producers** of technology; it must also enable them to comprehend the wider contexts in which media are situated, to reflect upon the wider conditions under which their daily media uses (and the meanings they give to them) are produced.

Some recommendations for a Media Education perspective

- As students experience daily, with digital media much of the learning is carried out without explicit teaching: it involves active exploration, i.e. a *trial-and-error/learning-by-doing* approach where peer-to-peer-help, experimentation and play have an important role rather than direct teacher *instruction*.
- Compared with the demanding multimedia experiences they have outside school, much classroom work appears boring, unexciting, limited and restrictive, teacher-directed, as research shows.
- Students are already active users of media technology; they have a strong sense of their own autonomy and authority as self-learners, yet teachers have an important role to play in order to enable them to use technology in a more critical and creative way so as to become active citizens in the digital era