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Internet Safety for Students in Elementary Schools

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INTERNET SAFETY
FOR STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Laurie MacArthur

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Education

REGIS UNIVERSITY

August, 2009

ABSTRACT

Internet Safety for Students in Elementary Schools

The purpose of this project was to develop a PowerPoint presentation to inform the staff of elementary schools about the benefits and risks of Internet usage for research and communication. Many skilled teachers are unaware of the pros and cons associated with the Internet. Elementary school students need to learn the means to retrieve credible information for research and how to use it in an ethical manner. In addition, they are particularly vulnerable to the serious risks associated with communication on the Internet. The author includes background information for staff members to guide their discussion about the content of the slides. The presentation contains language and graphics to appeal to the students in elementary schools. Thus, it can be used to present this information to the students as well as the teachers.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Students' access to the Internet, at home and at school, has increased notably in recent years (Wishart, 2004). Researchers from the Princeton Survey Research Associates (2004, as cited in Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) estimated that 87% of the youth in the United States between 12-17 years of age were online on a regular basis. The majority of the participants in their sample reported they were online daily. Students utilize the Internet as a research tool and as a social network mechanism.

Statement of the Problem

Frequently, the staff of schools are perceived to have the responsibility to provide Internet safety information to the students (Wishart, 2004). Students can access a wealth of information from their homes and their classrooms. Consequently, they need to learn to evaluate the credibility of the information available on the Internet and to use it ethically. Also, students use the Internet to share information with others. According to Tyrnes (2007), social networking can be beneficial in certain situations, but also it can expose students to precarious situations. Many elementary school educators find it difficult to concurrently teach students the benefits of the Internet and protect them from the dangers.

Background of the Problem

Many students are introduced to the Internet as a research tool by their teachers in elementary school. If Internet access is available, they can investigate virtually any topic

from their homes or classrooms (Sterngold, 2004). However, students are exposed to a multitude of risks when they research topics on the Internet. As stated by Sterngold, “The digital revolution makes it easy for students to plagiarize” (p. 16). Also, the information retrieved may not be credible. In addition, students may enter sites that contain inappropriate information (e.g., pornography).

The primary use of the Internet has moved from information retrieval to socialization (Geftter, 2006, as cited in De Souza & Dick, 2008). The risks involved with social networking have received a vast amount of coverage from media reporters. However, according to Tyrnes (2007), students’ participation in online social environments (e.g., chat rooms, discussion boards) can enhance learning. Students can collaborate and share information with peers outside of their schools via social networking websites. Therefore, under certain circumstances, “an extended online peer group can be valuable” (p. 577). Again, many students begin to participate in social networking while in elementary school.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to develop an Internet safety program for educators to use with students in elementary schools. Many novice teachers are not proficient with the use of the Internet. Therefore, the focus in the review of literature is on the history of the use of the Internet by students. This author informs educators of the benefits and risks associated with the use of the Internet for research and social networking. In addition, various means to control Internet safety at schools are identified. The information is organized for delivery in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

Chapter Summary

Students' access to the Internet has changed the way that information is retrieved. In addition, students are able to form online relationships through social networking websites. Educators have the responsibility to teach students about the potential benefits and risks they may encounter when they research topics and communicate on the Internet. The purpose of this project was to inform educators about the ways to teach students in elementary schools to use the Internet in a responsible manner. In Chapter 2, the Review of Literature, this author reviews the professional literature about the benefits and hazards of Internet use by students.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this project was to develop a presentation for educators to use with elementary school students to teach about the benefits and risks linked to the use of the Internet. People of all ages use the Internet for a wide range of purposes (Sharples, Graber, Harrison, & Logant, 2009). They utilize the Internet as a: (a) source of information, (b) tool to present knowledge, and (c) communication mechanism. The Internet has changed the lives of the majority of people. Frequently, daily routines are conducted through personal computers. Many people use the Internet as a replacement for traditional sources of information (e.g., dictionaries, encyclopedias, phone directories, newspapers, clocks). Often, people make purchases of goods and services via the Internet.

This evolution of the Internet has been associated with pros and cons (Hodge & Lin, 2003). Certainly, people who conduct research through the Internet have access to much more information than is available from public libraries. However, it is difficult for many people to determine the credibility. Plagiarism is much easier when there is an option to “cut and paste” (Bugeja, 2004, p. 37).

Many students have not known a time without the Internet (Rader, 1998). It has become “the medium of choice, replacing television or print in hard copy form” (November, 2001, p. 42). Ma, Wan, and Lu (2008) stated, “According to a report released by U.S. Bureau of the Census (2002) in *World Almanac & Book of Facts*, 64.1%

of children ages 7 to 11 have computers at home” (p. 198). Thus, they are particularly vulnerable to the potential risks associated with the use of the Internet.

Often, students use the Internet for social networking (De Souza & Dick, 2008). With the use of this form of communication, students can easily stay in contact with others. However, students who develop an online social network are at risk for many serious consequences. According to Brody (2007), “It isn’t always easy to find the balance between protecting students from Internet dangers and distractions and reaping its benefits—but it’s certainly on every district’s tech priority list” (p. 29).

Research on the Internet

Many students enter school with some degree of experience with modern technology (Heun, 2008). They may be more adept in computer literacy than their parents and teachers. Often, educators assume that the “net generation” (Ma et al., 2008, p. 197) is already proficient with the skills needed for research. DeBarr (2008, as cited in Heun), instructional technology coordinator for the Scottsdale Unified School District in Scottsdale, Arizona, expressed his concern about the research skills taught to students:

The kids know how to text message on their phones, but ask them to type a research paper and format it, they don’t know how to do that. Not many of those kids will be going into business and turning in a business proposal on a phone. (p. 19)

Evidently, the staff at many schools do not address the essential skills needed for research projects.

Benefits

Most students have access to Internet search engines and full text article databases for research (Sterngold, 2004). The information is limitless, diverse, and easily

accessible. Since the information highway never closes, students are not restricted to the books contained in local libraries, nor are they confined to business hours (Bugeja, 2004). When they use the Internet as a “means to the end” (Heun, 2008, p. 19) for a research project, the amount of information retrieved may be much greater, and the time students spend may be much shorter.

Information posted on the Internet may be more up-to-date than that found in textbooks (Berson, Berson, & Iannone, 2001). These authors stated, “The Internet provides access to the evolving knowledge base and facilitates the dissemination of ideas” (p. 33). Abstracts of full articles are available at the push of a button (Beguja, 2004). Thus, students must decide whether the information contained in the articles is current and applicable to the topic.

Risks

Technological literacy is an indispensable component of education (Heun, 2008). However, frequently, students are not taught the fundamental skills for academic success in a technological age. They visit a computer lab only to learn keyboarding. By the time this skill is introduced, most have taught themselves how to navigate through computer websites.

In addition to the enhanced learning opportunities available through the Internet, Ma et al. (2008) noted that “it has also brought challenges to academic integrity” (p. 198). According to Lehman (2008, as cited in Heun, 2008), the principal of Philadelphia’s Science Leadership Academy, technology should be integrated within subjects. Therefore, students should learn how the Internet “will transform them as students and learners” (p. 19) in an authentic environment. Without the essential skills needed to

retrieve appropriate information and cite it properly, students are exposed to a multitude of risks.

Inappropriate Material

The multitude of material accessible through the Internet includes a vast amount that is unsuitable for students (Wishart, 2004). The Internet is a vehicle for “free speech” (Baule & Thompson, 1998b, p. 17). According to Sharples, Graber, Harrison, and Logant (2009), the concerns voiced by adults about the Internet are similar to those which were raised in regard to television. Therefore, Sharples et al. stated, “Children will continue to explore the adult world” (p. 71), and inappropriate content can be included on websites and advertisements.

Wishart (2004) maintained that, “Inappropriate material such as pornography, inflammatory and racist writings can be accessed both by accident and with deliberate intent to view” (p. 193). It is ironic that some of the first words many students learn to spell are ones that adults consider inappropriate (Newman, 2009). This means they can use search engines to access pornography. However, the probability of retrieving such material increases with age. Because older students are more inclined to intentionally release personal information, this can become a serious safety issue.

Credibility of Information

“The impact of the Internet on our students is already powerful and growing every day” (November, 2001, p. 42). Frequently, students are led to believe that anything in print form is from a reliable source. Hence, there is an “illusion that anything found on the World Wide Web must be true” (p. 42). However, the Internet is an open forum, and

numerous students are likely to quote material found on the Internet that is not credible information.

Many students are not trained to critically appraise the information on the Internet (November, 2001). They lack the skills needed to evaluate the credibility of the information and the author of the website. In general, permission is not required to link one website to another. Therefore, through these “digital threads” (p. 42), students can navigate from one site to another, and it is very unlikely that the author of the original site is aware of the link.

Plagiarism

As students progress through the grade levels, the pressure to earn good grades increases (Devlin, 2007). The accessibility to information on the Internet can have “disastrous consequences” (p. 19). Students have found the abundance of information on the Internet to be a temptation to plagiarize. Also, the Internet is seen as the perfect solution for procrastinators (Howard & Davies, 2009). Bugeja (2004) termed this as “select, copy, and paste” (p. 37) cheating. “Not surprisingly then, digital plagiarism is on the rise” (Sterngold, 2004, p. 16).

The use of downloads from the Internet can be viewed as the means to achieve a goal (Bugeja, 2004). Many students have access to the Internet through their mobile phones. Thus, some students are able to discretely access websites during tests (Sharples et al., 2009). According to Bugeja, “Studies show that students not only plagiarize regularly, but also believe that it is okay to do so” (p. 37). In addition, many students perceive the consequences or punishments for plagiarism as minimal (Ma et al., 2008).

According to Villano (2006), “The most rampant plagiarizing occurs in the K-12 environment where students are encouraged to use the Internet to source their assignments” (p. 25). Many students devote a tremendous amount of time and effort to retrieve information. Therefore, they may become “guilt-free cheaters” (p. 27). It is extremely important for students to be aware of the consequences if they do not cite the sources of their information (Devlin, 2007).

Numerous students have not developed the skills needed to write quality research papers (Sterngold, 2004). Educators may not feel the need to model these skills, because their students appear to be proficient with the use of modern technology. Furthermore, many teachers may be intimidated by their students’ navigational skills on computers. Sterngold cited Howard (2002) and stated, “We expect authentic writing from students, yet we do not write authentic assignments for them” (p. 18). In reality, the Internet may have made it more important than ever for educators to teach effective skills to students so that they can research topics and write research papers.

Communication on the Internet

Social interaction has always been a priority for the majority of students (Sharples et al., 2009). Mustacchi (2009) stated, “According to a series of studies conducted by the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, more than 80 percent of adolescents own at least one form of new media technology, which they use to communicate with one another” (p. 78). In the past, students communicated through landline telephones, and most students could place phone calls only during certain hours. Obviously, peer communication is important for socialization and learning purposes; however, the evolution of this form of technology can present many risks for students.

Benefits

It is important for students to be knowledgeable about the new forms of technology to prosper in the 21st Century (Sharples et al., 2009). According to Sharples et al., “Children can gain valuable skills by engaging in the activity of online social networking and new media creation, without any need for formal teaching, there are also opportunities to apply these skills and technologies to school education” (p. 72). Students can build a multitude of skills that: (a) enhance leadership, (b) increase confidence, (c) encourage innovation, and (d) breed tolerance. They are able to share ideas through online forums with people from different backgrounds.

In addition, students, who do not interact at school, may share their thoughts through blogs (Sharples et al., 2009). They may even engage in online debates. Students can develop their own identities when they build online personal profiles or create videos to post on YouTube. According to Tyrnes (2009), “The educational and psychosocial benefits of this type of communication can far outweigh the potential dangers” (p. 575). Students can use social networking for numerous reasons to increase their learning experiences.

Risks

When students share information online, they expose themselves to the potential for verbal and physical abuse (Sharples et al., 2009). “Safe Internet use requires balancing perceived benefits against acceptable risks” (p. 72). In reality, students are no longer safe when they are at home (Mustacchi, 2009). Cyberspace has no boundaries. Students can be the targets of online bullying from any place with Internet access. The development of relationships with strangers can be even more dangerous, and many

students have sent compromising photographs of themselves via the Internet (Newman, 2009).

Cyberbullying

According to Mustacchi (2009), students from every generation have been the victims of bullies; however, previously, the “pressures of peer judgment and abuse” (p. 78) were primarily limited to the school grounds. Bullies rarely called or visited their victims at home. Since the explosion of the Internet, students are exposed to “teasing, harassment, and threats” (p. 78) from anywhere and at anytime. This “cyberabuse” (p. 78) can occur through: (a) chat rooms, (b) e-mails, (c) text messaging, and (d) the content of websites. Students can even send insulting text messages to each other during class. According to the staff at the NCH (2002, as cited in Wishart, 2004), bullying was reported by one in four children.

Kowalski and Limber (2007, as cited in Mustacchi, 2009) noted from a survey of 4,000 middle school students that, “11 percent had been electronically bullied at least once in the two months preceding the questionnaire, and 7 percent admitted to being both a bully and a victim” (p. 78). Students who are not known to be bullies at school can still be cyberbullies. Many students who would not convey insults and threats in face to face meetings send them over the Internet.

Social Networking

A countless number of people form a social network on the Internet (De Souza & Dick, 2008). Many online relationships are between people who do not know each other outside of cyberspace. With 175 million users, MySpace is the most popular social networking website (Sydney Morning Herald, 2007b, as cited in De Souza & Dick). It is

the most frequently visited website in the U.S. and surpassed Google.com in December of 2006 (Hitwise, 2006, as cited in De Souza & Dick). Other popular social networking websites include: (a) Facebook, (b) Bebo, and (c) YouTube (Sharples et al., 2009).

Lenhart and Madden (2007, as cited in Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) found from their survey of 935 teenage youth that “55% of online youth have created a personal profile page” (p. 130). Students produce virtual representations of themselves through social networking websites. In another survey about teenage use of MySpace, De Souza and Dick (2008) reported that nearly 50% of the participants indicated that they revealed information to create a positive image. “The children saw this aspect of MySpace as important in their desire to be perceived in a certain way” (p. 150).

Huffaker and Calvert (2004, as cited in De Souza & Dick, 2008) noted that most “teenage bloggers” (p. 145) revealed personal information on the Internet. “This included first name (70%), age (67%) and contact information (61%)” (p. 145). Gross and Acquisti (2005, as cited in De Souza & Dick) found that:

90.8% of profiles they examined contained an image, 87.8% of users revealed their birth date, 39.9% listed a phone number and 50.8% listed their current residence. The majority of users also disclosed their dating preferences, current relationship status, political views, high school attended, hometown and various interests. (p. 145)

Often, students who share personal information over the Internet include photographs (Newman, 2009). The invention of the webcam has made this particularly convenient. Staff from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008, as cited in Newman) conducted a survey about teenage use of electronics.

According to their survey, one in five girls (11 percent between 13 and 16) and 18 percent of teen boys have sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves. About 15 percent of senders forwarded photos to people they hadn't actually met but knew only online. (pp. 120-121)

Students in elementary schools have been found "sexting" (Newman, 2009, p. 120). Many students have "faced charges for possessing, distributing, and creating child pornography" (p. 120) because they send compromising photos of themselves over the Internet. Also, the recipients of these images have been known to face charges. Some of the students involved with sexting have been identified as sex offenders. Sexting is a public way for students to explore their natural sexual curiosity. However, "on the Internet, nothing ever truly vanishes" (p. 120).

Contact with strangers has always been a concern for caregivers (Baule & Thompson, 1998a). However, before the advent of the Internet, adults had more control over these encounters. Wishart (2004) cited O'Connell et al. (2002) and stated, "1 in 10 children who use chat rooms have attended a face-to-face meeting" (p. 194). Many convicted sex offenders have used MySpace in Australia (*The Age*, 2007, as cited in De Souza & Dick, 2008). In addition, the police have charged men with the sexual assault of teenagers who they encountered through MySpace (Stafford, 2006, as cited in De Souza & Dick).

Internet Safety at Schools

Internationally, school staff are perceived to have an essential responsibility to provide Internet safety information (Wishart, 2004). This is supported by responses from parent surveys (Amarach, 2001; Media Awareness Network, 2001; both cited in Wishart) and the staff at the Children's Charities Coalition for Internet Safety (2001, as cited in

Wishart). However, according to O'Connell et al. (2002, as cited in Wishart), the Internet safety training offered by staff in schools does not provide adequate guidance to protect students from the many dangers they are exposed to when they use the Internet. Sharples et al. (2007) stated, "At present, schools are caught between the rock of parental fears about Internet abuse and the hard place of helping children to develop responsible" (p. 82) skills to use the Internet as a learning tool.

Filtering Mechanisms

The staff at many schools attempt to create safe environments for students to explore topics on the Internet with filtering mechanisms (Baule & Thompson, 1998b). Since students can intentionally or accidentally access inappropriate material with the click of a button (Wishart 2004), censorware can be installed to prevent this. However, no filtering mechanism will keep students completely "safe from the potential dangers" (Baule & Thompson, p. 17) they may encounter on the Internet.

Censorware can be installed to block access to material based on filtering websites for objectionable words (Baule & Thompson, 1998b). Some filtering mechanisms enable access only to approved sites. According to Brody (2007), the staff in Chicago schools installed tracking mechanisms, so that when students or employees access an inappropriate site, "a siren similar to a natural disaster warning sounds" (p. 30). However, some students have disabled this device, and Sharples et al. (2009) noted, "As with prohibition, children become expert at finding ways" (Sharples et al., 2009, p. 73) to work around the system. Because the Internet changes constantly, the filtering mechanisms become out-of-date quickly. In any case, material that is valuable for learning may also be blocked when these are installed.

Adult Supervision

The staff at schools “face the problem of how to allow children the right to freedom of expression in the media of their choice while ensuring appropriate protection of their health and morals” (Sharples et al., 2009, pp. 70-71). Thus, the amount of adult supervision required for the Internet is debatable. In general, older students do not need as much instruction about how to explore the material on the Internet. According to staff of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (1994, as cited in Marsh, 1995), teenage students are at greater risk for abuse if they do not have adult supervision on the Internet. Eventually, the students in elementary schools will be teenage students. Therefore, it is important “to be proactive, not reactive” (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, as quoted in Newman, 2009, p. 123).

Wishart (2004) noted that, in order to prevent access to inappropriate material, the majority of school representatives who participated in a study about Internet safety reported that the staff supervised the students’ access to the Internet. Also, Wishart found that the school population was a factor that influenced the number of breaches of school Internet policy. Thus, it is possible that the greater number of breaches of Internet safety policies, which are linked to the larger populations of the secondary schools, may be due to a higher ratio of students to teacher. Baule and Thompson (1998a) stated, “Few people would allow their children to play in the street without supervision. However, many of our children are unsupervised on the information highway” (p. 28). According to Baule and Thompson (1998b), “Adult supervision is still the most effective method of regulating access to the Internet” (p. 21).

Teaching Responsible Behavior

Students need to be aware of the dangers which they may encounter on the Internet (Newman, 2009) especially students in secondary school, who have a reputation for risky behavior. As mentioned earlier, students can bypass filtering mechanisms. Obviously, school staff cannot provide one-on-one supervision, and few parents can supervise students on a continual basis at home. Therefore, it is essential for students to learn “responsible and safe use” (Hodge & Lin, 2003, p. 11) of the Internet.

In most schools, there is an Internet use policy (Hodge & Lin, 2003). However, in some instances, the staff at schools devote little or no time to review the policy with the students. Teachers, parents, and students should be fully aware of the school policy. According to Hodge and Lin, enforcement of the policy “is essential, but should be sufficiently flexible so that inadvertent violations are seen as ‘learning opportunities’ rather than automatic occasions for punishment” (p. 12).

Role play can be an effective teaching method for Internet safety (Mustacchi, 2009). Older students can teach younger students. This can be especially helpful to teach about grooming. Grooming is a situation “when a predator builds an online relationship with a child” (p. 79) with the intent to establish a trusting relationship. According to Mustacchi, a role play situation, where older students gave lollipops to younger students and then asked for personal information, was a very effective way to teach grooming.

A roadblock to teaching Internet safety at schools is the fact that many teachers do not feel competent to do so (Brody, 2007). “Districts need to help teachers get over their fear of the unknown” (p. 30). Wishart (2004) recommended that representatives from

government organizations and children's charities provide school staff with: (a) advice for safe use of chat rooms and instant messaging, (b) information about new technological developments and guidance for use in schools, and (c) teaching materials for Internet literacy and responsibility in and out of school. In addition, Wishart suggested that school staff consult Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to investigate filtering devices for Internet access via mobile phones.

Chapter Summary

Obviously, the Internet has changed the way students research topics and communicate. They are able to access an abundance of information from any place with Internet access. Thus, students have the convenience to retrieve information from numerous locations at any time of the day.

Because of the availability of an infinite amount of information, students should learn to act in a responsible manner on the Internet. It is easy to enter inappropriate websites. Students have to be knowledgeable about evaluation of the credibility of the websites and the authors. In addition, it is necessary for them to know how to avoid plagiarism. Some experts believe that participation in social networking websites can enhance learning. However, students are exposed to many serious risks when they enter these sites.

The staff at schools is responsible to teach students the ethical and safe uses of the Internet. This includes how to evaluate the material found on websites and how to write original papers with references. Also, the staff should protect students when they are online. In the Review of Literature, the many ways to achieve this were summarized: (a) filtering mechanisms, (b) adult supervision, and (c) teaching responsible behavior. In this

author's opinion, the greatest hurdle for teachers is ignorance about the dangers students may encounter on the Internet. Therefore, the project is focused on the barriers that educators may confront. In Chapter 3, the Method, this author describes the method used to develop this project.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The purpose of this project was to develop a program for educators, who work with the students enrolled in grades 3-5, to use to teach Internet safety to their students. As students progress through elementary school, most of them are expected to use the Internet as an educational tool. Students can access an abundance of information from their classrooms or homes (Sterngold, 2004). However, there are many risks that the students expose themselves to when they download and utilize information from the Internet (Ma, Wan, & Lu, 2008). The risks the students may encounter include the: (a) access to inappropriate material, (b) retrieval of information that is not credible, and (c) temptation to plagiarize.

In addition, many of the students in elementary school who have access to the Internet communicate online (De Souza & Dick, 2008). This enables them to stay in constant contact with others, some of whom they may not know outside of cyberspace. Obviously, this can present serious safety issues for the students (i.e., physical and verbal abuse).

The staff of elementary schools should take an active role to teach the students about the benefits and risks associated with the use of the Internet (Wishart, 2004). Numerous students are expected to use the Internet for research projects. However, frequently, the teachers do not model this process. As a result, the students do not develop the research skills they need to be successful throughout their academic lives.

These students are not taught to evaluate the positive and negative effects of the use of the Internet as an educational tool.

Teachers who are not knowledgeable about the benefits and risks of the Internet are uncomfortable teaching this content. Therefore, the author developed a PowerPoint presentation focused on Internet safety. It will be used to inform the staff of elementary schools about the benefits and risks for the students when they use the Internet. This presentation will be one that they can use with the students.

Target Audience

This project is designed for use with elementary school staff. Many students, who are enrolled in these grades, begin to use the Internet as a research and social networking tool. Therefore, it is important to train elementary school staff how to teach the students about the safe use of the Internet. The information can be adapted for use with middle school students.

Organization of the PowerPoint Presentation

The presentation is organized into three sections: (a) Research on the Internet, (b) Communication on the Internet, and (c) Internet Safety at Schools. The project is structured as a presentation for staff members. The author included background information to guide the discussion. However, the format and language is adaptable for the use as a presentation to elementary school students as well.

Peer Assessment Plan

The presentation was reviewed by four staff members who interact with elementary students on a regular basis. These staff members include: (a) a third grade teacher, (b) a fourth grade teacher, (c) a school librarian, and (d) a special education

teacher. The author asked for constructive feedback about the content of the PowerPoint presentation. The feedback included information about: (a) the value of the presentation for the intended purpose, (b) the appropriateness of the material for the age levels, (c) the probability that the students will be actively engaged, (d) and what material that should be added or deleted. Their feedback is discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

The use of the Internet has notably changed the means by which students obtain information and communicate (Wishart, 2004). Students in elementary school need to be taught about the safe and ethical uses for the Internet. However, it is typical for the staff members of elementary schools to not feel that they can adequately address these topics. Many of them are not knowledgeable about this form of technology. In addition, they may not be prepared to address the essential content, which is relevant to this subject, with the students. Therefore, the author developed an informative PowerPoint presentation intended for the staff members. This presentation is the topic of Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This research project is organized as a PowerPoint presentation. The author intends for it to be presented to the staff members of elementary schools. Information to guide the discussion is included above the slides. In essence, it is a presentation to teach staff members how to address pertinent topics for the safe use of the Internet with students in elementary schools.

Most schools have Internet use agreements. These are signed by the students before they are permitted to use the Internet. Typically, the same agreements are used for all grade levels. The language used for this project is written so that staff members can share the presentation with students in elementary schools.

Internet Safety for Students in Elementary Schools



Prepared by Laurie MacArthur
Third Grade Teacher
Bergen Valley Elementary

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide the staff of elementary schools with the information to teach students the benefits and risks associated with the use of the Internet for research and communication.

Educators may feel inadequately informed to teach the benefits and risks of the Internet to the net generation.

Table of Contents

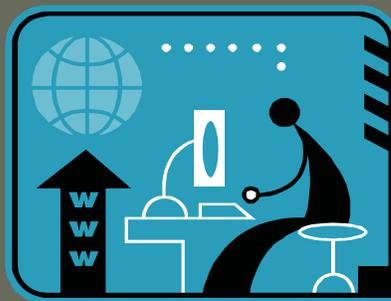
- Part One: Research on the Internet
- Part Two: Communication on the Internet
- Part Three: Internet Safety at Schools



Most students begin to use the Internet for research and communication in elementary school. The Internet is an invaluable tool. Unfortunately, it is also associated with serious risks.

Part One

Research on the Internet



Many students know how to text message, but have not been taught how to prepare a research project.

What are the benefits of research on the Internet?



Many students enter school able to navigate through the Internet. Therefore, educators may incorrectly assume they are also proficient with the skills needed for research.

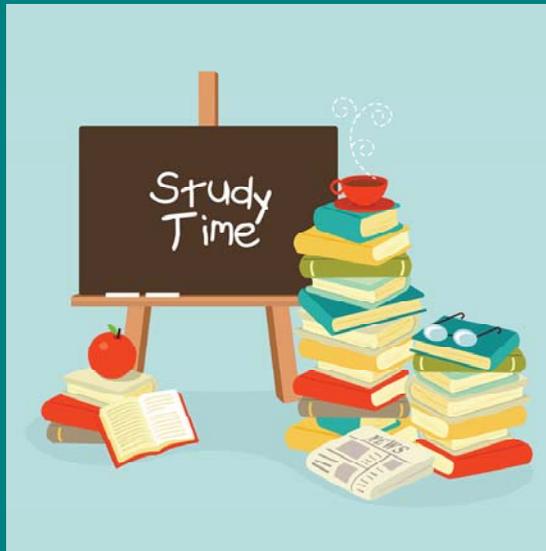
Flexibility

- The information highway never closes.
- Information may be retrieved from any place with Internet access.



Students do not have to go to the library to check out books. They can access information 24/7.

Students can access more information in less time.



A multitude of resources are available at the click of a button. Search engines and databases lead to a vast amount of information.

Current Information

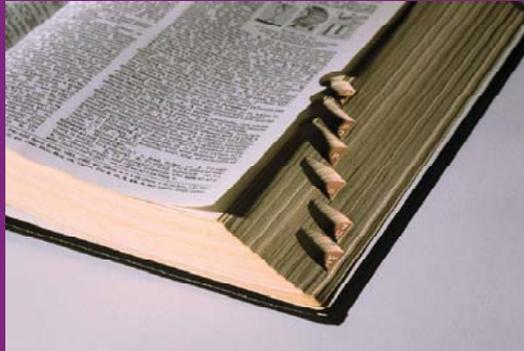
Information on the Internet may be more up-to-date than that found in textbooks.



Abstracts of articles are available on the Internet. Students can use these as screening tools to determine if the information contained is current and applicable to the topic.

Editing and revising are simpler

Dictionaries and Thesauruses are available to use within the documents.



In addition to spelling, spellcheck can help with punctuation.

What are the risks of using the Internet for research?



Students need to be taught the fundamental skills for academic success in a technological age. Without proper instruction, students are exposed to a multitude of risks.

Inappropriate Material



Students may accidentally or intentionally download unsuitable pictures and language.

Inappropriate material includes pornography and inflammatory or racist language. This can be included on websites and advertisements.

Credibility of Information



- Students need to learn how to determine if the information is reliable.
- Not everything found on the Internet is true.
- Many websites are linked together. The original author may not even be aware of the links.

Free speech applies to the Internet. Students may feel “that anything found on the World Wide Web must be true” (November, 2001, p. 42). Databases are linked to journals, magazines, and books. However, search engines can lead to any information posted on the Internet. Typically, permission is not required to link websites together.

Plagiarism

Copying someone else's written work is stealing if the student makes the reader think it is his/her own words. Students must give credit to the author.



Using the Internet to plagiarize is known as “select, copy, and paste” (Bugeja, 2004, p. 37) cheating. Because many students spend a tremendous amount of time and effort to retrieve information, they may become “guilt-free-cheaters” (Villano, 2006, p. 27). Teachers need to model how to write research papers and cite the original author.

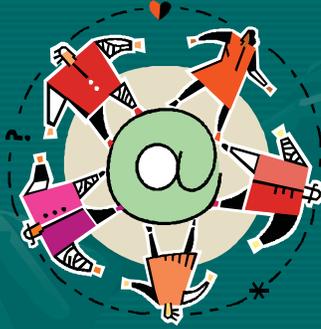
Part Two

Communication on the Internet



The Internet is used more for social networking than for research.

What are the benefits of communicating on the Internet?



More than 80 % of adolescents own some form of technology which they use for social interaction.

Communication is Important for Learning

Students can:

- share ideas and collaborate at their convenience.
- communicate with teachers and classmates outside of school.



Students who do not talk at school may share ideas over the Internet. They may learn tolerance by communicating with people from different backgrounds.

Personal Profiles and Blogs

Students can:

- explore their personal identity.
- share their experiences with others on the Internet through online journals.



According to Tyrnes (2009), “The educational and psychosocial benefits of this type of communication can far outweigh the potential dangers” (p. 575).

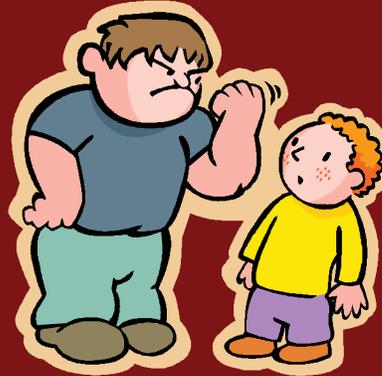
What are the risks of communicating on the Internet?



When students share information online, they expose themselves to the potential for verbal and physical abuse.

Cyberbullying

- Teasing, harassment, and threats sent over the Internet are cyberabuse.
- Students should not respond to these remarks. They should tell an adult.



Cyberabuse occurs through: (a) chat rooms, (b) e-mails, (c) text messaging, and (d) the content of websites. As many as one in four children have been victims of cyberbullies.

Social Networking



- Many online relationships are between people who do not know each other outside of cyberspace.
- Information shared may not be true.
- Personal information should not be given to strangers.

Many students who have shared personal information on the Internet have been sexually assaulted. In addition, numerous students have sent inappropriate pictures of themselves over the Internet (e.g., sexting). Some have been identified as sex offenders.

Part Three

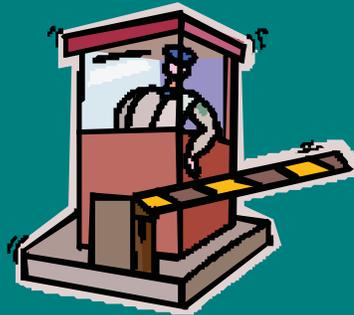
Internet Safety at Schools



Often, students are more proficient with the use of the Internet than their teachers. However, it is important for the staff of schools to accurately teach students about the safe and ethical use of the Internet.

Filtering Mechanisms

Censorware can be installed to block access to inappropriate material.



Filtering mechanisms do not block all inappropriate material. Sometimes, material that is helpful for learning is blocked. The Internet changes continually and filtering mechanisms become out-of-date quickly.

Adult Supervision

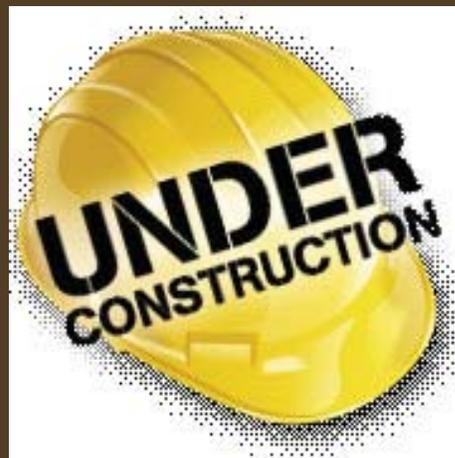


Adult supervision enables students to learn the many benefits of the Internet in a safe environment.

“Few people would allow their children to play in the street without supervision. However, many of our children are unsupervised on the information highway” (Baule & Thompson, 1998a, p. 28).

Responsible Behavior

- Teachers, students, and parents need to be aware of the school’s Internet safety policy.
- Role play is an effective teaching method.



The school’s Internet safety policy should be addressed on a continual basis using age-appropriate language. Violations should be used as learning opportunities. Role play is a very effective way to teach about the hazards of social networking.

Chapter Summary

The staff of elementary schools should make every attempt to assure that the students are safe when they are online. Most schools have filtering mechanisms. In addition, the staff should provide supervision and instruction for the students about the benefits and risks associated with the Internet. Unfortunately, many staff members are not prepared to inform students about this form of technology. In this chapter, the author presented a PowerPoint presentation for educators who work with elementary students to use with their students. The author included background information for educators to guide their discussion. In Chapter 5, the author discusses the completed project.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Contribution of the Project

The author's goal for this presentation was to provide the staff of elementary schools with the information to teach the students about the pros and cons of Internet usage. The PowerPoint presentation is a summary of the current research collected for the review of literature. It is written in simple language so that the staff of elementary schools can easily grasp the main ideas. In addition, the graphics included help to convey the major topics. The background information enhances the discussion amongst the staff members.

Limitations

The author prepared the project during the summer. Therefore, it was not an option to share the PowerPoint presentation with the staff of an elementary school. Instead, the presentation was viewed individually by the evaluation team members. A group discussion would have been helpful to evaluate the content. In addition, the author could not share the presentation with a class of elementary students.

Peer Assessment Results

Each member of the evaluation team viewed the PowerPoint presentation in the presence of the author. Some of the members were unaware of the process to view PowerPoint presentations. In these cases, the author guided the presentation. The author

feels that this is support for the prediction that many members of the staff are not as proficient with technology as the students.

Every member of the evaluation team agreed that the content of the presentation should be essential information for the staff and students of elementary schools. In addition, they all felt that the language and graphics would appeal to the students. The information provided for discussion with each slide was necessary because all of the members were unfamiliar with some, and in some cases all, of the issues presented. The author was especially concerned that the fourth grade teacher was unfamiliar with sexting and cyberbullying.

The special education teacher was concerned about the content of Slide 17. She felt that the risks of communication on the Internet are so dangerous that a benefit should not be included. In contrast, the third grade teacher felt that, because so many students participate in social networking websites, this would make the students more engaged in the presentation.

The librarian, who has taught Internet safety, felt that the material should be presented in more than one session. In the past, she has taught Internet safety in one period at the end of the year. Her presentation did not mention the benefits of the use of the Internet. After viewing this PowerPoint presentation, she expressed the need to inform students about the content at the beginning of the year. She recommended that the staff present the material as three separate parts with follow up activities (i.e., role play).

As a result of the discussions, the author perceived the need to include cheating via cell phones in the presentation. Many students use cell phones to: (a) text answers during tests, (b) take pictures of tests, and (c) warn other students about pop quizzes. The

development of new technology may be met with further risks to the integrity of students. Therefore, the students may not be informed about the benefits and consequences of these progressive tools.

Recommendations for Further Development

Technology changes on a continual basis. Many teachers do not personally use modern forms of technology. Therefore, the staff of elementary schools needs to participate in training about the pros and cons of these new developments. As mentioned earlier, the risks associated with students' possession of cell phones should be included in staff development meetings. Without instruction, many members of the staff will continue to be unaware of the new forms of technology. Therefore, the students may not be informed about the consequences associated with these progressive tools.

Project Summary

The topic of this research project is important to the author for several reasons. Technology is anything that makes lives easier. Students need to be proficient with the current forms of technology in order to be successful in the modern world. Thus, teachers should be able to instruct students with the use of technology.

Obviously, the evolution of the Internet has changed the world. The benefits are infinite. However, the risks of irresponsible behavior on the Internet are serious. Many times, students are unaware of the severe consequences associated with the use of the Internet as a vehicle for research and communication.

The PowerPoint presentation includes background information for the staff of elementary schools about the pros and cons of Internet usage by the students. It is written in language that is understandable to most elementary school students in the intermediate

grades. In addition, the graphics are meant to appeal to this age group. The presentation should be useful to inform the staff and students of elementary schools about the benefits and risks of the Internet.

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