

How to use Internet Radio to help protect young people

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A curious title you might think! Well these are curious times and it would appear despite the good intentions, life sized posters, DVDs, YouTube videos and other stuff we make for young people, not all of our advice is getting through. It also appears that not everything we are telling young people about how to behave on the Internet is connecting with them. Why is this do you think? Might it have something to do with listening to older people? Is culture getting in the way of keeping our young people safe on the Internet? According to research published in 2012, parents worry the most about their children being groomed on the Internet. Actually this is the least likely thing to happen to them of all the present dangers that our young people are exposed to on the Internet. But that doesn't stop adults worrying about the risk. Whilst the risk is relatively low, the potential consequences are serious enough to be life changing. There is risk in everything we do and there is an inbuilt desire to protect our young, but are we really protecting our young as well as we can?

It is also clear from recent evidence that young people are still making mistakes online, I am not sure that they completely understand the consequences of their mistakes. We're still seeing too many children and young people affected by online bullying and the posting of offensive photos on social media sites. Once published even to a private small group of friends, this material can be copied and relayed to other sites and shared with a much bigger than intended audience. Once out there, it is nearly impossible to recover the image, post or remarks, it's just too late. How can we teach that there's no undo button? Can we do that through the use of books, pamphlets, DVDs? It appears to me that some of the agencies working in Europe producing advice and guidance for young people are themselves behind the times. Technology has moved on, children and young people are creating, sharing, mashing and yet the adults are still using traditional media in a traditional way to communicate with their audience. It's not the traditional media I have a problem with; it's the old fashioned traditional mode of use of that media that is driving me crazy. Let me give you some

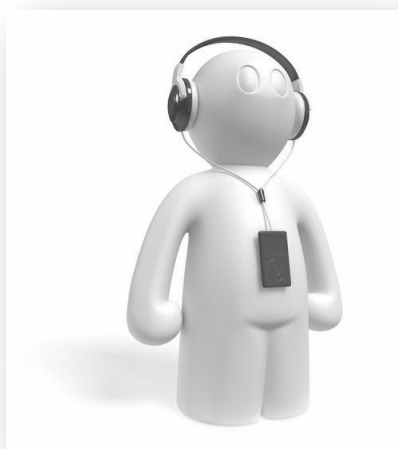
examples of this. Much of our material is passive and not interactive. I don't mean interactive in a gaming sense as one would play a game, I want young people to make the game! They should be creating the game themselves for others perhaps younger or older people to play. If it's a fun filled newspaper for young people to read about being safe online, then they should be creating the newspaper not just consuming it. After all this is how they enjoy YouTube, they see, they make, they share.

In schools we filter the Internet and ban almost everything of interest to young people. Young people are a force of nature; where there is a will they will find a way. Technology presents many new opportunities many of which some adults can't comprehend. A young person's desire to keep in constant contact with their peer group baffles most of us; nevertheless this is a fact and way of life for many of them. Suddenly losing access to social media technology or being out of contact via text messaging causes great alarm for young people. They are often distraught; complaining that this is "the end of the world for them" and "I'll have no friends now". Any parent that has tried to restrict or remove the use of their child's mobile phone will have experienced this. I am of course referring to the fact that young people are never without their mobiles phones. The average teenager in Europe sends 3,339 texts each month. It hasn't stopped at texting; picture messaging has become an easy and acceptable method of exchanging photos with much of this user generated content falling below accepted standards of decency and some of it illegal. And any amount of national or international Internet filtering will not address this issue. Policy makers who believe that centrally filtering or providing some form of opt-out Internet service will solve all of our illegal content issues are mistaken.

Smartphones

Smartphones offer young people a level of privacy to connect to Internet services and access these without supervision or the knowledge of parents. This has extended the reach of social networking sites such as Facebook. These mobile devices once called phones now have more computing power at their disposal than it took to get humankind onto The Moon. You can do many wonderful things with the latest smartphone, in fact some of the latest tablet PCs don't look like phones at all. I am going to confine my observations of this technology to media broadcast (because of my interest in radio broadcasting). You can also watch live TV and listen to Radio on most new phones these days and it is this new development that I want to explore in greater detail. Whilst TV still takes up considerable bandwidth, audio streams don't. Young people have discovered that the huge choice of Internet Radio stations can be accessed on their phones, bringing live and interactive programmes with music directly to wherever they are. If young people are spending more time online and using these devices why then are we still printing books, magazines and information cards with advice and guidance on how to keep safe on the Internet? How can anyone teach the safe use of mobile phones, cover important topics such as anti-bullying behaviour where mobile phones are banned?

What is Internet Radio or Radio 2.0?



Let me introduce you to the concept of Radio 2.0 or Internet Radio as it is also called. Often these broadcasts are live and interactive; there are fewer restrictions on content and lower costs than traditional over-the-air broadcasts. The single biggest difference is that Internet Radio covers the planet. Wherever there is an Internet connection, Radio 2.0 will reach. Right now there are thousands of broadcasts going on around the world and you could listen to any of them. What has this got to do with learning and teaching I hear you say? Well consider for just one moment having a station at your disposal, what would you do with it? Who would run it, and who would listen? I've been researching the benefits of having an

Internet Radio Station in schools for several years. I've discovered that a successful school radio station can be used for anything, not just music. When children and young people make shows about subjects that interest them, more of their peers listen. I've also learnt that working together in groups is the stuff of growth, something that policy makers appear to have missed. They call working together and sharing stuff, cheating. Collaboration is not cheating, success in our ICT-rich world that our young are actually creating themselves, requires high levels of collaboration. And yet, we in England under the current central leadership are moving backwards in time and away from project based assessment where the biggest teamwork opportunities reside. Just look at the amount of texts young people send to each other, collaboration isn't negotiable and needs to be a major component for success in learning. The most interesting discovery I've made is that working to a deadline is good for young people. Real-life isn't full of try-again opportunities and neither is there an undo button on everything we do. Yet in school, more than often if some aspect of our work isn't good enough we get another opportunity to do it again. Live radio doesn't have that feature and I like that. There's nothing like it to focus the mind and get the best work possible out of young people when they know it has to be right first time. I think the most important aspect of my research is that I've noticed that in general our children and young people aren't good at coping with failure; most of them don't know what failure looks like or feels like. Live Radio can fix that, coping with the unexpected is a great rehearsal for the World of Work. There are parallels here between what is happening on the Internet and with young people right now. They don't know what trouble really looks like. In schools we've over filtered their lives, over protected them and because of this we cannot teach the skills they need to help them cope with trouble.

Just in terms of school radio production, I know from experience that when young people have acquired the skill of coping, their quality of work is higher. To measure this; I look for a change in behaviour, specifically when something unexpected happens and they cope without any fuss and sometimes without anyone knowing what has just gone wrong. It is at that point that the school should start expanding their broadcasting activities because the broadcasting team is now ready for anything. It might seem obvious, but in terms of school radio broadcasting, missing a link or a

handover or introducing music that doesn't play when it's supposed to, are all relatively easy to spot and simulate for that matter. I've discovered all of this quite by accident. I set out to look for more inspiring uses of technology having been challenged by one Headteacher following one of my conference speeches. The Headteacher was searching for a cheap quick solution that would inspire his youngsters to use technology creatively. He couldn't find anything available on the market that was suitable, he needed something inventing. That sounds easy I thought, however the Headteacher wanted something that required minimal supervision by his already time-poor staff. Whatever I came up with, his children had to own and manage it themselves. I have to admit that I didn't immediately turn to radio broadcasting for a solution; I thought that visual or TV broadcasting would prove to be a more up to date use of technology. However, TV isn't something that young people can do live every day; it isn't sustainable and requires large amounts of supervision and investment as the equipment isn't cheap and much of it delicate too.

A New Approach?

It really is time to take another look at how we go about sharing important advice. I've discovered two things during my research with young people using mobile devices. If they participate and are more engaged in an activity rather than just being told something, they are more likely to absorb that information. Educators know this. Secondly if you try to ban mobile phones, they will find a way around that ban. They will text from their pockets, under school desks and from their bags all whilst trying to not be seen doing so. This begs the question; why are we wasting any time trying to ban phones?

Niel McLean a former director of BECTA (British Education Communications Technology Association) has always said; if you want young people to understand something, get them to make one. Apply this to key Internet Safety messages and the latest developments in easy to use Internet Radio broadcasting you have the perfect solution. I can prove this actually works. Young people do enjoy listening to other young people especially if they know them. School Radio stations are perfect conduits for communicating essentially important messages, whether they are Internet Safety, or just general positive behavioural messages. Just imagine the positive reach that a show about being safe online has when it's created by young people. I really think that children and young people have become fed up listening to adults going on at them about how to be safe, when as is often the case, young people know more about the technology. I've been researching and exploring the educational benefits of getting children and young people to make live radio programmes. I've discovered during seven years of research that if young people are encouraged to work together to a tight deadline with a clear understanding of the consequence of failure they are capable of producing work that's brilliantly engaging and of an incredibly high quality, well above what is normally expected of them. By steering the focus of the content, any educational outcome is possible as this can be applied to any subject.

Safer Internet Day

For the last three years I've been producing and hosting the world's biggest Safer Internet Day Radio Show live from London. In 2012, over 40 million people tuned in live during the 12 hour non-stop show to listen to young people, safety product providers, Internet Safety experts and a huge mix of VIP guests. The majority of content came from young people talking about the dangers and sharing their top tips on how to be safe online. If children and young people become the carriers of these messages, then the messages themselves seem to



have a greater impact. Perhaps it's because Education as a sector has been slow to embrace change. In most classrooms the teacher is still standing at the front spending most of their time with their backs to the class writing on a glorified chalkboard. I accept that the board might now be an interactive touch surface, but our use of this technology hasn't really affected the pedagogy of learning. However not a lot has changed in the last 100 years even with the use of technology, most classrooms are still laid out in a "Church" style configuration.

In 2013, the theme of Safer Internet Day is "Connect with Respect" and there will be an even bigger share on the content created and broadcast by young people. I am not suggesting for one moment that all of our Internet Safety issues can be solved with just one live 15 hour radio show, far from it! The sustainable solution is for schools to create their own shows on a regular basis, developing school radio to include key safety messages including safe internet use. There is nothing like hearing young people talk about their experiences on the Internet using the same language, expression and context as their target audience. They instinctively connect with young people. That's why I believe they have to be the carriers of the messages about how to be safe online. I am not taking about adults scripting the content, young people need to write and produce this in their own words. When they do this, their messages carry much further in the minds of the listener. We must also undertake another change in the way we educate our young people. Why are we still teaching in year sets, why not mix the children up in age groups. It is then much easier for younger children to see by good example what is expected of them when they get older. This helps in raising levels of aspiration; we call it aim higher, exceed your expectations and constantly strive to improve one's opportunities. This is a good thing. We can also affect behaviour using this mixed aged approach! With younger children seeing older children achieve success and older children learning to communicate with younger children, the benefits are wide spread and far reaching. Only during formal education do we teach children and young people within horizontal aged groups for the purposes of learning. This was once done for efficiency and assessment, this model is no longer efficient and there are more opportunities for assessment than a year group exam. In fact, collaboration and the ability to work well in groups are both becoming the new currency for success in the world of work.

Education really is the key to solving all of our problems, as long as education engages, inspires and affects the learner in a meaningful way. That's the challenge for all of us; how do we ensure that learning and teaching is sufficiently desirable to interest and engage our audience? We must involve our audience of learners in the fundamental aspects of learning & teaching, our audience needs to participate. Our messages of being safe and secure on the Internet should be part of every child's development and woven into the fabric of learning. Educators cannot achieve this alone, parents must play an important role and children and young people should "Connect with Respect".

Russell Prue speaks at conferences all over Europe; he motivates and inspires educators with his infectious enthusiasm for the learner centric use of technology. He broadcasts a live Internet Radio Show each month as part of his Learning & Teaching in the C21st Programme, you can tune in anytime to hear Russell at www.AndertonTiger.com/Listen or find his station Anderton Tiger Radio in the Tune-In World Radio Directory.