Teaching Internet Safety, Promoting Digital Literacy; The Dual Role of Education and Schools

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Towards a better internet for children: policy pillars, players and paradoxes

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Gothenburg

## Topics

* Social mediation
* Online safety and policy regulation
* Risks and harms

## Sample

EUKIDS ONLINE Surveys

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

* High-quality content online for children and young people
* Stepping up awareness and empowerment
* Creating a safe environment for children online
* Fighting against child sexual abuse and child exploitation

## Implications For Stakeholders About

* Researchers
* Industry
* Healthcare

# Abstract

Policy recommendations in the area of young people’s use of the internet frequently point to education as central to the challenge of improving internet safety. While the primary responsibility for ensuring children’s safety online is assumed to be a parental one, it is recognised that parents may not always be sufficiently informed or competent to be the primary source of internet safety education for their children. Industry and a variety of safer internet organisa- tions are also active players in internet safety messaging but it is to the school, more often than not, that policy makers look to ensure that all children have access to basic information about protecting themselves online.
This chapter addresses two aspects of the challenge facing educationalists as they seek to meet these ambitious demands. Firstly, in stepping up effort so deliver online safety in schools, what core messages should it incorporate and how can it be best implemented within an already busy school curriculum? Drawing on data from EU Kids Online as well as European Commission research into provision for online safety education, we discuss the very diverse settings and target age groups that currently exist across Europe and the problems that arise in defining minimal standards. Secondly, to be sustainable online safety education has to be more than a list of ‘dos and don’ts’; it needs to foster media literacy and greater digital citizenship, as commentators have argued (Passey 2011).

# Outcome

With the teaching of internet safety now constituting a cornerstone of European strategy for a better internet for children (European Commission 2012), schools that may in the past have found themselves ill-prepared for the wider deployment of ICT across the curriculum, now face new responsibilities and challenges at the forefront of international efforts to enhance safety and digital literacy skills. Many educational systems have introduced internet safety in their curricula; some as a specific subject or special project, others by incorporating it within relevant curriculum areas such as social and personal health education, or civic and political education. Whichever method is adopted, educational systems and more specifically schools have assumed a more prominent role than heretofore in ensuring that students learn appropriate behaviours on the internet, safety instructions as well as coping mechanisms in the cases where upset or distress occurs. Worryingly, the technology gap between students and teachers, and the disconnect between digital literacy within and beyond school, may undermine the effectiveness of such efforts (Burnett 2011; Meneses, Fabregues, Rodriguez- Gomez and Ion 2012; Moursund and Bielefeldt 1999). The issue of internet safety in education and especially for policy making is therefore twofold and requires policy to support the training of teachers as well as the education of students.
Two main strategies towards internet safety education have been identified in this chapter: one targeted and subject-specific, and the other a longer term curricular movement towards digital literacy education. The first trajectory provides a contingent response to the many urgent calls for action by policy makers and child safety experts in helping children and young people deal with risks in the digital age. Researchers have urged caution about the degree of emphasis on such programmes given the general nature of the objectives of internet safety and the likelihood of resistance to messages that are overly- protectionist and which do not speak to the realities of young people’s digital experience. The second approach, which seeks to develop children’s online safety skills within the context of an expanded concept of literacy and digital citizenship, marks a shift towards empowerment and greater self-regulation by young people. This, as we have seen, while arguably the more sustainable ap- proach that best meets young people’s needs, poses substantial challenges for schools and for governments resourcing them. Yet, as international pressures mount between countries in pursuit of competitive advantage in digital literacy attainment, this may represent an important opportunity to seek a secure and widely accessible position for internet safety education