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# 'Think B4 U Click': an Educational Online Safety Resource for the Irish CSPE Curriculum

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**Introduction**

Young people in Ireland, like their counterparts across Europe, are enthusiastic social networkers. EU Kids Online found that in 2010 82% of children in Ireland, aged 13-16, had a social networking (SNS) profile (O'Neill, Grehan, & Ólafsson, 2011). Social networking gives young people extraordinary opportunities to communicate with peers, share information and explore new friendships, in the relative security of an online community created through a social networking platform. Much concern has been expressed about young people's apparent lack of concern about privacy issues (boyd & Marwick, 2011) and about the dangers they may be exposed to by failing to keep their SNS profiles restricted to friends or personal acquaintances. Education has been slow to address this issue in part due to the reluctance of schools to allow social networking on school networks and as well as more traditional resistance to intervene in youth cultures outside the normal curriculum.

This short article reviews the background to 'Think B4 U Click', an educational resource specifically designed for the Junior Certificate CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education) syllabus.[i] The resource pack was developed jointly by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE), the Irish Government agency established to provide advice, support and information on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education, with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL), a leading independent human rights watchdog in Ireland. The aim of the project was to assist teachers to raise issues of online privacy in the classroom through an exploration of online rights and responsibilities, ultimately with the aim of empowering students to be effective, autonomous and safe users of new media.

**Social networking trends among Irish youth**

Social networking has been the subject of sustained awareness raising and education in Irish schools since 2006. Internet safety education in schools has targeted the risks and safety issues associated with disclosing personal information and maintaining public profiles online. Initially in response to the rapid rise of Bebo as a social networking site in Ireland (Nolan, 2006), a series of training materials and online resources were developed for parents, teachers and school children highlighting the importance of responsible online communication. A social media campaign 'Watch Your Space' was developed to raise awareness amongst teenagers of the risks to their well being from disclosing personal information online and cyberbullying.[ii] More recently, following the trend in which Facebook has now become the most popular SNS in Ireland, a Facebook campaign was launched for Safer Internet Day in 2011, with the aim of encouraging greater parental awareness and mediation.

In 2006, research conducted by NCTE found that while use of SNS was growing, the primary method of communication was still email, chat rooms and instant messaging or IM (Webwise, 2006). Half of the teenagers survey said they had chatted on the internet (only a quarter of the preteens said they had chatted on the internet). At the outset strong parental restrictions on online were apparent and research as early as 2003 indicated that in 70% of internet-using households, there was a rule in place not to give out personal information (NCTE/SAFT, 2003). In 2010, EU Kids Online found that this was as high as 91% (O'Neill, et al., 2011).

However, this does not mean that young people were fully aware of the consequences of sharing information or had sufficient digital skills to manage their online privacy. One of the first surveys to look at how young people used social networking websites in Ireland (especially Bebo, My Space and YouTube) was the *Watch Your Space* survey conducted in 2007 (NCTE & Anchor Youth Centre, 2008). By this time, young people in Ireland had wholeheartedly embraced SNS. 82.5% of the 374 10 to 20 year olds surveyed said they had used SNS at least once. 69% of young people surveyed were accessing SNS more than 3 times a week, over a third were doing this on a daily basis. Irish young people seemed much more likely than their counterparts in Europe or the United States to make their online profiles public – 71% of the respondents said that their profile was public compared with 56% of young Europeans and 66% of US teenagers. The research suggested that, while this difference could be related to cultural factors, it was most likely explained by the technical aspects of the Bebo website, the most popular SNS in Ireland at that time. The addition of Irish school and college communities to Bebo precipitated its phenomenal uptake in Ireland –

profiles set to private could be viewed by all members of the communities joined by users, even if the user had not added the members of the communities as friends.

The 2006 Webwise survey of children's use of the Internet showed that only 27% of those surveyed said that they disclosed their full name – compared to 79% in the 2007 survey. This large increase was largely due to the technical characteristics of the Bebo website which automatically publishes the first and last name the user enters into the basic registration form.   The *Watch your Space* survey was repeated in 2008 and indicated that 66%  of SNS users kept their profiles public so that anyone could see them. This finding was down from the 71% found in 2007 and was  attributed in part to awareness raising efforts as well to  technical changes in the Bebo registration process whereby profiles of minors were set to private by default on registration.  It was also found that boys (71%) were more likely than girls (63%) to keep their profiles public and that younger teenagers (34%) were more likely to have a private profile than older teenagers (18%).

A larger study conducted in 2009, three years after the first Webwise survey of 2006, involved  860 children aged 9-16 years, and revealed a number of significant changes (Ipsos MORI / NCTE, 2009). By this time , SNS were 'wholly conventional forms of interaction'. Survey findings also displayed a significant increase in the use of communicative tools such as IM Messaging, as well as increases in the publication of personal information online and in the number of children meeting online contacts offline. However, there was also found to be a corresponding increase in awareness of risks and how to respond to said risks. The survey found that 35% of respondents were prepared to disclose their full name and 32% of those surveyed were prepared to disclose their email address and publish their photograph. However, respondents were found to be less likely to disclose all of the information they are asked for and more likely to talk to parents about such requests, takes steps to block those who send such requests, etc.

Finally, EU Kids Online in 2010 found that 35% of 9-12 year olds and 82% of 13-16 year olds had a social networking profile. By this time, Facebook had become the most popular SNS service with 58% of 9-16 year olds on Facebook while 42% used other SNS services. Both in the UK and Ireland, fewer children were found with public profiles on Facebook, possibly a result of effective awareness-raising campaigns in these countries. In Ireland, just 14% of 9-12 year olds and 8% of 13-16 year olds kept their profiles public. It was clear that education efforts to highlight the importance of privacy issues and online safety were having some impact. However, the importance of reinforcing this message to ever younger users was essential and in this context, the Think B4 U

Click resource was devised as a longer term initiative to embed notions of digital citizenship within the core curriculum

**Educational responses**

The growth of online tools provides a wealth of opportunities for young people to write about their lives, talk and, more importantly, a place where their friends can find them. Young people are enthusiastic about actively sharing personal information and opinion. Teenagers, having a heightened need to communicate and to be included in social networks, willingly exploit these online facilities and push the boundaries of the technology to their ends.

Many teenagers see these online areas as private and free from adult and parental control but allowing opportunities for regular and instant communication with peers. The speed with which social networking has developed is unprecedented and as this  massive social experiment unfolds, some downsides of this phenomenon have emerged. Balancing empowerment of young social network users while protecting their welfare online is crucial, as clearly greater online access and use tends to increase online risks (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011). Conversely, strategies to decrease risks can restrict children's online opportunities, possibly undermining children's rights or restricting their ability to cope independently.

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) is focused on empowering children and young people to be safer, more effective and responsible internet users for life.  In fulfilling this remit, in 2009, the NCTE, with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Citizenship Education Support Team of the Second Level Support Service collaborated to develop 'Think B4 U Click' as a resource to  be used by schools to empower young people to be more effective and safer users of new media for identity, sociality, creativity and education. Promoting the concept of online rights and responsibilities, this resource is intended to help advance young people's use of new media from initial enthusiasm towards civic participation.

Parents, schools, and service providers all have key roles to play in protecting children and educating them in the responsible use of new communications technologies. While schools cannot have sole responsibility for dealing with cyber bullying, education plays a central role in communicating risks and effective risk reduction strategies to children, young people and parents. Effective educational approaches integrate parents as active facilitators of their children's media literacy and foster an ability in children to manage potential risks in online environments.

We live in a time when, due to influences of information and communications technology the way our children live their lives is constantly changing. Nowhere is this more evident than with young people's use of the Internet. The ease of access to powerful communication tools such as social networking websites, video and photograph sharing sites, and camera-phones means that, all over the world, young people are saying new things in new ways to new audiences.

Email, instant messaging, texting, Twitter, and social networks such as Facebook and Bebo allow children in Ireland to connect with each other and engage with society in ways that were unimaginable two years ago. We are also seeing how the anonymous, instant, and far reaching communication capabilities of the Internet have brought a new dimension to child protection issues such as bullying, anorexia, suicide, and sexual exploitation. In response to this challenge, the NCTE delivers integrated educational and awareness raising initiatives which aim to not just to facilitate this engagement but to actively empower our children to be autonomous and responsible users for life.

The growth of online tools provides a wealth of opportunities for young people to write about their lives, rant about any topic and, more importantly, a place where they can socialise with their friends. People are enthusiastic about actively sharing personal information and opinion. Teenagers, having a heightened need to communicate and to be included in social networks, willingly exploit these online facilities and push the boundaries of use to create virtual social networks. As such, children and young people are vulnerable to violations of their privacy, particularly in light of the fact that children and young people regularly make a great deal of personal information about themselves available in the public domain, for example through social networking sites such as Bebo and Facebook.

The objective of 'Think B4 Click' was to assist teachers in educating students about the meaning of privacy and the rights and responsibilities that we all have where privacy is concerned. Given the web's relevance to young people, the resource drives home the importance of using the net responsibly in order to respect one's own privacy and that of one's friends and family.

**Why is privacy important?**
Personal privacy is an essential part of human dignity and is crucial to the functioning of a democratic society. Privacy protects the autonomy of an individual and allows him or her to interact

with society by his or her own free will. The right to privacy is protected under Irish law and international human rights law.[iii]

Increasingly in modern society, private lives are exposed to the eyes of others. Vast amounts of personal information are now available electronically and may be accessible to the government, our friends or people we don't know and have never met. In turn, we are also engaging in activities which may infringe upon the privacy of others, e.g. posting pictures of our friends or families online without their permission. With the advent of modern technology and an "information-based culture", mobile phones, the internet, CCTV and surveillance devices, place our privacy more and more under threat. The ICCL has called for robust privacy standards, believing that people should be aware of the privacy implications of their activities and how to protect themselves against threats to their privacy. This is particularly important when it comes to younger people.

This resource aims to assist teachers in educating their students about the meaning of privacy, and the rights and responsibilities that we all have where privacy is concerned. Given the internet's relevance to young people, the resource has a particular focus on online privacy, and on the importance of using the Internet responsibly in order to respect one's own privacy and that of one's friends.

**About the resource**

Think B4 U Click is a resource pack for teachers which focuses on privacy issues, particularly in relation to children's online activities. The materials are designed to inform children about their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and their responsibilities regarding use of the web. The materials have been developed by the ICCL, the NCTE, and the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) to be used by teachers to implement the Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) curriculum. The ICCL and NCTE working in partnership launched this national initiative in September 2009.

'Think B4 U click' has been specifically designed for teachers of Junior Certificate CSPE who wish to explore the issue of online privacy in the context of online rights and responsibilities. Civic, Social and Political Education is a Junior Certificate course in Active Citizenship, based on Human Rights and Social Responsibilities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are the two key documents which underpin this course. The ultimate aim of this resource is to empower students to be effective, autonomous and safe users of new media. This resource sets out to make students aware that when online, just as in

all other aspects of their lives, individuals have human rights. Everyone is responsible for their actions towards other people and for the safeguarding of other people's rights. This is particularly pertinent in the realm of Web 2.0 where online communities are largely unregulated and rely on the community members to moderate them by reporting inaccuracies, potentially defamatory comments, and posting of inappropriate content.

**Active learning methodology**

The methodology employed by the resource guides students through the issues using active methods to stimulate discussion and allows students the space to consider how these issues affect them personally, how to assert their online rights, and how to respect the rights of their peers.

Civic, Social and Political Education is concerned with developing in students their potential for active participatory citizenship at a personal, local, national and international level. It is based on the notion that students will only choose to become active participants in their communities if they feel a sense of attachment to them. CSPE should produce knowledgeable students who can explore, analyse and evaluate, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal, and capable of making decisions and judgements through a reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities.

It is difficult to imagine students becoming active citizens if their learning about citizenship has been passive. Students must be given opportunities of being active citizens within their classroom, school, community and beyond. There is nothing like doing the real thing!  Through their involvement in active learning situations and Action Projects students have the opportunity to develop and practice the skills outlined below:

*Identification/Awareness Skills*: These are skills which enable students to acquire information (letter writing, telephone calls, sending faxes, sending e-mail, using computers, surveying, asking questions, interviewing).

*Analysis/Evaluation Skills*: Students should be able to analyse, interpret and evaluate any input they receive (collating, sorting, analysis of data and images, discussion, evaluation information and inputs from guest speakers).

*Communication Skills*: Students should practice and develop skills of communication (reflection, group participation, discussion, debating, presenting, publishing, role play, listening).

*Action Skills*: Students should develop social and political skills (working in groups, hosting, voting, decision-making, fundraising, budgeting).

Such skills are developed when students become actively involved in developing an issue or topic that has arisen in class beyond the usual limits of textbooks and course materials. For example, students might undertake a survey of attitudes amongst students in their class or school to a particular issue which may be important locally or nationally. Or they might research, organise and invite a guest speaker to talk to the class on a particular topic and thereby develop the skills of how to gain access to information and structures. Alternatively they might run an election/ referendum at the same time that this is happening nationally thereby developing and practising the skills of participation in the democratic process.

**Conclusion**

Children need to be made aware that information posted to SNS – indeed, information posted online generally – may remain accessible for an indefinite period of time, even where such information has been removed, or deleted, by the SNS user.[iv] Children should also be encouraged to consider the potential consequences of uploading certain types of content (for example, photographs). Additionally, children should be encouraged, not only to protect and respect their own individual right to privacy and data protection, but also other peoples' right to privacy (for example, by requesting a person's permission prior to uploading photographs containing that person's image). Most crucially, the importance of using the privacy settings offered by SNS operators should be engrained in any education-based initiative in respect of online social networking.

The Think B4 U Click resource represents a good example of inter-departmental collaboration in addressing the above needs. The resource is directed at junior cycle students just as most government-led initiatives in respect of privacy and data protection have focussed predominantly on teenagers, particularly in the context of the online and new media environment. Arguably, similar initiatives should be incorporated into the curriculum at primary level. Children are going online at younger and younger ages, and it is important that questions of data protection and privacy are also directed towards younger children at primary school level. It is also important that initiatives such as Think B4 U Click campaign should be evaluated in order to ascertain whether children's

awareness of privacy and data protection issues have improved and that they are indeed becoming more empowered as citizens in the digital age.

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## Endnotes

[i] See: http://www.thinkb4uclick.ie/ for a full version of the resource. Accessed May 1, 2012.

[ii] See: http://www.watchyourspace.ie/. Accessed May 1, 2012.

[iii] Article 16 of the UNCRC treaty provides a child with the right to privacy, stating that:
1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.
2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.
 Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights also protects the right to private and family life.

[iv] See Insafe, Safer Internet Day 2010: Think B4 U Post available at http://www.saferinternet.org/web/guest/safer-internet-day