THOMAS HILLMAN

Canadian Curriculum Spaces for Issues of Online Privacy

Internet connectivity and the technologies that it supports have become a pervasive part of many aspects of life. The power of these tools have brought a multitude of possibilities but also some serious issues. One of these issues relates to privacy. For all users, but particularly for young people, many of whom are embracing the possibilities of new media, the Internet offers a huge variety of new ways to interact and share information. Simple dictums given to children like 'never talk to strangers' may be rendered much more complicated in the online worlds of the Internet where issues of identity and trustworthiness can often come with subtleties and challenges not seen in the physical world. Just as children need to develop the skills to critically read the physical world, they also need to become critically literate on the Internet. While there has been a good deal of attention paid, in recent years, to critical literacy with respect to new media in Canadian school curricula, little regard has been given to issues surrounding online privacy. In this article, I will discuss the dearth of attention to issues of online privacy in Canadian curricula and the need for spaces specifically designated to address them.

Online privacy in Canadian curricula

While most provincial curricula in Canada have a strong focus on critical literacy that includes literacy in relation to new media, little can found that directly relates to issues of online privacy. In Ontario, for instance, the only mention of privacy in relation to the Internet in elementary level curricula is found in the grades 1-8 *Language document*. As part of the general instructions for teachers about the use of technology in classrooms the following disclaimer is given:

> Although the Internet is a powerful learning tool, there are potential risks attached to its use. All students must be made aware of issues of Internet privacy, safety, and responsible use, as well as of the potential for abuse of this technology, particularly when it is used to promote hatred (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, pp.30).

It isn't until the Grade 10 Computer and Information Science and Computer Engineering Technology courses that issues of online privacy are mentioned and specific expectations set out for teachers to follow. As a component of the course Computer and Information Science, students are expected to "describe how computers change the ways in which information is collected and used and explain how this affects people's privacy and access to information" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999). Similarly, in British Columbia, while online privacy is mentioned in the grades 8-10 Information Technology *Integrated Resource Package* as a possible issue for students to consider in English classes, it is not discussed before the Grade 10 level. The document suggests that:

> In English, after studying a novel about privacy of information, have students use information technology tools (e.g., the Internet, e-mail) to investigate the impact of information technology on personal or corporate privacy. Have them use information technology tools to present reports (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1996, pp.28).

While students in Ontario and British Columbia at the Grade 10 level, for instance, may, as part of their experience, investigate issues around online privacy, it is clear from curriculum docu-

ments that teachers are not widely required to address the issue, especially not below the Grade 10 level. Research on young peoples' use of the Internet, however, has shown that not only do children far younger than those in Grade 10 make extensive use of technologies like the World Wide Web and instant messaging but that many services target them specifically. (Steeves, 2006; Youn, 2005; Cai, Gantz, Schwartz, and Wang, 2003). This same research also shows that many services on the Internet marketed toward young children raise serious concerns about how and what personal information is being collected and the protection offered by governmental and industry standards (Cai, Gantz, Schwartz, and Wang, 2003; Cai and Gantz, 2000). Steeves and Webster argue that current policy attempts to protect online privacy are at odds with the reality of online experiences for children. "Children's understanding of the way in which the privacy protection framework works does not appear to affect the extent to which they adopt types of behaviour promoted by adults as privacy protective" (Steeves and Webster, 2008). This and other research demonstrates a need for education around the issues of online privacy at the elementary grades. Though the Ontario and British Columbia curricula do mention, in general introductory statements to teachers, the need for awareness of online privacy issues, they are not a core part of expectations for what students must be exposed to at the elementary level.

While most provincial curricula in Canada have a strong focus on critical literacy that includes literacy in relation to new media, little can found that directly relates to issues of online privacy.

Curriculum spaces

Canadian teachers face a formidable challenge in trying to cover what is expected in most curriculum documents. In Ontario, for example, teachers of Grade 7/8 split classes must attend to over a thousand expectations listed in the curriculum they follow (MacKenzie, 2000). This, in effect, renders it extremely difficult for teachers to find the time to include areas outside of those specifically listed. While a number of rich resources such as lesson plans and backgrounders are provided by organisations like

the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre and The CyberSmart Education Company in the United States, teachers likely have a significant challenge finding space in their class time to make use of them. If such resources are to be widely used in Canadian schools, issues around online privacy must be incorporated in curricula and not just at the level of high school information technology electives, but in core courses and in the elementary grades. As Berson and Berson articulate, "…we are obligated to educate children on critical protection and security in a digital age as well as prepare them for cybercitizenship" (Berson and Berson, 2004).

If issues of online privacy are to be an important component of critical literacy for children with respect to new media, then space for them should be created in provincial curricula. Until they are, I fear that teachers will not have the time nor the support necessary to widely tackle them.

* * *

Thomas Hillman is a doctoral student researching learning and technology at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Education.

REFERENCES

Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. *Techno-tonomy: Privacy, autonomy and technology in a networked world*. Retrieved April 16th, 2008, from http://www.aclrc.com/techno_tonomy/index.html

Berson, M. & Berson, I. (2004). Developing thoughtful "Cybercitizens". *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, 16(4), 5-8.

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (1996). *Information technology 8 to 10: Integrated resource package*. Retrieved April 18th, 2008, from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/it810.pdf

Cai, X. & Gantz, W. (2000). Online privacy issues associated with Web sites for children. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 44(2), 197-214.

Cai, X., Gantz, W., Schwartz, N., & Wang, X. (2003). Children's website adherence to the FTC's online privacy protection rule. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 31(4), 346-362.

Livingstone, S. (2003). Children's use of the internet: Reflections on the emerging research agenda. *New Media and Society*, 5(2), 147-166.

MacKenzie, B. (2000). The curriculum planner. *Professionally Speaking: The Magazine of the Ontario College of Teachers*. Retrieved April 27th, 2008, from http://www.oct.ca/publications/professionally_speaking/june_2000/planner.htm

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2006). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: Language*. Retrieved April 15th, 2008, from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf

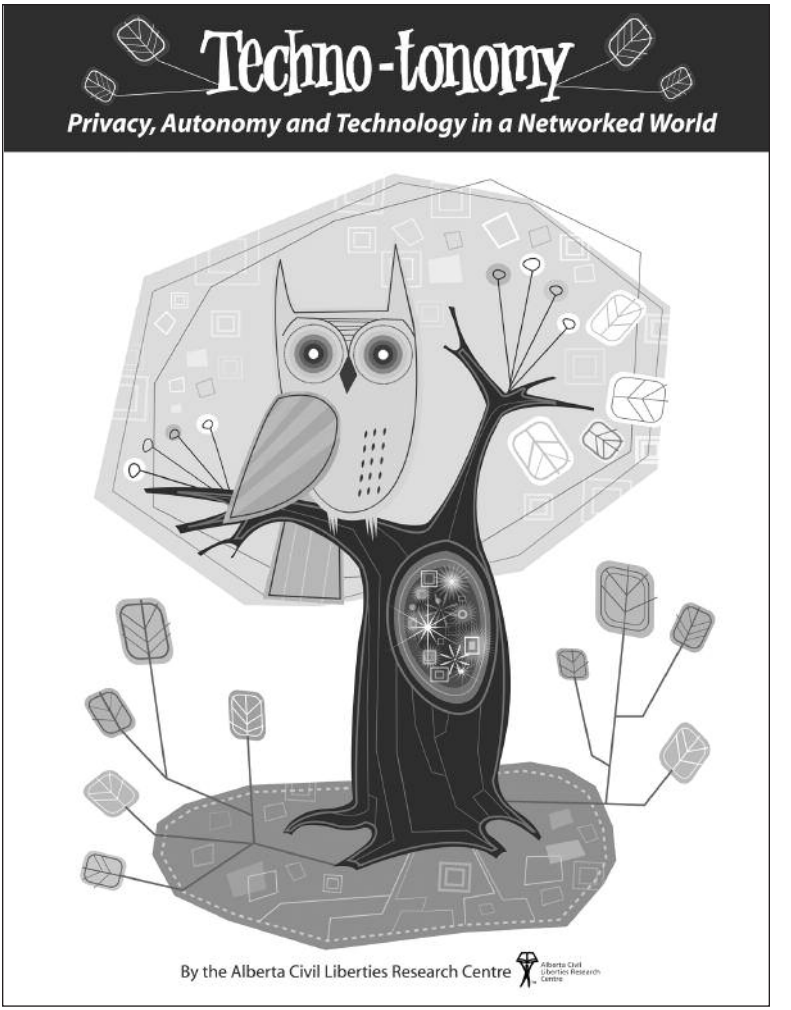
Ontario Ministry of Education. (1999). *The Ontario curriculum grades 9 and 10: Technological education*. Retrieved April 15th, 2008, from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/teched910curr.pdf

Steeves, V. (2006). It's not child's play: The online invasion of children's privacy. University of Ottawa Law and Technology Journal, 3(1), 169-188.

Steeves, V. & Webster, C. (2008). Closing the barn door: The effect of parental supervision on Canadian children's online privacy. *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*, 28(1), 4-19.

The CyberSmart Education Company. *CyberSmart: Lesson plans and activity sheets*. Retrieved April 16th, 2008, from http://www.cybersmartcurriculum.org/lesson_plans/

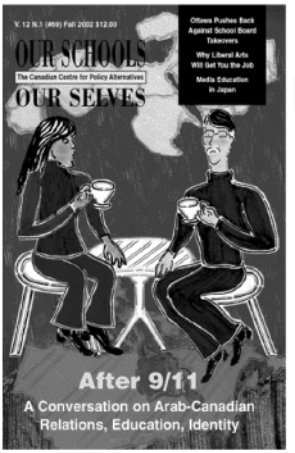
Youn, S. (2005). Teenagers' perceptions of online privacy and coping behaviors: A risk–benefit appraisal approach. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 49(1), 86-110.



Techno-tonomy: Privacy, Autonomy and Technology in a Networked World, 2006
Order through: Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre 403-220-2505 email aclrc@ucalgary.ca" aclrc@ucalgary.ca

Techno-tonomy was created as part of the *On the Identity Trail: Understanding the Importance and Impact of Anonymity and Authentication in a Networked Society*. This guidebook includes a discussion on the definition of privacy, the laws governing it, invasion of privacy, the effect of certain types of technology on privacy rights, and the data that is being collected about youth through technology. It is intended for teachers, facilitators and workshop leaders who want to explore these concepts with youth or secondary school classrooms. This project was funded with a grant from the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Public Outreach grant.

Knowledge is a powerful tool.



OUR SCHOOLS
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
OUR SELVES

"...an excellent general-interest journal... Engagingly written, it bridges the gap between theory and practice."
—The Utne Reader

Our Schools / Our Selves is the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' quarterly education publication. Since 1988 it has been a forum for debates and commentary on issues such as environmental activism; commercialism in schools; young women in trades; labour, education and the arts; schools and social justice, and teaching for democratic citizenship.

Subscriptions (4 issues/year) are $51.36 (including shipping, handling and GST). Make cheque payable to Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 410-75 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5E7. Phone: 613-563-1341. Fax: 613-233-1458. Email: ccpa@policyalternatives.ca. Visit our web site for more information.

http://www.policyalternatives.ca

❍ I'd like to subscribe to **Our Schools/Our Selves**

❍ Please find enclosed my cheque in the amount of $_____

❍ Please charge my ❍ VISA or ❍ MasterCard for the amount of $ _____

Card# _____ Expiry Date:_____

Signature: _____

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

Phone:_____