



MELISSA LUHTANEN

Techno-tonomy; Writing Resources and Contextualizing Learning for Youth

The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre's (ACLRC) mission is to promote awareness among Albertans about civil liberties and human rights through research and education. A main focus is writing educational resources for youth on a variety of human rights topics including freedom of expression, refugees, sexual orientation, gender identity, bullying, and sexual harassment. Recently we published a booklet called *Techno-tonomy: Privacy, Autonomy and Technology in a Networked World* which discussed the way youth interact with new technologies such as the Internet. This guidebook helps teachers and facilitators guide youth and young adults through the minefield of using new technologies. It discusses issues like using a pseudonym, online dating, cyberbullying and cyberstalking, as well as the laws which regulate privacy.

In putting guidebooks together such as this one, the ACLRC follows a process of consultation, contextualization, and focus on the right content and appropriate format. This process is especially important when producing materials for youth who are not always skilled in wading through dense and overly academic writing styles.

Consultation

A consultative process is a strategy of finding out what the reader will expect, need and be challenged by. Consultation is a key strategy in engaging youth in an interactive module. When consulting on any guidebook the ACLRC examines the issue from all angles and asks readers from the target audience to help focus the resource before the research and writing has begun. In this case we spoke to youth about privacy, their concerns, their personal definition of privacy and their thoughts about how privacy issues affect their lives. We used their ideas of privacy to tap into the focus and direction of the guidebook.

Consultation informed us not only about the expectations of the youth who are reading the materials, but also about the information the youth are lacking, and therefore the focus that was needed for the booklet. The consultation process helped us to understand that youth wanted their privacy protected, but had not always thought about all the ways privacy could be an issue in using new technologies. Consultation with people who work with youth in this area was also important. It told us that youth are avid users of the Internet and a negative message promoting fear of the Internet would not be heard by youth.

Contextualizing the information

In any teaching tool, the reader needs to understand why the topic is important. A topic like privacy includes areas that are difficult to understand. Putting the learning modules in context is as important as the actual information included in the guidebook. In *Techno-tonomy* we did this through legal cases and stories about youth. We listed sample cases on privacy issues, such as searching someone's home when a potential crime has been committed. Youth began to understand the importance of privacy law and policy through these real-life scenarios. We also spoke to other youth about their conceptions of privacy. This information was used in examples and in handouts. This way the youth were able to hear from their peers and thereby gain a deeper understanding of why it is important to understand privacy laws.

In all of the ACLRC guidebooks we set the stage for why human rights are important so that when we get into the materials, the reader is already involved and interested in resolving

the issue. This contextualized application of the law encourages learning and broadens understanding.

Content and format

From the above work flows the content that is necessary for the reader to fully grasp the topic. In the case of *Techno-tonomy*, phrasing of the content was as important as the actual content we included. We learned in the consultation process that youth were fully immersed in new technology. There was no value in telling them to cut down or eliminate their Internet use. In fact a negative message would have resulted in less absorption of the materials. So we began by talking about what privacy is and different conceptions of privacy. Then we moved into ways of protecting privacy while still acknowledging that the use of new technologies was a natural, fun and desirable way of learning. This information was useful to teachers as well as students because it placed the conversation of new technologies within a positive focus.

Finally we chose the format for the guidebook based on consultation with youth and stakeholders. The project was about new technologies and so the ACLRC used a CD-Rom and a web-link to the resource so that users could easily access the information. This allowed additional non-print information such as links to other privacy education websites to be included. The *Techno-tonomy* guidebook also includes a booklet and handouts to engage students.

In the hardcopy guidebook we split the materials, and therefore the writing style, into two formats: for the teacher and for the student. The teacher received background information, teaching lessons, statistics and further reading resources. The student received two-page handouts written in a more understandable reading style, links to fun games on privacy, privacy cartoons, and engaging questions about privacy issues. In this way both audiences were given the learning tools needed to address the issue of privacy.

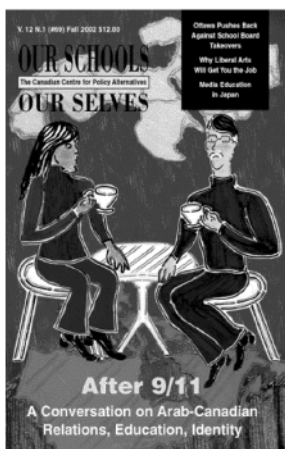
The response to *Techno-tonomy* has been tremendous. We have presented it to teachers' conventions, privacy conferences and classrooms. The materials are accessible on our website www.aclrc.com and have been used widely across Canada.

OUR SCHOOLS/OUR SELVES

* * *

Melissa Luhtanen is a lawyer and human rights educator for the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre.

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: _____
