MiSA
Ottawa Region

The Development of New Media Literacy & Instruction: Risks, Challenges & Opportunities for Canadian Students

Key Concepts

- The development of new media literacy is essential to a student's full participation in society.

- Many factors contribute to an individual's capability to manage risk.

- Potential risks involve content, contact and conduct risks.

- Children are not as adept at Web-based information problem solving as they believe.

- Children cannot learn about risks unless they experience them.

- It is possible to support children to learn the judgement skills they require to safely and effectively move from consumers to creators of online content.

Carleton
UNIVERSITY

Corresponding author:
Dr. Amedeo D'Anguilli
Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies & Department of Psychology

Do children have the judgement and education required to safely negotiate new media both as a consumer and contributor of online content?

What are the implications for Canadian students?

The answers are complicated as any speculation with regard to an individual's capability to manage potentially risky situations. Age, socioeconomic condition, education, context; these are all factors when determining a child's ability to safely navigate the online world and their ability to manage inappropriate content.

This review surveyed the current risk landscape and suggested a model which represents a combination of available research, mapping risk to development.

Most current data reveals that online risks to young people include exposure to: pornography, negative beliefs, stranger danger, cyberbullying and self-harm sites. In addition, there are concerns with regard to commercial content and privacy. Three types of risks were identified: Content, Contact and Conduct risks.

As neurocognitive development progresses, children move from recipients to actors, from solely consumers of content to producers of content, and that the risks associated with those age groups will therefore be correlated to where they participate in the online world.

Many of the online risks may reflect offline concerns but due to the ubiquity and permanence afforded to the Internet, certain risks have the potential for far more damaging and longstanding effects than their offline counterparts.

Once complex set of cognitive skills that seem critical in children and youth is the judgement associated with risky situation when searching information on the Internet (technically known as Web-based information problem solving or IPS).

The ability of judging online risk rests heavily on a break range of cognitive skills, involving language, memory and communication skills. The power of digital information technologies does not alleviate the burden on such skills, most of which appear to be prerequisites to efficient Web-based Information Problem Solving. Conversely, the reviewed research suggests that judgement, if carefully framed and assisted, may be a means to foster students' comprehension skills.

The available data shows the efficacy of devices aimed at guiding students' activity, such as work-sheets, structured portals, and metacognitive aids. Support seems appropriate and works from early childhood to university, again showing the complexity of cognitive ability that develop from the new media literacy.

These risks are difficult to individually counter and, in the Internet context, state policy with regards to limiting content will not be possible in the same way it was with television and film.

Parental policy with regards to blocking of content has for the most part proven ineffective. Education and teaching resiliency give children the best opportunity to reduce risk.

Children cannot learn about risks unless they experience them. While hanging out online, youth are learning social and new media skills they need to participate fully in society.

Children need a safe space to learn the skills necessary to be good netizens, a place where they can be shown how to filter the messages of commercial interest, false statements, and inappropriate content, allowing them to experiment with creative expression and social participation.

In light of such constraints, education and teaching judgement and resiliency give children the best opportunity to reduce risk and take the advantage of the opportunity to develop the unique abilities that new media literacy affords.

"Today in our cities, most learning occurs outside the class-room. The sheer quantity of information conveyed by [the new media] far exceeds the monopoly of the books as a teaching aid and cracked the very walls of the classroom so suddenly, we're confused, baffled...[M]any teachers naturally view the offerings of the new media as entertainment, rather than education. But this carries no conviction to the student."

The Development of New Media Literacy & Instruction:
Risks, Challenges & Opportunities for Canadian Students
Dr. Amedeo D'Anguilli, Carleton University