



cyber chat



By Dr. Barbara Spears

Welcome to the first Cyber Chat. Over the coming issues of *Education Technology Solutions*, Cyber Chat will share some of the most recent, evidence based research that is shaping our understanding of cyber safety and cyber bullying in Australia and overseas. In addition, positive uses of technology will be explored and resources for teachers will be provided where possible.

I would like to focus on cybersafety in this issue. Whilst we know that young people are becoming increasingly more cyber-safety conscious, it is still really important to keep revisiting the messages.

In Australia, the work being undertaken by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is significant in terms of getting those messages out to schools. Funded by tax-payer dollars through the Commonwealth Department of Broadband, Communications and Digital Media (DBCMD), ACMA was directed to provide a range of education activities; improve current government cyber-safety website resources to make them easier for parents to use; and to provide up-to-date information. ACMA was also charged with implementing an online helpline so that children can report online incidents that cause them concern.

The cybersmart website is a great place to start exploring these resources (www.cybersmart.gov.au) and the School's Gateway area of the site provides access to an extensive range of resources to assist school communities in developing an holistic approach to cybersafety. In particular, information is provided concerning common cybersafety issues (including cyberbullying). The 'cybercitizenship profiles', which outline what students are actually doing online, according to age group and school groupings (such as upper or lower primary

or secondary), should be of real interest to teachers. It is important to note that these profiles are based on evidence: that is, what young people have revealed about their behaviours online. This evidence was particularly drawn from the two research studies undertaken by ACMA: *Media and Communications in Australian Families* (2007) and *Click and Connect* (2009).

As teachers are always looking for resources, ACMA has produced units of work that are framed as pathways that explore the development of cybersafety concepts and capabilities. A number of the capabilities directly address the issue of cyberbullying: 'positive online behaviour' and 'peer and personal safety'. Teacher resources are provided for five year levels, with the potential for some adaption to accommodate the older 16 - 17 year old age group (www.cybersmart.gov.au/Schools/Teacher%20resources.aspx). Here you will find Cybersmart Detectives; Hector's World; CyberQuoll; Cyber Netrix; Let's Fight it Together and Wise Up To It.

One of the real benefits to schools comes directly from ACMA's *Cybersafety Outreach* program. Schools can book free teacher professional development sessions and free general safety awareness sessions for parents, students and teachers. (See www.cybersmart.gov.au/Schools/Book%20teacher%20professional%20development.aspx).

ACMA has also worked with Childnet International to adapt and distribute its award-winning resource *Let's Fight It Together*, to raise awareness of cyberbullying; and for very young children, ACMA has partnered with Hector's World to create *You're Not Alone*, an animation with teaching resources, which explores the concept of how to deal with cyberbullying.

Finally, the most recent report,

Online Risk and Safety in the Digital Economy, was released by the Minister in February 2010, and this forms the third report prepared by ACMA concerning measures promoting safety in the online environment.

As demonstrated by these links and resources, there is a lot being done to help Australian teachers provide consistent, clear and age-appropriate cybersafe messages to children and young people in our schools. The opportunities for parents to learn alongside their children through these sites is a powerful way for them to come aboard the cyber-train.

Just as parents protect their children from harm's way offline, both teachers and parents need to be engaged in protective practices online as the community navigates its way through the ever-changing parallel universe known as cyberspace. Parents need to parent children in the same recognized ways: providing age appropriate boundaries; becoming informed themselves; and recognizing that point when they cease to be parenting a child, and start parenting an emerging young adult. All teachers need to be active in terms of cybersafety education, cyber citizenship and anti-cyberbullying initiatives, and with resources such as those provided by ACMA, this is made simpler.

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Dr Barbara Spears is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, University of South Australia. She has led the Australian Government investigation into Covert Bullying: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying, and is a member of the evaluation team for KidsMatter, a national mental health initiative in primary schools.