

## South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) e-safety project with PlymKids

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Ken Corish, Education Adviser (ICT) at Plymouth City Council, and colleagues David Wright and Karl Hopwood at SWGfL, together with Plymouth Children's and Young People's Trust, have worked in partnership with PlymKids drama group to develop a new resource on e-safety.

Material for this study was gathered from interview with Ken Corish on 10th March 2009.

### Tags:

Primary, Secondary, E-Safety/Media literacies, Digital visual/audio

### Harnessing technology system outcomes:

Engaged and empowered learners

### Sectors:

Primary, Secondary

### Innovation

The project exemplifies innovative practice in promoting internet safety through performance and mixed media. It illustrates a trend towards encouraging young people to critically evaluate their own use of the Internet and to share their own experiences and concerns with peers and younger pupils through role play and dramatic scenarios.

## Background

The initiative responded to a perception that e-safety advice can fail to engage young people's interest partly because of the way it is presented:

*"How come e-safety is always taught by old blokes?"*

Pupil, KS3

Young people are keen to express opinion and develop strategies that will impact upon their peers. Advice was sought from IYAC, the Youth Panel for e-safety, and regard was also taken of Shirley Atkinson's e-safety Ambassadors work at the University of Plymouth. Other projects, for example Digizen Cyberbullying Resources were looked at. The need for a resource set that 'could be developed upon' and would look at 'some contentious issues' not addressed in conventional e-safety resources, prompted Ken Corish to think about using performance and mixed media.

Part of the 'problem' is that e-safety is about feelings and emotions. Mr Corish observed that, "guidelines for human behaviour are hard to do". Role-play and performance helps young people to think about issues that affect them by constructing real-life scenarios. The project shows that technologies can capture these scenarios in accessible and relevant forms, using video and audio clips and film.

Project participants were members of PlymKids drama group, pupils, teachers and a professional film crew. The audience was a SWGfL conference and subsequently schools, youth and community groups.

PlymKids presented realistic scenarios in an 11-minute performance, filmed on location and developed into a video and audio resource. A main objective was to portray young people's feelings, emotions and advice to other young people about handling situations that might get out of control, for example, inappropriate photos or personal details on social networking sites, or behaviours that could cause potential damage or distress.

## Technology

Live performance is captured on film and developed as an open video resource, both for didactic purposes (notes, lesson plans) and as a stimulus for further work. Pupils use a variety of media to develop their own e-safety scenarios. An example was demonstrated using Story Creator. In essence:

*"Pupils think up a scenario and choose images and text to illustrate it. Alternatively, they use Story Creator images as a 'trigger to generate ideas'. The aim of the exercise is for pupils to put together their own performance to convey their e-safety message to peers and younger peers."*

## Teaching and learning

The materials which form part of the resource are designed to be reorganized, adapted and form part of a mash-up as well as being used as provided and adapted across the curriculum, especially in PHSE, literacy, ICT and media and communication. Pedagogically, e-safety is focused on ‘understanding the issues, developing resilience and reducing vulnerability’, but more and more,

*“E-safety is moving from blocking and filtering, towards self-policing and indeed challenging some of the behaviours online that young people accept as normal that they would not adopt in the physical world.”*

There are organizational challenges regarding how young people use technologies in and out of school. They develop strategies to keep parents and older people from finding out what they might be up to, for example. Within the physical environment of a school, there is a duty of care towards pupils. Mr Corish sees the answer as ‘not to remove the technologies from them...but to help them to ‘question behaviours around technologies’. The pupils’ role among their peers as e-safety ambassadors is crucial. This is supported by research in the UK and the USA (CyberMentors).

## Impact

SWGfL has gathered 380 feedback comments on the PlymKids project, many ‘overwhelmingly positive’. Criticism that the project was ‘all girls’ has been met by a planned performance in September featuring boys.

## Challenges

The project team sees one challenge as the capacity to expand the project and its longer term sustainability. The e-safety team is charged with covering diverse issues and confronting difficult areas, from sexual predation on the internet to encouraging wider responsibility in the home and community. A specific challenge is parental involvement and how to ‘brand’ e-safety sessions:

*“Inviting them [parents] to another e-safety evening does not float their boat.”*

Getting other sectors on board is equally problematic. The interface between school and outside agencies needs addressing. In summary:

Schools set up a filtered ‘safety wall’ but pupils can access proxy avoidance sites. Removing the technologies from them is not a viable sanction and may even contravene student entitlement. Restricted use is often more effective and particularly positive sanctions for responsible use. However, the team comment:

*"Technology is like giving children wings, but you can't always control the directions in which they fly."*

It is felt that the way forward is to encourage personal responsibility and self-review in all environments. This has implications for employers, for example, those offering work experience as part of the new National Diplomas, who will need guidelines (currently in development).

## Wider adoption

Building on work done in consultation with University College Plymouth, a more imaginative approach to parental engagement is needed. Some work has been done on creating a series of challenges and questions for parents, emphasising a balance between responsible parenting and over-policing of children, and combining quiz-style formats and humour. One such exercise began by asking, *"Do you feel that technology has left you behind at the station and it's your children driving the train?"*

It is also thought important for other sectors to be involved. Despite that fact that Safeguarding Children Boards are part of every Local Authority's 'Every Child Matters' strategy, some services are not fully represented. The PlymKids project tries to encourage e-safety wherever young people are and whatever environment they find themselves in.

## Links

[www.iyac.net](http://www.iyac.net)

[www.swgfl.org.uk/safe](http://www.swgfl.org.uk/safe)

[www.plymouth.ac.uk](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk)

'If you Laugh at it, you're art of it': <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/students.aspx>

[http://myths.e2bn.org/story\\_creator](http://myths.e2bn.org/story_creator)

<http://cybermentors.org.uk>