

# Ethics in cyberspace- a philosophical approach

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## ABSTRACT

Encouraging students to expand their search for knowledge in cyberspace has brought in new dimension, on the handling of the new technology by the students and brought to light whether or not our curriculum demand such leap development and furthermore will student use the Internet in more socially responsible way. Children begin to learn ethical values right from birth through families and religious institution. They are considered as primary sources for a child's ethical education while schools have the responsibility to teach and reinforce some moral values. New technologies bring about the need to interpret old values in new ways, but also may call for the creation of new codes of conduct when new actions are made possible with the use of technology. Children can quickly identify whether the behavior is right or wrong in real world but when students use virtual world behavior may not be as easily judged to be right or wrong. This study attempts to show the prevailing misconception the cyber ethics among students. This paper examines basis ethical issues when students have had to make ethical decisions. The study will qualitatively explore the level of understanding of teachers concerns and role in bringing in an ethical behavior on students on the Internet. If a student encounters unsafe behavior on the Internet, the student will be able to behave and act appropriately.

**Keywords :** Ethics, cyberspace

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a branch of study which deals with moral judgments, issues of right and wrong, and determining what behaviors are humane and inhumane. An action is said to be ethical if it does not have a damaging impact on oneself, other individual or on society. It actually describes the character of one's profession or one's religion of practice (Simpson, 2004) At the Centre for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, the guiding principles written into the Character Education Manifesto is being used to promote an abiding respect for the intellect and spirit of the individual (CAEC 1996). Further, it expresses the need to re-engage the hearts, minds and hands of our children in forming their own characters, helping them to know the good, love the good, and do the good (CAEC 1996).

Children begin to learn ethical values right from birth through families and religious institution. They are considered as primary sources for a child's ethical education while schools have the responsibility to teach and reinforce some moral values. Since the first appearance of the term in 1988, this topic more commonly has been referred to as *Information Ethics* (IE). Robert Hauptman (1988) used the term in the first chapter of *Ethical Challenges in Librarianship*, which is the first use in English. Capurro (1988) challenged information professionals to take responsibility and action for information policy in professional and public settings. He saw IE as the appropriate term for the contemporary information ethos or environment. The third appeared in the criminal justice

literature (DeMaio, 1988). But still Children do not know what they can or cannot do with intellectual property on the internet, many computer-savvy kids as well as educators, administrators and parents are unclear about what is and what is not ethical when dealing with the World Wide Web (Janna J. Baum, 2008).

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## 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Ethics in Internet

Aristotle, the founder of ethics as an academic discipline argued ethics as a reflection of morality. As Rafael Capurro (2008), who heads the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), reminds us: "As a self-referential process ethics is an unending quest on explicit and implicit use of the moral code, that is to say of respect or disrespect, with regard to individual and social communication. In other words, ethics observes the ways we communicate with each other as moral persons and the ways this moral identity is understood. There is, indeed, no unbiased ethical observer. (p. 21)"

Definition of Information Ethics includes concern with the moral dilemmas and ethical conflicts that arise in Interactions between human beings and information (creation, organiza-

tion, dissemination, and use), information and communications technologies (ICTs), and information systems. (Toni Carbo, 2008). Cyber ethics (information and communication ethics) differs from the rest and requires a special attention because we use technologies to communicate within "cyber world" that happens within the computer network, a new phenomenon that is not always well understood because they receive all the basic moral values from primary institution like school, religion and family which does not represent the virtual world. These are two different worlds and it is easy for students to judge what is right from wrong in real world for the same behavior than the virtual world. Ethical decisions can be as simple as to choose a drink or as complicated as whether to support the cloning of human beings. The ability to make and evaluate arguments appears even more important in a modern world where people have to deal with a lot of new information in diversifying technology convergence. Argumentation is a process of making and justifying arguments. To justify an argument is to support it with evidence because people may have doubts about an argument and an argument shouldn't just be a personal opinion (Reznitskaya, A, 2002)

## 2.2 Two Different World

Children can quickly identify whether the behavior is right or wrong in real world but when students use internet (described as virtual world) behavior may not be as easily judged to be right or wrong. (Janna J. Baum, 2008) New technologies bring about the need to interpret old values in new ways, but also may call for the creation of new codes of conduct when new actions are made possible with the use of technology such as The ability to send unsolicited commercial messages to millions of Internet email users (spamming) was not possible before there was email or the Internet. Digital photography has made the manipulation of images undetectable, an impossible feat with chemical photography. Prior to the Internet, minors faced physical barriers of access to sexually explicit materials. What safeguards do schools, libraries, and parents need to take to keep children from freely accessing inappropriate materials? Intellectual property in digital format can now be duplicated with incredible ease. Do we need clearer definitions of property? Capurro, R. (2008). One of the most significant reasons that computer ethics deserve special attention is because of our rather human ability to view one's actions in the intangible, virtual world of information technologies as being less serious than one's actions in the real world. Most of us, adults or children, would never contemplate walking into a computer store and shoplifting a computer program. Yet software piracy (the illegal duplication of computer programs) costs the computer business billions of dollars each year. Most of us would never pick a lock, but guessing passwords to gain access to unauthorized information is a common activity. So now it's the Teachers who need to give students opportunities to construct

value judgments and counter-arguments, to compare their own ethical decision with opposing arguments and to develop their reasoning ability (Patronis, T, et al 1999). Students also need chances to improve their conceptual understanding and value judgments Most of the students developed low level arguments consisting of either claims only or claims and data. Due to the lack of rebuttal in arguments, (Chun-Hsu Lin, et al 2010). Teachers need to develop learning objectives and activities that specifically address technology ethics. Proper use needs to be taught at the same time that other computer skills are taught. Capurro, R. (2008).

## 2.3 Ethical Dilemma

The usage of internet has grown explosively as fast internet connections get cheaper. However, a Lot of the children who uses internet are not aware of the fact that personal information may be revealed when they go online (Sonia Livingstone ,2003). Information technology misuse by many people, especially the young, is viewed as a low-risk, game-like challenge. There is a physical risk when breaking into a real office that does not exist when hacking into a computer database from one's living room or den. Illegally copying a book is costly and time consuming; illegally copying a computer program can be done in seconds at very small expense. Media plays a vital role in the ethical dilemma, Movies, as well as book and television programs, often make questionably ethical actions such as breaking into secure computer systems seem heroic or at least sympathetic. ( Doug Johnson, 1999 ) as these action are not questions ethically but approached as a outcome of intelligence. The viewed pornography on a website seems to disappear as soon as the browser window is closed. Not long ago, ethical technology questions were only of interest to a very few specialists. But as the use of information technologies spreads throughout society and its importance to our national economies and individual careers grows, everyone will need to make good ethical decisions when using computers. Studies show that persons involved in computer crimes acquire both their interest and skills at an early age.

Association for Computing Machinery's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (1993) stresses many of the same ideas as The 10 Commandments of Computer Ethics. Their "moral imperatives" include:

1. I will contribute to society and human well-being
2. I will avoid harm to others.
3. I will be honest and trustworthy.
4. I will be fair and not discriminate.
5. I will honor property rights including copyrights and patents.
6. I will give proper credit for intellectual property.
7. I will respect the privacy of others.
8. I will honor confidentiality.

Deborah Johnson in *Computer Ethics, 2nd Edition* (Prentice-Hall, 1994) include: *Johnson's 3 P's of Technology Ethics: Privacy - I will protect my privacy and respect the privacy of others. Property - I will protect my property and respect the property of others. Appropriate Use - I will use technology in constructive ways and in ways which do not break the rules of my family, church, school, or government.*

## 2.4 Methodology

### Research background

S.NO	NAME OF SCHOOL	AGE RANGE	MONTHS SCHOOL ON-LINE
1.	Monfort	Higher Secondary	24
2.	Santhome	Higher Secondary	24
3.	St. Johns	High School	6
4.	St.Peters	High School	10
5.	St.Marks	High School	18

The following data are drawn from five educational institutions, which examined cyber ethics perception evaluated actual problem and described attempts to be made by schools to alleviate this ethical dilemma that prevails among the students. The research took the form of semi structured interview. Field sites were selected to produce a diversity of categories and information in order to provide some basis towards generalization (Kennedy, 1979). Overall, two primary schools two middle schools and three higher secondary schools were selected as field sites (see table 1). Additionally, it believed that cyber ethical perception might change as staff gained more online experience, so schools were selected that had established Internet use. Whilst the person with primary responsibility for information and communication technology (ICT) in school served as an initial contact, teachers with no specific internet – related roles were also interviewed. Fourty two staff member were interviewed, twelve in St. Marks, 10 in Monfort school, 10 in St. Santhome school, 8 in St Peters school and 2 in St.Johns. Within the practice of qualitative interviewing it should be recognized that there may exist some difference between the responses of an interviewee and the reality that these responses were intended to capture. This might be perceived as an issue of validity, that is, whether an account accurately represents certain features of a phenomenon that it is intended to describe, explain or theories (Hammersley, 1992, p. 69). As Gomm (2004, pp.152-153) notes, validity in interviews might be compromised where respondents do not know

the information required, where they Table 1 Details of research field sites

Choose to answer inaccurately, where they are unwilling to answer the question or where a different interpretation of the question may have been made. It would be naïve to dismiss the possibility that such occurrence might have compromised the validity of aspect of the subsequent data on staff narratives.

Time was spent in schools to build up rapport with staff and were guaranteed that all research data was confidential. It was recognized that the objectivity might be compromised through engagement teachers. Yet, disengagement is not always a realistic, or, some would argue, desirable, possibility in qualitative research and is perhaps best understood as a process constructed after the event.

### *Teacher's perception of cyber ethics from student's use of Internet*

As already stated perception of cyber ethics of students may not necessarily correlate with actual dangers, yet understanding expressed fears can provide an insight into potential hazards,. Importantly, these perceptions need to be understood on a hermeneutic level. In exploring staff perception issues relating to the status of student, the cultural construction of ethics can also will be considered.

The major issues surrounding technology ethics can be categorized into three areas: privacy, property, and appropriate use. Of the 42 staff interviewed, 26 expressed concern about plagiarism, 9 focused on copyright and 7 on the hacking.

#### Privacy:

This was a significant concerns among the staff as they approached it in ethical perspective, student using internet must reflect that their use of this technology should not violate the privacy of others and they should not give information to other. Children need to understand that businesses and organizations use information to market products. Information given to one organization may well sell it to others. All students need to know that a stranger is a stranger, whether on the playground or on the Internet. The same rules we teach children about physical strangers apply to virtual strangers as well. Information inadvertently left accessible does not mean that it is appropriate to access it.

*" they develop a sense of comfort with the online stranger than the physical one. This many because of the anonymity provided by the medium."* Stated a Santhome high school teacher.

#### Plagiarism

Concepts like plagiarism, hacking are not understood by students in a proper sense but by youth narratives the teachers say that the student consider it to heroic and more knowledgeable when they crack codes. Students need to understand when and how to cite sources in both print and electronic formats. Students need to learn to treat intellectual property, existing only in virtual spaces, the same way they would treat physical property and that the theft or destruction of such property is unethical (and unlawful).

*"The basic purpose of assignment is to develop a better understanding on the subject. But the very essence is spoiled when they copy and paste materials from the internet for the assignment"*

*"the concept of plagiarism existed even before computers but with advent of internet it is become easier"*

#### Copyright violation

Overall, seven of the staff interviewed expressed concern over copyright infringement. It was recognized in the primary schools that students tend to copy and print images from the web with little awareness of copyright laws. It was difficult explaining to young children why they could not copy certain images. Rather, students tended to cut and paste whatever online material they want without awareness of copyright laws. Moreover, the most common they attempt to do is to download songs, movies and sometimes software download the ethical issue to be considered is that these student will comment viewing movie in pirated version is ethically wrong but a similar kind of action in online is not considered so by them. Teacher of Monfort School stated that

*One thing most commonly done by students is downloading music and movies, now the problem with that for me is there are licensing issues, which of course the student are not interested in.*

Students need to know that computer software is protected by copyright law. It is unlawful, as well as unethical, to make copies of computer programs without permission or payment of the producer of those programs.

#### Appropriate usage

Not all information in internet is suitable for students and students don't search only for the knowledge based information on the internet. There are sites which misguide them and can also influence student in a worse way. Students must be guided in what is the appropriate way to use internet for the knowledge base.

*"A good deal of Internet content, if not obscene, is certainly tasteless, offensive, and lacking in educational value."*

#### Digital literacy

All the teachers interviewed labelled poor online education recourses and they wanted infusion of responsible computing to be taught in school and added in the curriculum. Teachers anticipate that the more digitally literate or skilled children become, the more they will gain from the internet while also being better prepared to avoid or cope with online risks. While digital literacy is generally defined as including a broad range of skills and competences, digital safety skills represent a specific subset of digital or media literacy. Children should gain internet access in advance of an infrastructure of awareness-raising, parental understanding, regulation and safety protection.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Healy (1998) concludes the report 'Creating the Future' with the hypothesis that '...it seems a grave error to expose children to a stimulus that may shortchange this critical system'. The critical system she infers here is their mind and professes that if children's thinking and reasoning are given a good foundation the mind will continue to adapt and develop for a lifetime and the stimulus she refers to is the computer. This paper helps to identify and emphasizes areas where an understanding of cyber ethics will increase students' current and future understanding in the use of the Internet and their interaction with other aspects of the Internet and its environment. If a student encounters unsafe behaviour on the Internet, the student will be able to behave and act appropriately. By integrating cyber ethics in school curriculum the college will help prompt students, teachers and parents to re-examine their decision framework with regard to Internet usage and hence move them to reflect and consider the use of the technology ethically. Ultimately, "the goal of technology literacy is to enable young people to develop their own creative and critical capacities in relating to technology, not to train them to be machine operators. Then they will clearly see that their own choices are not limited to adjusting themselves to a 21' century determined by technology." (Cordes, 2004, para. 32). Although the challenges facing those who teach technology are great, educators remain hopeful. Tom Lickona, professor of education at the State University of New York at Cortland sums it up perfectly by saying, "Even in a rotten world, it's possible to raise a moral child, if we make it a high priority" (Newman, para. 11). As Capurro (2008) states that "the final goal of ethics is not just to speak about the good but to *do* the good, and, we could add, to dream about it"

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