The AISV CyberCulture Survey

Preliminary survey results

Mobile phones with built-in video cameras, fast 24-hour broadband internet access and laptops with wireless internet connections have changed the way we communicate. The social ramifications of this technology, and particularly its effects on young people, are still being explored.

Media focus has been largely negative, highlighting the potential for bullying, the dissemination of inappropriate materials and the existence of disturbing websites. To date, there has been very little published research in Australia that captures the perceptions and attitudes of young people in relation to negative online behaviours.

AISV and its member schools recognise the importance of these issues to school communities, as they affect everyone – school leaders and teachers, students and parents. There is a need to refine policy at the school level to proactively manage the problems that may result from some of the behaviours young people demonstrate when online or using mobile phones. There is also a need to expand age-appropriate, up-to-date educational strategies covering behavioural and safety issues.

To facilitate this, research is needed to provide a greater understanding of the issues and nature of the online social landscape inhabited by Australian youth. We need to understand what young people are actually doing online and their views on appropriate behaviour. We know the kind of negative behaviours that are appearing – we need to gain some insight into gender and age differences, and the extent to which these behaviours are affecting young people.

The AISV CyberCulture Survey 2008 looks at the attitudes and behaviours of young people online. It also considers student perception of parent attitudes and policies adopted at school.

We are pleased to be able to report many positives. Most young people said their parents were aware of their online activities and there is evidence that negative behaviours are less likely to be experienced by those whose parents provide some guidance. Almost all survey respondents said they would turn to friends, family or adults at school if they were being bullied through electronic technology, and most were aware that their schools had policies about bullying.

Each of the nine negative behaviours considered below was experienced by less than 10% of the students surveyed.

Preliminary results from the AISV CyberCulture Survey are provided below.

Demographics

- 4770 students in years 5-11 participated, from 39 schools, 41 campuses
- 2704 girls (56.7%) and 2066 boys (43.3%)
- 590 girls (12.4%) and 571 boys (12%) from regional areas

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2704</strong></td>
<td><strong>2066</strong></td>
<td><strong>4770</strong></td>
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I have not been involved in any cyberbullying but my friends have been bullied. It would be helpful if I knew how to deal with it.  
**Girl, Year 10**
Computers and the internet

Many families have more than one computer and laptops are quite common. Internet access available to a majority of students is fast, available 24/7 and in many cases, wireless, enabling access anywhere in the home.

- 72.2% use a desktop
- 57.3% use a laptop
- 30.7% have access to both desktop and laptop
- 83.6% have broadband internet access
- 46.2% have wireless internet access

As many as 15% of Year 5 students and nearly 20% of Year 6 students say they access the internet in their bedrooms often or always. This figure increases to around 30% in years 7 and 8, to 44% in Year 9 and 47% in Year 10. There is a slight decrease in Year 11, to 40%.

By Year 8 about 1 in 5 (19.7%) students spends over two hours online most school nights, increasing to over 1 in 4 (27.9%) at Year 9, and almost 1 in 3 (31.5%) at Year 10. Students of any age who could access the internet in their bedrooms were more likely to spend longer online in the evenings.

Parents and the internet

- 2 in 3 children said they talked to their parents about their online activities at least some of the time (4 in 5 students in years 5 and 6).
- 91% of all respondents said their parents knew what they did online at least some of the time and 2 in 3 children said their parents often or always knew about their activities.
- Over half of all respondents (52.1%) have rules about the amount of time they can spend on the computer/internet at home.
  - Nearly 3 in 4 Year 5 students (71.3%) have rules about time online.
  - Nearly 2 in 3 Year 6 students (64%) have rules about time online.
- 3 in 4 (75.3%) children in years 5-7 have rules at home about where they can go online.
- Over 2 in 3 (68.4%) children in years 5-7 said their parents knew about everyone they chatted to online.

Students and mobile phones

69.2% of respondents in all years said they often or always took a mobile phone to school. Girls were more likely to have a phone; nearly 90% of girls in years 9-11 regularly took a phone to school compared with about 80% of boys. Texting was more common than making phone calls. 85.7% of students with a phone said they took at least a few photos every month and 46.8% said they also sent photos by phone a few times a month. Video was also popular: 64% took video at least a few times a month and 28.1% sent them to friends’ phones a few times a month.

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- 36.8% of students said they checked messages during class time at least sometimes, increasing to 50% in Year 9 and 70% in Year 11.
- 29.4% of students said they sent messages during class time at least sometimes, increasing to over 40% in years 9-10 and over 60% in Year 11.

Snapshots

- More than 1 in 3 respondents (35.8% n=4437) have online friends they have never met.
  - Over 1 in 5 Year 6 students (23.8%)
  - Over 1 in 3 Year 8 students (39.7%)
  - About half of Year 9 and 10 students (49.5%)

91% of students said their parents knew what they did online at least some of the time (4 in 5 students in years 5 and 6).

- 3 in 4 (75.3%) children in years 5-7 have rules at home about where they can go online.
- Over 2 in 3 (68.4%) children in years 5-7 said their parents knew about everyone they chatted to online.
Experiencing negative online behaviour

The following percentages of students experienced these behaviours in the 2008 school year:

- Someone spreading a rumour about them online - 9.2%
  - Over 12% girls in years 7-9
- Friends blocking them on Messenger - 8.4%
  - 14.8% girls in years 8-10 compared to 8.6% boys
- Someone sending them a nasty/threatening message - 8.0%
- Someone posting an embarrassing picture/video of them without permission - 7.4%
- Asked to send a nude picture - 7.3%
  - 9.3% girls in Year 8, 14.8% in Year 9, 11.8% in Year 10, 16.3% in Year 11
- Private message made public - 7.3%
- Someone posting cruel or nasty things about them online - 4.9%
- Received a picture/video that made them feel uncomfortable - 4.6%
- Hurt or embarrassed while someone else filmed the incident - 3.1%

In 2008 the media reported a poll in which 40% of respondents aged 12-18 had been asked to send a nude picture. Our results – 7.3% in total, 14.8% of girls in Year 9 – suggest that this issue is nowhere near ‘epidemic’ proportions. Nevertheless, the figures are still a cause for concern and should be addressed in policy and educational materials produced as a result of this research.

In the same way, our results show that the ‘trend’ of filming fights or other incidents on camera-phones actually affects fewer young people (3.1% overall) than any of the other negative behaviours surveyed.

23.6% admitted to experiencing at least one of these behaviours this school year; however it is important to note that these behaviours may be one-off incidences that do not necessarily equate to bullying. The purpose of these questions was to gauge the extent to which anti-social behaviours appear, and to examine factors that may influence their appearance.

For example, early analysis suggests that the students more likely to experience these behaviours are those who:

- are older
- spend more time online
- access the internet in their bedrooms
- have no rules about internet access and online activities at home
- are unhappy at school

The first four are at least partly interrelated: older students spend more time online and are more likely to have access to the internet in their bedrooms, greater privacy and fewer rules. The way in which unhappiness at school may be related to the experience of these behaviours (whether the one is a cause of the other) is not known but might warrant further investigation.

Student voice

The survey was important to do because it teaches you more about bullying and it gives you a chance to say what you have to say about being bullied.

Girl, Year 5

If people add others on chat rooms (eg: MSN) they should always know who it is. If not, they could be talking to someone and telling them information so they can be harmful to you.

Boy, Year 6

Cyberbullying can be very hurtful to people and can make people feel scared. I think it is worse than bullying in person because when you are bullied in person you can escape to home but when you are being cyber bullied you can’t escape. If they text you you are always being bullied because you always have your phone.

Girl, Year 7

Cyberbullying and general bullying is wrong and it should be stopped. Teachers and parents can’t stop it, but kids in the class can.

Girl, Year 8

I do not think that there is much teachers can do because it’s mainly over Facebook or MySpace etc. so I think that it is the victim’s choice, all they have to do is delete the bully, it isn’t that hard.

Boy, Year 8

Students who don’t feel successful at school are more likely to experience negative behaviours online.

Students whose parents don’t know what they do online are more likely to experience negative behaviours online.

In this school, I feel like I am successful

Parents know what I do online
School policy and awareness

A high 95.4% of students knew their school had a policy on bullying and 92.4% said they had talked about bullying in a class or meeting. 80.9% had talked about safety and security online and 77.6% had talked about cyberbullying. Results were consistent across year levels and by gender.

Just over half of respondents (53.8%) said they thought adults at school were aware that online bullying was going on; boys and older students were less convinced. 66.3% said staff would try to stop cyberbullying at least sometimes; again, boys and older students were less likely to believe this. 64.5% said they thought adults at their school disciplined cyberbullies at least sometimes, with boys as likely to believe this as girls.

Support

Young people’s perception of support

Nearly all young people would turn to someone for support if they were bullied online or by phone (only 6.9% said they wouldn’t talk to anyone). Students were asked to rank possible responses. Parents was ranked first by 42.3% of students, followed by Friends at school by 34.3% of students.

Parents, Siblings and Teachers were each ranked in second place by about 15% of students. Generally, younger students tended to rank their parents and teachers more highly, while older students favoured their friends both in and outside school.

Telephone and internet helplines were ranked very low by students at all year levels, suggesting either that most young people would rather talk to someone they know, or that they were not aware of the availability of helplines or online forum spaces.

Where next?

Student response to the survey was positive despite its length, with the majority of participants answering most questions. The preliminary results are encouraging, suggesting an increase in awareness and proactive responses by students and school communities.

Harrassment and bullying online often take forms generally not personally experienced by today’s parents and teachers. Such online behaviours are not separate from their offline equivalents; however a lack of understanding can easily lead to inappropriate lectures about online activities and safety, or knee-jerk punishments such as disallowing all internet access.

The term ‘cyberbullying’ itself is problematic as definitions tend to be very broad. Students often perceive adults as being alarmist and over-reacting to a fairly minor problem. The online equivalent of a single playground incident should not really be considered cyberbullying.

This research will assist us to provide schools and parents with a greater understanding of young people’s online activities so that we can provide age-relevant guidelines and educational materials, giving students strategies to ensure their safety and continuing enjoyment of their online environment.

Further research will be released during 2009.